

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

**11 November, 2019 at 5.00 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Singh (Chair);
Councillors Allen, Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley,
Costigan, Z Hussain, McVittie, Phillips and
Shackleton.

Apologies: Councillor Preece, C Ward-Lewis and T Majid (Co-opted members).

In attendance: Lesley Hagger, Executive Director Children's Services;
Chris Ward, Director of Education, Skills and Employment;
Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health;
Ben Curtis, Barnardo's;
Rosie Pugh, Barnardo's.

19/19 **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Allen declared an interest in relation to item 4 on the agenda relating to voluntary support for SHAPE as a Non-Executive Director of the Sandwell Children's Trust.

20/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

21/19 **Adverse Childhood Experiences ACEs**

The Board received a report and presentation from the Executive Director, Children's Services and representative from Barnardo's Midlands.

The Board noted that Adverse Childhood Experiences ACE were stressful or traumatic experiences that could have a huge impact on children and young people throughout their adulthood. An ACE could

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

be a one-off event, an ongoing issue or a combination of issues, which could be abuse and neglect, or household and community dysfunction.

The Board noted the following messages from the presentation:

- the forms of ACEs included maltreatment, violence and coercion, adjustment, prejudice, household or family issues, inhumane treatment, adult responsibilities, bereavement and survivorship;
- ACEs have a complexity of impacts both for individuals and families, often on a continuing basis;
- the impact of ACEs could be mitigated by resilience and supportive relationships, to protect physical, emotional, spiritual and mental wellbeing;
- exposure to ACEs could increase the odds of a person drinking, smoking, having under age sex, unplanned pregnancy, be involved in violence or using illicit drugs or being incarcerated;
- the agenda for addressing ACEs in Sandwell was noted and Members noted that kindness and consideration provided a 'trusted person(s)' who could safeguard and reduce the impact of the environment young people were living in;
- resilience was being able to find the balance between the young person's trauma, or stressor, and the protective factors to raise physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health and wellbeing;
- there was a need to fix the environment young people were growing up in.

The Board noted that in addition to the ten identified ACEs had similar negative long-term effects including bullying, poverty and community adversities (living in a deprived area and neighbourhood violence).

The Board noted that childhood adversity created stress which impacted on healthy brain development, which in the long term could result in effects on behaviour, learning and health.

The Board noted that the Health and Wellbeing Board, at a recent meeting had approved an action plan to improve understanding, identification and support available to those at risk. A multi-agency steering group, chaired by the Executive Director Children's Services was established to develop and implement the action plan. The action plan was also

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

incorporated into the work of 'Safer Sandwell' through the Prevention of Violence and Exploitation (PoVE) sub-group. Two posts had been funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner and hosted by Barnardo's to work across Sandwell and Dudley, their work is also supported by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit and Public Health England.

The Board noted that the Action Plan identified three priorities:

- A Sandwell has a good understanding of the distribution of ACEs across the borough, professional curiosity was used in a systematic way to identify those at risk and support their needs;
- B People could access support and advice from a range of trauma informed interventions and services;
- C Professionals were ACE aware, and trauma informed, communities across Sandwell had a better understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences and its impacts.

The Board noted that the primary focus of the Action Plan was to develop the awareness and understanding of ACEs across all agencies, to improve the support provided to children and adults and this was reported to be progressing well. The training offer included:

- an e-learning tool – available to all agencies to raise awareness of ACEs;
- face-to-face training – to enable all agencies to be trauma-informed;
- a 'Trusted Adult' training programme was available in schools, three-day training, which was also made available to other agencies.

The Board noted that a Teamworx programme, was also offered to pupils in Years 5 and 6 who had been identified by their schools as experiencing ACEs, and a business case was being developed to extend the programme beyond the current academic year.

The Board noted that the next steps would be to evaluate the impact of the training and to develop ongoing resources that agencies could use when working with children and adults, and to review and make recommendations for policy review across agencies to address the negative impact of ACE's.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

The Board welcomed the work to encourage awareness training and participation with the Children's Trust, SHAPE and partners, the tools and training that had been developed, including the E-learning programme (developed by Barnardo's and Sandwell Council) and the 'Trauma Deck' of 52 cards used in training sessions at Team meetings. Also, the link up with Dudley Council as a partner, and the work that they were progressing with Bangor University about ACEs.

