

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of this Committee held on
6 September 2023

(Present) **Councillor T Long (Chair)**
Councillors D Banks, Greaves, Maguire, McCormack, Osundeko,
Sheldon and Sweeney

(Not Present) **Councillors Murphy MBE and Sims**

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Murphy MBE and Sims and Mr D Thorpe.

2 MINUTES

* **Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023, be approved and signed.**

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest from Members were made.

4 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

No Declarations of party whip were made.

5 DIRECTORS REPORT ON PROGRESS IN CHILDRENS SERVICES

A report was presented which provided an overview and update of progress in Children's Services, highlighting the peer reviews undertaken since the last meeting of this Committee, along with improvements made within the service and work already being undertaken in respect of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC) and Special Education Need and Disability (SEND) inspection preparation.

Members acknowledged that it had been a busy period with two peer reviews having been recently undertaken, one in the Fostering Service by the Local Government Association (LGA) and one for the Children we look after service (CWLA) by Salford City Council as part of the North-West sector led improvement offer.

It was reported that the service still had a strong focus on recruitment and retention of social work staff. The first tranche of five international social workers joined the local authority in April, one more social worker was due to join at the end of June and a further five in the summer.

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Priorities from the Children's Improvement Plan continued to be achieved. September 2023 had shown another reduction on children subject to child protection plans and children in pre proceedings. There had also been a focus on achieving permanency for children, evidenced through the feedback from the recent monitoring visits and initial feedback from the peer review.

The report detailed the activity in relation to:

- The Fostering Peer Review;
- The CWLA Peer Review;
- Children's Improvement Plan Update;
- School Attendance; and
- SEND.

Members acknowledged that Childrens Services were continuing with their improvement trajectory and could evidence progress across most areas. Challenges still existed within the placement / sufficiency arena, but progress had been made in creating the Council's own residential homes, with the tendering process being entered into, inviting external organisations to run the Council's children's homes on its behalf.

The Director of Children's Services provided an overview of the recent St Helens ILAC inspection that had taken place, in accordance with the new Ofsted inspection framework, and highlighted the rigorous processes and the main key findings, judgements and very positive outcomes which rated St Helens as overall 'Good'. It was also acknowledged that areas for development still existed, and work was ongoing to address the key recommendations and challenges as detailed within the report.

Members were advised that a more detailed report would be provided at the next meeting.

Following the provision of a verbal overview of the report, the following comments and questions were raised:

- following a request, a response was provided to indicate the ongoing work and activity to address pupil absence rates, especially those identified as severe absences;
- information was provided for regulated accommodation placement provision for asylum seeking young people in St Helens, which was in line with national policy, and the associated funding arrangements currently in place;
- an update was provided upon the progress of recruitment for the international social worker cohort, which highlighted some complexities in the process that had been identified in terms of required expectations of external partner organisations;
- it was reported that a concerted recruitment campaign was underway for the appointment of experienced social workers;
- information was provided in regard to the current position for recruitment/ development and retention of social worker apprentices; and
- assurances were provided for meeting needs due to the demand on fostering services arising from the overarching priority of Neglect combined with accommodating asylum-seeking children and young people via placements, which would be achieved through a whole system approach, with development of the family hubs and via strategic work in educational and social work services.

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The Director of Children's Services was thanked for the thorough and comprehensive report.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the progress achieved to date be noted; and**
- (2) thanks be expressed to all involved for their commitment and dedication to improve services for the children and young people in St Helens, and for the outcomes achieved.**

6 UPDATE ON OFSTED SEND LOCAL AREA INSPECTION PREPARATION ACTIVITY

A report was presented which highlighted the key areas from the previous Ofsted SEND local area inspection. This gave an overview of the new inspection framework following its publication earlier this year, explained the inspection preparation that had already taken place and highlighted the current risks that had been identified.

Members were made aware of the strengths, the areas for development and the changes in the new inspection framework.

It was reported that between 29 January to 2 February 2018, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of St Helens to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the disability and special educational needs reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The findings of the inspection were contained in the Ofsted report, which was appended for information and were split across three general categories, which judged the effectiveness of the local area in:

- identifying children and young people's SEN and/or disabilities;
- meeting the needs of children and young people who had SEN and/or disabilities; and
- improving outcomes for children and young people who had SEN and/or disabilities.

The report detailed, and provided an update, upon the significant progress that had been made against these areas.

It was reported that Health and Social care information were now both routinely sourced in the production of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) and a co-produced Quality Assurance Framework was now in place to judge EHCPs against five agreed quality assurance standards.

The framework was attached as an appendix to the report.

