

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

**18th March 2019 at 5.00 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

- Present:** Councillor Underhill (Chair);
Councillors M Y Hussain and S Davies (Vice-Chairs);
- Councillors Akhter, Allen, Ashman, Hevican, M Hussain, Phillips and Mrs T Majid (Co-opted Member).
- Apologies:** Councillor Rollins, Shaeen and C Ward-Lewis (Co-opted member)
- In attendance:** Rt.Hon. Jacqui Smith, Chair, Sandwell Children's Trust;
Frances Craven, Chief Executive - Sandwell Children's Trust;
Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services, Sandwell Council;
Dawn Maleki, Sandwell Youth Service;
Tariq Karim, Sandwell Youth Service;
Sam Harman, Go Play Sandwell;
Janet Russell, Independent Consultant MASA and Interim SSC Business Manager.

5/19 **Declaration of Interest**

Councillor Allen declared a personal interest at the meeting in relation to minute no 8/19 (Play and Youth Services) on the basis that his son was an employee of Sandwell Council Youth Services.

6/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th January 2019 be approved as a correct record.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
18th March, 2019**

7/19

Sandwell Children's Trust – Update Report

The Board received a presentation by the Chair and the Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust in relation to the performance of the Trust since November 2018. The Chair advised that there would be an updated improvement plan submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Board in June 2019.

They highlighted progress against the following priorities and main considerations from the report:

1. Leadership
2. Workforce
3. Practice: Quality assurance framework
4. Children looked after, care leavers, permanence
5. Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing and Trafficked
6. Performance and Quality Assurance
7. Partnerships
8. Voice of the Child

In response to comments and questions raised by members of the Scrutiny Board, it was noted that: -

- Ofsted had made several monitoring visits already, the Adoption and SEND partnership review was taking place and the next Ofsted visit would be in April 2019;
- the Fostering Inspection had not been published but was expected to show that more work would be needed and a direction of travel given;
- auditing at the Ofsted inspections had been averaged down; more recent audits had been good, but the overall score did not reflect the improvement;
- In relation to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) missing and trafficked young people, concern was raised that there was a need to be aware of young people that had been victims of CSE. The Board was assured that meetings had been held with young people who were at risk or potentially victims. The Board was advised that West Midlands Police had been proactive in prosecuting perpetrators, however there had not been sufficient press coverage or awareness of the prosecutions that had taken place. It was felt that the police should be raising awareness of the issue to act as a deterrent.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 18th March, 2019

- The Council had met with Police at the Exploitation Board to discuss safeguarding arrangements and to consider the four-stage approach – disruption, prevention, protection and prosecution;
- There was a need to tell people about the good success rate and to get the message out to vulnerable people;
- of the 220 staff employed by the Sandwell Children's Trust, 109 were agency staff. The commitment to recruit and retain staff at Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) was underpinned by the 12 reasons to work at SCT, to help to build the future for the children and young people of Sandwell;
- the Chair reported that two years ago, the Board had visited Children's Services to 'walk the floor' and to meet employees and listen to their concerns. The Chair welcomed improvements at the Trust because they addressed many of the issues highlighted at the time, such as concerns about technology, caseloads etc;
- the new work arrangements had created an environment where employees talked to managers about the day job, innovation and concerns; they were nurturing individuals and managing expectations;
- the Chair made reference to wording in the monitoring report about children who had been missing and that on their return, attendance at an interview was non-mandatory. The Chief Executive recognised that the narrative could be stronger to demonstrate that the young people were being supported and encouraged to attend an interview to focus on their experience and the impact of what that had been;
- it was reported that the individual needs relating to cultural diversity and disabilities remained unrecognised in some assessments, but that this would be picked up in the narrative of the ministerial letter;
- the Board was advised that there were constructive conversations being held between the Trust and the Council relating to the prediction of overspend.

Resolved:-

1. that the Chief Executive Sandwell Children's Trust feedback to the Exploitation Board about the need to promote successful prosecutions in Sandwell and to raise awareness of West Midlands Police successful prosecution rates;

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
18th March, 2019**

2. that the Executive Director - Children's Services, in consultation with the Police and Crime Commissioners team and communications team consider ways how to raise awareness and promote good practice, to let the public know about successful prosecutions in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation in Sandwell.

8/19

Play and Youth Services

The Executive Director of Children's Services gave an update on the current role and purpose of Sandwell Youth Service, 'Go Play' Sandwell and the relationship between those services which explored the interface between Go Play, the Youth Service and SHAPE. It was highlighted that Sandwell had a good range of youth and play services which, whilst was reduced, had been protected so that services were not completely lost to the Borough.

Consideration was given to where the Council should target the youth service moving forward; to think about positive activities and developing confidence.

The Go Play Manager outlined the service provided for 6-12-year olds in the Borough. It was clarified that youth services and play services overlapped and worked with each other. To ensure flexibility that the services responded to the individuals needs and to family and community needs. Work was ongoing to find out more about how children felt about play in Sandwell, where they could play freely, were there green spaces and to raise the profile of play to highlight it was important for children to play as part of their development.

