

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of this Committee held on
25 March 2024

(Present) **Councillor T Long (Chair)**
Councillors Greaves, Murphy MBE, Osundeko, Sweeney and van der Burg

(Not Present) **Councillors CD Banks, McCormack, Maguire, and Sims**

Mr C Williams (Roman Catholic Church Representative)
Mr D Thorpe (Church of England Representative)
Miss A Kirman (Parent Governor – Primary)

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors CD Banks, McCormack, Maguire and Sims and Mr Thorpe.

30 MINUTES

* **Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2024, be approved and signed.**

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest from Members were made.

32 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

No Declarations of party whip were made.

33 CHILDREN SERVICES PERFORMACE UPDATE

The Director of Children's Services introduced a presentation which provided an update of Children's Services Performance and corresponding real time data. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, Assistant Director for Education and Learning and Public Health Consultant also presented in relation to Social Care, Education and Public Health performance data respectively.

The Director of Children's Service noted that the Service was continuing on its improvement journey and that being 'brilliant at the basics' remained the priority whilst progressing with a forward plan for the Service in reaching an 'Outstanding' Ofsted status.

It was noted that the level of demand on services remained significant however, there were signs of improvement in areas such as 'Open Cases' and 'Children in Foster Placements'.

It was highlighted that services were, in a more stable position with this being reflected in the Ofsted inspection grading.

The main areas covered in the presentation were:

Children's Social Care

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- Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers,
- Increasing Foster Carers,
- Agency staff,
- Percentage of Assessments Completed in 45 days (Year to Date),
- Spending reductions,
- Progress on Children's homes provision and
- Performance on Care Leaves.

Education

- Increasing EHCP application demand and staffing,
- Educational Psychologist capacity and recruitment, and
- Progress on Early Help Assessment Tool (EHAT)

Public Health

- Progress made on Children of who have received a 2-2.5-year review from a health visitor,
- Challenges with the Under 18 conception rate performance, and
- Hospital admissions for self-harm

During questions from Members of the Committee the following points were raised:

- There were currently 13 social workers who had caseloads of over 20. 87% of assessments had been completed within the time scales. It was discussed that the issue of social worker recruitment remained a challenge and a national trend. However, it was noted that improvements had been made creating a more improved and settled work force. Recruitment continued as a priority and a workstream linking with universities and a 'Grow Your Own' programme was proving successful. It was further noted that those staff with higher caseloads were being managed, ensuring that the most complex cases were not falling on those with already high caseloads.
- Members discussed the foster carer process and if there was any scope for professionals, qualified to work with Children, who could support as temporary Foster Carers. Officers highlighted that fostering was one of the most regulated areas and the process for being a foster carer was the same for all applying. However, it was noted that those in respective professions are targeted with marketing. It was further noted that the complexity of Children in need of a foster home was increasing.
- Concerns were raised in relation to Self-harm and alcohol admission to hospital. Members questioned whether those children living in the borough and presenting themselves to hospitals outside the borough were included in the statistics. It was confirmed that statistics related to children presenting to Whiston Hospital A&E and did not include those children who may have attended hospitals in other neighbouring areas such as Wigan and Warrington. Officers agreed to provide a briefing for the committee on how this data could be collected in future.
- Further Public Health questions were raised on smoking rates during pregnancy which remained high but was showing signs of improving. Equally, Conception rates were also improving and funding was being sourced to support smoking cessation, particularly with women during pregnancy. Officers suggested that detail be brought to a future meeting as to how funding is to be spent and, to understand the measurable outcomes of the funding programme.

Further comments were made on:

- Specialist Cares

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- Educational Psychologist preventative work
- Smoking Rate reduction and the corresponding increase in vaping

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the Director of Children Services for her contribution and dedication to the Council and wished her well in her retirement.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the Childrens Services Performance Update be noted; and**
- (2) **public health officers to provide a briefing for Members of the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee on the detail of those Children who live in the borough and have presented at hospitals outside of the Borough in relation to self-Harm.**

34 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24

The Quarter 3 Performance Report 2023-24 was submitted which provided an analysis of progress and performance over the period from the 1st of October to the 31st of December 2023-24 against the Council's priority 1, "Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life".

Comments and main points were raised in relation to Priority 1 Performance Indicators as follows:

- CYP 001 Information was provided on the number of open Early Help episodes starting. Officers highlighted that the number of children receiving Early Help services had slightly improved. However, it was recognised that there was much work to do to improve the Early Help offer and to reduce the demand for specialist services. New governance and oversight arrangements via an Early Help Board were in progress to strengthen the Early Help partnership offer across St Helens. This work along with the Supporting Families Programme and the transformation to Family Hubs (with additional funding) will assist in earlier identification of needs and support within communities avoiding more intrusive statutory services. Although recognising improving the volume of early help activity increased, levels of activity need to coincide with improvements in the quality of assessment planning across the council's Early Help team and partner agencies to support a sustained reduction in demand for all statutory services. To support the delivery of this the council through its partnership, coordinators have engaged with partners to understand the barriers to delivering effective early help to children and families. In response to these findings a multi-agency review of the Early Help Assessment document (EHAT) had taken place and a revised document has been coproduced with partners and circulated for approval by members of the Early Help Board
- PH008 Members questioned the percentage of children aged 5 with MMR vaccination (2 doses). Officers highlighted that the most recently published data for the percentage of children aged 5 have had 2 doses of the MMR vaccination relates to Quarter 2 2023-24 which showed that 87.3% of children in St Helens had 2 doses of the vaccine. This it was noted was an increase from the previous quarter (86%). MMR Vaccine uptake rates in St Helens have remained below the critical threshold of 90% for a number of years (including pre-pandemic). However, St Helen's MMR2 vaccine uptake rate at 5 years is currently slightly higher than the national average. Members were reassured that Proactive local