The report also detailed the new Ofsted SEND Local Area Inspection Framework which was updated in April 2023 which informed Members of:

- what the inspection reports would include;
- inspection outcomes;

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- alternative provision;
- inspection preparation; and
- current risks, which were set out as being accessibility of the Disabled Children's register, short breaks provision, current Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) performance, educational psychology capacity, co-production and SEND cohort school attendance.

A presentation entitled 'An Update of SEND Local Area Inspection Activity' was delivered to accompany the narrative within the report outlining the new SEND Local Area Inspection Framework. The presentation detailed what the new framework was expected to look like, in addition to partnership working and working with others.

The presentation focused upon:

- previous inspection outcome;
- new inspection framework: What's Changed?;
- current risks;
- mitigations; and
- current service priorities.

Following the provision of a verbal overview of the key headlines of the report, the following comments and questions were raised:

- following query, reassurance was provided that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) had indicated that the current arrangement of a Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) supported by a Deputy DCO would not be reduced;
- in response to a question about SEND pupil absences and capacity, clarification was provided upon needs being met in mainstream school provision and utilising specialist support services, and the places that were available in various other high-quality settings to meet required needs;
- an update was provided to inform Members of ongoing work to address an area of development identified in the 2018 joint local area SEND inspection report in regard to short breaks, which had indicated that the local area's short-break provision was ineffective at that time;
- activities around service provision and educational offers for Post 16 and, in particular, for 18–25-year-old provision for young people were provided with a detailed summary of ongoing work strategy being provided for preparation for adulthood;
- following a request for an update on progress for outstanding/overdue backlogs of EHCPs, reassurance was provided that no child or young person had been waiting more than 18 months for assessment, with a prioritisation system being used to clear backlogs within a 12-month period;
- it was confirmed that all schools, including academy trusts, attended and were co-operative with partnership meetings and challenge/engagement sessions with the local authority; and
- discussion took place around the aspirational focus for, and creation of, employment opportunities for SEND children and young people. The funding for internships was acknowledged.

It was agreed that this area of work could be included in the work item 'Listening to the Voices of Young People in St Helens' to be considered at a future meeting.

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It was agreed that an update on progress towards the preparation for SEND inspection be provided at every meeting of this Committee.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the findings of the report and the progress made be noted;**
- (2) an update on the progress of preparation for the SEND Local Area Inspection made be provided at every meeting; and**
- (3) the aspiration and employment opportunities for SEND children and young people be included as part of the work item 'Listening to the Voices of Young People in St Helens' at a future meeting.**

Councillors Sheldon and Sweeney left the meeting during discussion of the following item.

7 PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23

The Performance Outturn Report 2022-23 (Annex A) provided an analysis of progress and performance over the period April to March 2023 against each of the Council's six priorities.

The report reflected the new performance framework and targets aligned to the priorities and outcomes of the Borough Strategy, as agreed by Cabinet on 20 April 2022. This framework provided the basis for quarterly performance reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny over the course of 2022-23.

The Council acknowledged that effective performance management arrangements were critical to supporting decision making and work continued to ensure the development of the performance framework and performance management processes across the Council.

The Performance Outturn Report 2022-23 – Priority 1 focus for this Committee was attached at Appendix 1 and reflected performance over the 12-month period April 2022-March 2023 and the legacy impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, rising demand for services and a requirement to deliver significant budget savings.

As a result, it was more critical than ever that the Council had a clear understanding of what it needed to measure and how it was performing to inform decision making.

There were 108 performance indicators, where outturn performance against target were available to be reported in the Performance Outturn Report 2022-23. Of these:

- 73% of indicator targets had been either exceeded, met fully, or met within 95% of target. This compared to 64% of indicators at outturn 2021-22;
- 27% of indicator targets were not met. This compared to 36% of indicators at outturn 2021-22;
- the trend measure indicated over the course of the last 12 months that 55% of indicators showed improvement, 6% of indicators maintained the same performance and 39% of indicators showed a downward trajectory. The position was similar to that at outturn 2021-22, where 51% of indicators showed

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improvement, 10% maintained the same performance and 39% of indicators showed a downward trajectory; and

- 15% of all indicators where comparison was possible were in the top quartile, compared to 27% at outturn 2021-22. 22% of indicators were in the second quartile compared to 16% at outturn 2021-22, 31% of indicators were in the third quartile and 32% in the bottom quartile, compared to 18% and 38% respectively at outturn 2021-22.

In summary, at outturn 20223-23 there were a number of outcome areas which demonstrated strong and/or improving performance. Equally, there were areas where performance against outcomes was either some distance from the annual target or an outlier in terms of St Helens performance relative to the England average or St Helens statistical neighbours.

In Priority 1 there were three areas of challenge, which were outlined in the report.