The Youth Service had been vastly depleted from a budget of £2.2 million to £850,000 in a few years. With low resource the services provided had to be shared across the Borough. Five of the six towns that make up Sandwell Borough had one youth club, the sixth town West Bromwich had two clubs due to the size of the area. In addition to the small number of clubs, the services were more targeted to small groups, individuals and clubs such as young women's group, sports and detached work.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 18th March, 2019

The Service also had two dedicated facilities for young people providing outdoor education at Malthouse Stables and arts provision at Coneygre Arts Centre.

Members were advised that young people from the service were engaged in the SHAPE Programme taking part in a conference providing feedback into the programme and participating in other youth work events such as the Annual talent show and using the two youth buses that worked across the Borough. The report reflected the breadth of the work carried out.

In response to questions raised by members of the Scrutiny Board:-

- the age restriction on the Youth Service Bus had created some debate. The predominant age group using the buses was 11-19, however younger siblings aged 8 plus were attracted to the bus. Play services had been considering the cross-over of age groups and the offer for ages 8-18;
- the Executive Director Children's Services advised that the bus was a space that the older young people valued, it was not just about keeping them occupied, but was an opportunity to work with them and look at helping them make the right choices. She indicated that there was a need to protect the space for older younger people. The youth bus service had made a significant impact on communities across Sandwell;
- the service also had a special needs youth club at Meadows school and a mixed ability drama group at Coneygre Arts Centre, which were advertised via its website and facebook page;
- Go play facilities finished at aged 16 and there were concerns that there was no transition to other services; that it was hard to find out what was happening out and around the Borough;
- there had been a problem in one area with what to spend the youth offer money for their area on, however the youth team would work with any members to indicate what was available and to support them to fully utilise grants or funding opportunities as had happened in some areas already;
- the 'Pop-up Play' sessions across Sandwell were proving to be a hit in school holidays for 6-12 year groups and up to age 16 for young people with special needs. Parents were allowed to stay with younger children;
- there was demand for provision for older children in school holidays and a session at Marsh Lane was being considered for

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 18th March, 2019

- older children to come along and have a game of football or just get together to carry out activities;
- the Youth Service was officially ages 11 -19 years, but the focus was on ages 13-19 children, this would depend on individual need because some young people were not more comfortable or confident in younger age groups. It was important to have some flexibility and not to have absolute lines drawn;
 - the Play Service had six staff to deliver all of the services across Sandwell;
 - there was not a big presence of play facilities in Rowley, the level of facilities was influenced by demand, resource and who bought in the play services;
 - there was a Council narrow boat called the 'Aaron Manby'. The boat was maintained and run by a voluntary organisation and as such was not solely available to the youth service. It was agreed to circulate information to Members about the Council's canal boat;
 - the SHAPE programme was funded by the Council, SHAPE organised events throughout the year for children and young people. The objective was to listen to the voice of children and young people in Sandwell using five themes:
 - Staying Safe
 - Being Healthy
 - Enjoying and Achieving
 - Making a Positive Contribution
 - Economic Wellbeing
 - Play and Youth Services worked closely with SHAPE and provided the capacity for a large majority of the SHAPE programme, however, they were in separate parts of the organisational system. It was felt that there could be some efficiencies in bringing these services together into a single coherent arrangement;
 - the target of the Youth and Play Service was to work towards the 2030 vision and to provide the best service and quality outcomes within the much-reduced budget;
 - there was a discussion about the buildings that were currently in use by the Youth Service and the need to consider the conditions and better use of Council buildings for local youth club provision.
 - Sandwell was the first local organisation in England to undertake Play Sufficiency Assessment this was exciting work and Sandwell was leading the way;
 - further in-depth research was being carried out to consider what more could be done, in addition to hearing the voice of the child

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
18th March, 2019**

information, the information from young people about play would also feed into the Green Space Strategy.

The Chair thanked officers for their hard work and enthusiasm for the services they delivered.

Resolved:

- 1) that the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services consider the joining up of Play, Youth and SHAPE services,
- 2) that information relating to the Council's narrow boat 'Aaron Manby' be circulated to Scrutiny Board Members;
- 3) that an update report relating to Play Services be included in the work programme 2019-2020 for the 11th November agenda.

8/19

Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board transition to Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership - Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA)

The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Independent Consultant MASA and Interim Sandwell Safeguarding Children Business Manager provided a summary of Sandwell's new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in response to legislative changes affecting Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.

The Chair acknowledged that there were additional responsibilities for Scrutiny outlined in the attachment and a need to clarify the role of the Scrutiny Board. As the Board was unable to open the link to the appendix in the report members had not had opportunity to fully consider the content of the document and requested that the document be circulated for comments.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Executive Director of Children's Services circulate the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangement report and any

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
18th March, 2019**

comments of the Scrutiny Board subsequently
be considered by Cabinet as appropriate.

(Meeting ended at 6.50 pm)

<p>Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896</p>
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