

## Minutes of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

7 January 2019 at 5.00pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**Present:** Councillor Underhill (Chair);  
Councillors S Davies (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Akhter, Allen, Ashman, Hevican,  
Phillips, Shaeen, C Ward-Lewis (co-opted  
member) and Mrs T Majid (Co-opted Member).

**Apologies:** Councillor M Hussain and M Y Hussain).

**In attendance:** Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's  
Services.  
Chris Ward, Director of Education Skills and  
Employment.  
Audrey Williamson, Sandwell Safeguarding  
Children Board Independent Chair.

### 1/19 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meetings held on 12  
November 2019 be approved as a correct record.

### 2/19 **Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2017-18**

The Independent Chair of the Sandwell Safeguarding Children's  
Board presented the Annual Report. She referred to presentation  
slides which highlighted the following matters:

- Several challenging circumstances for the Board, unprecedented pressure on public finances, a period of National policy changes including the focus and remit of safeguarding Boards and an update relating to 'Working Together' consultation and the expected implications for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) arrangements.
- The three priorities that Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) communicates effectively / assures that effective arrangements were in place and has a clear understanding of the effectiveness of safeguarding system in Sandwell.

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- The Board heard what was working well. The Sub Group activity had continued in Sandwell with the Sub Groups working towards individual work plans that contribute to the overarching SSCB Business Plan.
- Learning from Audit; The three multi-agency audits in respect of neglect, children with disabilities and domestic abuse were coordinated during the year. Learning notes presented in '7 minute' briefings for each audit were disseminated to the partnership and made available on the SSCB website.
- The process continued to be slow, some of the recent learning from cases could not be used straight away because the cases were criminal cases. There was support for the transition to the Children's Trust, there was progress.
- The two big learning issues were disguised compliance and professional curiosity – both issues would require staff to receive training.

The Independent Chair clarified that the Annual report was a retrospective report for March 2017– March 2018 and that the transition to the Trust and the issues for the Safeguarding Board had been particularly challenging during that period. She highlighted that there was now a permanent Director of Children's Services, A Chief Executive of the Children's Trust who jointly chaired working groups on key matters such as Child Exploitation. The aims would be to continue to improve the policy and performance of Children's Safeguarding Services and provide a stable environment for Children's Services. Progress was slow but steady.

The Scrutiny Board Chair referred to the key points in the report for the following year 2018-2019, she recognised that matters had moved on at a pace throughout 2017-18 and suggested it may be helpful for Councillors new to Children's safeguarding and Scrutiny to receive a briefing /summary of performance, similar to the briefing in paragraph 8 of the Annual report. The Independent Chair acknowledged the training and briefing opportunities for new Members issue and advised that she had not prepared a briefing, but would do if required, she advised that there were seven-minute briefing available on some key issues, that could be shared. The Scrutiny Chair welcomed an offer of regular updates to the Board and indicated that it was difficult for Councillors to visualise how the different Children's Boards and Bodies relate to each other.

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The Scrutiny Chair referred to a section of the Annual Report relating to 'Missing frequently Children', the Independent Chair advised that more time should have been taken to interview the young people when they returned to a place of safety to determine detail of what they had experienced whilst missing. The information obtained from interviews may not have been in full or completely accurate. There was consensus from the Board that there was a need to look at the tender specifications to ensure that the right information and accuracy of information is obtained from interviews.

The Board was advised that there had been considerable improvement in the last month of the current contract delivery. The contract was reported to have increased number of completed interviews from 53% in November 2018 to 73% in December 2018. The Independent Chair clarified that the young person returning to safety themselves decided if they wanted to be interviewed on return, and that the term 'exploitation' was used in the widest sense of the term, it was not referring exclusively to child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The Scrutiny Chair requested clarification whether there were any specific problems with children being used as 'drugs mules' in Sandwell. The Director of Children's Services advised that the exact numbers were not available at the meeting however it was known to the authorities that there were approximately 100 children in Sandwell who had been highlighted at risk of a range of 'contextual safeguarding' matters, at varying levels, drugs mules was one of the issues identified. She indicated that contextual safeguarding matters were an issue across the Nation and that should the Scrutiny Board want to look at this issue in more detail a report could be brought to a future meeting.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board asked what support was available for children who were who were impacted by Domestic Violence (DV). The Board was advised that Black Country Women's Aid had recently been commissioned to start a programme of work. The Director of Education, Skills and Employment advised that prior to the programme being in place there was not an information channel or way of knowing that there was a DV problem in the home at an early stage and therefore the child was not supported in the school. The earlier the school knew the sooner the support could be put in place and the better the success.

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In relation to the Early Help Partnership the Chair asked what the relationship was with Children's Centres and whether the Board was looking at making the relationship more active. The Board was advised that the Director of Children's Services was leading on early help; consideration was being given to early help, what intervention and support was being provided; the difference of support in different areas; what the six towns provided, they had looked at what each other was doing and had found that the Early Help Partnership work was helping and that Children's Centres can't do this on their own.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board referred to section 4.13 of the report and asked if repeat referral was too high and how the Board could gauge what was high. The Director of Children's Services advised that the referral rate was improving, because it was decreasing. She indicated that the Sandwell Children's Trust would be invited to attend the March 2019 meeting of the Scrutiny Board to provide a performance update and suggested that the Trust be requested to provide some focus on the matter of repeat referrals.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board referred to the section of the report which highlighted the single point of contact (SPOC), if you were worried about a child, to report your concerns to protect the child. The Chair highlighted the need to be creative and accessible with where the contact number was shared, the Board discussed alternatives such as the side of buses, flyers and notices in schools and in supermarket foyers.