Following the provision of a verbal overview of the key performance outcomes in the report, the following comments and questions were raised:

- specifications around smoking cessation services and advice were briefly outlined;
- conspiracy theory issues did not factor in any outcomes for vaccine uptake;
- concerns were expressed around the performance indicator for hospital admissions for self-harm aged 10-24 years and the narrative that indicated St Helens had the highest rates of hospital admission in England, and it was reported that this issue was a key priority to be addressed with numerous programmes, workshops, pathways and strategies supporting the ongoing work in place across all partner organisations.
It was agreed that the detailed reports that had been produced by Public Health around underlying reasons and findings on this issue be provided to this Committee before consideration of the work item entitled 'Review of the Provision of Mental Health Services for Young People in St Helens';
- the main reasons and context for the reported data being in the third and fourth quartiles were explained, it being added that wider data indicated a much better position; and
- local programmes and strategies around addressing childhood obesity issues were outlined.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) reports that had been produced by Public Health around underlying reasons and findings on hospital admissions for self-harm aged 10-24 years be provided prior to the work item entitled 'Review of the Provision of Mental Health Services for Young People in St Helens'.**

8 CABINET RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

A report was presented which provided Members with the Action Plan response to the recommendations of the Improving School Attendance Task Group, which had been agreed by this Committee.

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At the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Workshop held on 6 July 2022, it was agreed to hold a spotlight review in November 2022 to contribute to the wider work to improve school attendance in the borough.

The focus of the review was in response to overall absence rates in St Helens reported for the Autumn and Spring Term 2022/23 which were higher than regional and national averages.

The Action Plan attached at Appendix 1b to the report set out the Cabinet response to the recommendations from the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee Task Group on school attendance.

- * **Resolved that the Action Plan attached at appendix 1b that set out the recommendations from the Task Group into improving school attendance in St Helens be noted.**

9 **CABINET RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF REDUCING TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

A report was provided which provided Members with the Action Plan response to the recommendations of the Reducing Teenage Pregnancy Task Group, which had been agreed by this Committee.

At the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Workshop held on 6 July 2022, it was agreed to hold a spotlight review in December 2022 to contribute to the wider work and developing strategy and action plan to reduce the high rates of under 18 conceptions and teenage pregnancy rates in St Helens reported for the Autumn and Spring Term 2022/23 which were higher than regional and national averages.

The Action Plan at Appendix 1b set out the Cabinet response to the recommendations from the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Task Group into reducing Teenage Pregnancy.

- * **Resolved that the Action Plan attached at Appendix 1b that set out the recommendations from the Task Group into improving school attendance in St Helens be noted.**

10 **SPOTLIGHT REVIEW OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE IN PREGNANCY – COLLECTIVE ACTION TO REDUCE RISK AND HARM TO CHILDREN**

A report was provided which presented the evidence submitted to and findings of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee Spotlight Review 'Alcohol and Drug Use in Pregnancy – Collective Action to Reduce Risk and Harm to Children' held on 28 April 2023.

Based on the Review's findings, the principal purposes of the report were:

- to contribute to raising awareness of this issue to result in more healthy pregnancies so that more children had the best start in life and life chances;

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- to highlight the serious harm done *in utero* arising from parental alcohol and substance misuse and the consequent impact on child development and life chances, families, and Council and other services; and
- to scrutinise the work currently undertaken by the Council and partner agencies to address the issue.

It was reported that at the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Workshop on 6 July 2022, Members had suggested a study group to establish further understanding on the issue of alcohol and substance misuse in pregnancy and the subsequent problems this may cause.

The topic was highly relevant to the Borough because St Helens had:

- higher rates of teenage pregnancy than the national average;
- significantly high levels of under-18 admissions to hospital for alcohol-specific reasons per 100,000 population; and
- widespread issues with substance misuse, including the highest rate of hospital admissions linked to drug poisoning in England and the highest rate for women.

The report detailed the evidence provided from:

- Consultant in Public Health, St Helens Council;
- Children and Young People's Services, Futures Team;
- The Principal Education Psychologist at St Helens Council;
- Care Grow Live (CGL);
- Young People's Drug and Alcohol Team;
- The Wellbeing service;
- The 0-19 Enhancing Families Service; and
- The Interim Virtual Head.

The findings and subsequent conclusions were also detailed in the report and a set of recommendations for action were attached at Appendix 1. These recommendations linked to and supported the first and second of the six borough priorities "Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life".

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) **the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 be approved; and**
- (2) **the recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for response.**

11 **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

A draft work programme was provided to Members for consideration of topics for the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to consider during the Municipal Year.

The topics listed on the draft programme were circulated to Members for consideration.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

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