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communications/promotional materials had been developed for parents and carers and for 18–25-year-olds to raise awareness of the MMR vaccination. Catch up campaigns for 0–5-year-olds and 18–25-year-olds are being completed in primary care.

- * **Resolved that the performance position at Quarter 3 2023-24 be noted;**

35 UPDATE ON PROGRESS TOWARDS THE OFSTED SEND INSPECTION

A presentation was delivered by the Assistant Director of Education and Learning which updated Members on progress towards the Ofsted SEND Inspection.

The presentation covered:

- The Relaunch of the Strategic Partnership arrangements with a refreshed SEND Partnership Board, new terms of reference and strengthened governance arrangements.
- Six weekly SEND Partnership Board meetings
- Monthly Ofsted preparation meetings and workshops
- The reengagement of the Parent Carer Forum L4C and revised partnership agreement
- Parent carer engagement events

Members requested information on the SEND strategy document 'A life of equal chances', whether this was the most up to date document and if it had been self-assessed. Officers reassured Members that the new Send Strategy was to be reviewed which will include input from partners, stakeholders, parents, and carers. The new strategy would be slimmed down and would focus on an agreed narrative which will be more current. A new working group was in the process of being set up to ensure that the new strategy would be specific, informed with clear and measurable outcomes.

Members noted the inclusiveness and planning around the new strategy and welcomed this as the best way forward.

- * **Resolved that the Presentation be noted.**

36 HARM CAUSED BY UNDER-AGE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

A presentation was delivered by the Public Health Consultant and, the Young Persons Drug and Alcohol (YPDAAT) Team Manager who provided an overview of:

- The extent of underage drinking in St Helens
- The Impact on Young People, and
- The work carried out and its effectiveness.

It was noted that the most recent published data was for 2018/19- 2020/21 which showed the rate of alcohol specific admission in St. Helens was 81.4 per 100,000. This was significantly higher than England (29.3 per 100,000). St. Helens was ranked as 2nd highest in England for under 18 alcohol related admissions to hospital and was the highest in the Northwest. Provisional (unpublished) quarterly rates showed a trend of declining alcohol related admissions to hospital for under 18s in.

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The Attitudes and Behaviour Towards Drinking among 15-17 year olds in St. Helens - Trading Standards Survey (2023) suggested fewer young people were now drinking for fun compared to results from previous surveys and there had been a large increase in young people who said they never drank from 10 years earlier. There had been a slight increase in children buying alcohol from shops, however, this hadn't been reflected in complaints received by Trading Standard regarding premises selling alcohol to under 18s. This was similar across the NW Region.

Officers discussed the local action which was currently in place to tackle alcohol related issues in Children and the prevention strategy currently in place with all parents stakeholders.

Comments and main points were raised as follows:

- Similar to self-harm hospital admissions, Members were concerned that children living in the Borough being admitted to hospitals outside of the Borough may not have been getting the relevant support around Alcohol related issues. Members suggested that the committee should consider looking at this during the 2024/25 work programme sessions.
- Members commented on the reduction of Alcohol use and if it was being replaced with other substances. Officers noted that this was likely, and work was being carried out to understand this more. There had been a notable increase in the use of ketamine among young people.
- Members questioned if all schools were being supported in education programmes. It was noted that new resources had been made available to enhance training, group work and outreach, particularly at those school highlighted as being at high risk as well as some colleges.
- Members suggested a site visit to look at the work being carried out at YPDAAT.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the Report be noted,**
- (2) **a piece of work to be considered in the 2024/45 work programme on the collaboration and pathways for children living in the Borough and presenting at hospitals outside of the Borough with Alcohol related issues: and**
- (3) **a site visit to YPDAAT be arranged.**

37 TESSA SPOTLIGHT REVIEW REPORT

The Chair provided an overview of the work carried out in relation to the Report and recommendations contained in the Spotlight Review Report.

Following approval of the Spotlight Review's Report and Recommendations by the Committee, the report would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and response would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

* **Resolved that:**

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- (1) the recommendations contained in the report be approved; and**
- (2) the report and recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and a response be requested to be received by the Committee at a future meeting.**

38 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Work Programme was attached to the agenda for consideration by Members. The Senior Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the Committee's work programme.

It was noted that the current work programme will be dissolved at the end of this municipal year and a new work programme set up through consultation with members and officers at a work programme session in the coming months.

- * Resolved that the work programme be agreed.**

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