The Independent Chair of Safeguarding Children Board thanked officers and Members for a very useful discussion and said that often when delivering a service, it was difficult to see the service from other perspectives. She would take comments back from the discussion to feed into future planning.

Resolved:

That the Annual Safeguarding Children Board Report  
2017-18 be received.

3/19

**Cambridge Associates report**

The Director Education, Skills and Employment provided a report which outlined the recommendations and options arising from a report on education services, commissioned from Cambridge Education.

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The Executive Director Children's Services advised that during the development and move to the Children's Trust there had been a priority focus on children's social care and the services transferring to the Trust, however the services that had been retained in the Council also had to be reviewed. The Cambridge Education report was commissioned to focus on the remaining services and was published in August 2018.

The presentation to Board provided an overview of the Cambridge Education report, highlighting the following sections:

- The Lead Member Priorities
  - School readiness
  - School outcomes
  - School to work
- The purpose was to review the remaining services
- There were two stages of the review:
  - Stage 1 to review the current provision and expenditure, the statutory responsibilities of the Council and the possible options for provision.
  - Stage 2 a more detailed look at connexions, employment and skills, early years and childcare, children's centres and youth services.
- The review was a substantial document which gave a good description of services currently delivered and how they met the duties, but they were considered to be partial, not strategic or linked to the Vision 2030 or Lead Member priorities. It was not clear where the recommendations in the report had come from, they did not give full detail or focus on improving outcomes, the review suggested that further reviews were carried out.
- The focus on 'Connexions and Employments and Skills' to develop reach and impact for young people, schools and employers to employers to improve outcomes to all.

From the comments and questions by members, the following points were highlighted:-

- The Council was clear what it wanted but this report did not give the 'so what', or give an ending to the report. Further reviews would provide additional information but would be at additional cost in time and resource.
- The Director Education, Skills and Employment highlighted that the five services developed in the careers and employment

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service were coming together and showing efficiency savings for 2019-20 of in the region of £250k. The services were performing really well:

- SAFL – Good Ofsted, but service underutilised
- Connexions Service – Service was really good equivalent to two Ofsted goods.
- Employment and Skills – Apprenticeships had tripled since the employment and skills element joined the service.
- Work Experience – transferred across to the careers and employment service on 7 January 2019.
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- Since the formation of the Careers and Employment Service, the services were much improved and there had been efficiency savings with better outcomes and there were more options for bringing together and developing services.
- The Council was aware of where 97% of all young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS) were across Sandwell.
- It was suggested that the data was supplied at a sub-regional or ward level to help target support for young people in need of training or support in Sandwell. The Executive Director of Children's Services welcomed the suggestion to break down the data and target the resource.
- The Executive Director Children's Services agreed to circulate available data and the Cambridge report to the Scrutiny Board Members for information.

In relation to the second focus of the presentation: Early Years, the Director Education, Skills and Employment indicated that the Council had re-considered how all services for children and families had to be configured to maximise integrated working.

The Director indicated that the percentage of children with a good level of development (GLD) in Sandwell was improving as was the national performance difference but there was still a 6% gap to close to national average. Members of the Board were informed of the Sandwell six Towns breakdown which highlighted the differences between the gaps in the Towns, the highest being Rowley with 72% and lowest Smethwick with 61%.

The Director of Education Skills and Employment highlighted the importance of identifying and supporting speech and language

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needs in Sandwell and the Board discussed the need for children to be ready for school.

The Director provided a summary of the Children's Centres, Youth Services and Play Services report and indicated that Children's Centres in Sandwell were amongst a few in the Country to have a qualified teacher in the centre. The Chair welcomed the early help offer as this would avoid costs later in a child's development.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that it was good to have a youth service but that the service was stretched in Sandwell. The Board agreed that there was a need to look at what Sandwell really wants from its youth service. The Board was advised that there would be a budget reduction for Children's services from 2019-20 and that this would include early help hubs.

From the comments and questions by members, the following points were highlighted:-

- There was a need to consider use of Council owned buildings for children's centres rather than other buildings. Great Bridge Children's Centre was a brand-new facility.
- The Director of Education, Skills and Employment advised that the Council was proud to have retained many valuable services in Sandwell. He advised that Sandwell had a growing population and that there was a need to monitor youth services and that the Council was investing in play services. A further report on play and youth services would be presented to Scrutiny Board on 18 March 2019.
- The Director of Children's Services advised the Board that the Council wanted to ensure that the very best services were available to Children and young people.

The Director advised that there had to be a whole system approach to find the best way forward.

Resolved:

- 1) Circulate the Cambridge Education report to Members of the CSE Scrutiny Board;
- 2) Circulate a break-down of data at sub regional level to help target support for young people in

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need of education employment or training (NEET) as requested;

- 3) To recommend to the Cabinet Member for Services Children the need to consider use of existing Council owned buildings for children's centres rather than use of other buildings to save cost.

4/19

**Regional Adoption Agency**

The Chair advised that the Cabinet had considered the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) report at its meeting on 12 December 2018, at which time the Cabinet Member highlighted the need for the Councils Overview and Scrutiny function to scrutinise the operation of the RAA.

The Director of Children's Services provided a summary of the main points and highlights of the report. She explained that the City of Wolverhampton Council would host the RAA in the West Midlands and that conversations with the Black Country Authorities to develop a regional agency had been ongoing for a number of years.

From the comments and questions by members, the following points were highlighted:-

- The starting point for any process would be the Council. The link between the Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) and the RAA and the relationships have to be strong;
- All four Cabinets across the Black Country have to agree this;
- The Trust will do some of it. The benefits were as on page 39 of the report and cost effective instead of four managers there would be one.

Resolved:

To recommend to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services that the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board scrutinise the operation of the Regional Adoption Agency in Sandwell.



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(Meeting ended at 6.10 pm)

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