The Board welcomed that Sandwell was ahead of other Authorities with its work on ACEs. The following comments and responses were noted: -

- there was a strong relationship between poverty and ACEs in Sandwell and cultural and intergenerational relationships, and epigenetic journey had been considered when collating data;
- the Teamworx programme in schools for Year 5 and 6 pupils was to be reviewed to include younger and older Year groups;
- ACEs was a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- the link to looked after children had been considered, in addition to the trauma that unfolded before and when becoming a looked after child;
- the intergenerational aspects of ACEs were crucial, prevention was paramount and the link to pregnancy in young people had been taken into consideration;
- preventative steps had been taken to ensure that the steering group was represented by all services and organisations, and the strategy for prevention and protection was for all workforces to become ACEs aware, trauma informed and trusted adult trained;
- current services had been mapped, made available, trained and accessible;
- workforces were being trained to look beyond the symptoms of children who were not developing, to consider what the causes were behind behavioural, learning or emotional issues;
- training was being well received by all workforces and resources were being developed;
- data was being utilised from all available sources to build the data base;
- it was recognised that there was a need to adapt services to the needs of the local community and that Sandwell population and towns would need different support in place.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

The Chair thanked the Executive Director Children's Services and the representatives from Barnardo's for a very powerful and emotional video and thorough presentation. He welcomed that the responses to questioning about the work Barnardo's were delivering on ACEs and the way forward had been full and open.

The Chair requested that the Board be kept informed about the programme and informed of other measures that could be taken.

22/19

SHAPE Programme

The Board received a report and video presentation from the Director of Public Health, the SHAPE project manager and two members of the SHAPE Youth Forum.

At its meeting 10 October 2019, the Board invited members of the SHAPE to explain the work they did as part of the Youth Forum. The SHAPE Project Manager provided a report which outlined the governance arrangements, consultation methods and future steps to involvement in decision making and co-production with children and young people.

The Board received a [Video Presentation](#) about the SHAPE programme and how young people participated and wanted their voice to be heard.

A SHAPE Youth Forum Member and Member of the Youth Parliament informed the Board about young people's involvement in scrutinising policies and matters that involved young people and children, such as employment law. Another Youth Forum Member, told the Board how the SHAPE project worked to develop young people, to give them a voice for other young people, to consider services that affect them and influence their future.

The Youth Forum Members invited the Board to consider how to involve young people in consultations and decision making.

The Board welcomed the presentation and the opportunity to get children and young people involved in the scrutiny process.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

- Josh had become involved with SHAPE through his UK Youth Parliament Campaign and it was recommended to Jess by her mother who worked in the team. Both had found SHAPE interesting, made new friends and got involved. They found it a way of making friends outside of school and enjoyed getting involved to make a difference;
- staffing levels had been identified as an issue, more funding would enable more staff and SHAPE would be able to deliver much more;
- the SHAPE talent show was getting bigger each year and the SHAPE programme had been recognised by television programme 'The Voice'. As a result, word had got around and the SHAPE Programme Manager had been asked to talk at various venues about the SHAPE programme and its success. This was welcomed but was time consuming when resources were stretched;
- engagement with schools had been difficult at first, it was difficult to get to all schools with current resource, but a conference had been developed for young people by young people, and now there were 90 young people involved and to attend the conference;
- in addition to the talent show and conference, other work was rolling out in relation to the 'Antibullying Road Show', 120 children had been seen on 11th September 2019 and it was anticipated that over 700 would be seen in that week. It was anticipated that this could be rolled out further with partnership working in place;
- the Antibullying Roadshow was free of charge to schools which increased take up;
- communication about SHAPE was rolled out through schools, SHAPE did not have capacity to reach out to parents, consequently there was a reliance on schools;
- in relation to how SHAPE could do better, the Manager indicated they would like to reach children with additional needs, work with autistic young people, do more with home educated children and alternative provision for learning, and much more, but advised that capacity, resources and links to get to people they want to reach were barriers to reaching those groups;

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

- parental engagement and voting in ballots was another area identified for improvement, all other regions had thousands more votes in ballots. The Board noted that some schools were not engaging in the ballot process relating to issues such as knife crime, mental health and protecting the environment;
- there was a need to raise awareness about local issues and ballots through a designated officer, to co-ordinate with schools; the electoral participation officer post no-longer existed and there was no democratic process or dedicated person(s) nominated to assist;
- the team had talked with headteachers in partnership meetings and work had taken place with the Youth Services Manager;
- this was an opportunity for schools to get involved with the broader Ofsted criteria of youth participation in democracy, however there was a lot going on in schools and there was a need to consider how much of what was happening met the new curriculum objectives.

The Board welcomed the work SHAPE was carrying out to promote the wellbeing of young people and strengthen their voice in local democracy. The Chair indicated that there was a need to promote their work and to get all Members of the Council involved.

Resolved

- (1) that Council be recommended to amend the terms of reference for the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board to include 2 non-voting co-opted representatives of the SHAPE Youth Forum, to represent the voice of young people on matters that impact on children and young people.

22/19

Regional Adoption Agency

The Board received a report from the Executive Director Children's Services relating to the performance of the new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) arrangements, operational since 1st April 2019.

The Board noted that at a previous meeting it had been agreed that scrutiny of Adoption@Heart and the RAA performance would take

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 11 November, 2019

place at the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board rather than at Corporate Parenting Board.

The Board noted that at the time of writing the report the first half year performance report had not been presented to the Adoption@Heart Commissioning Board, however there were early indications of performance set out in paragraph 4 of the report submitted that were promising from Sandwell's perspective. A performance dashboard was available but required some further development, monthly reports had been considered by the monthly Operational Management Board and the quarterly Strategic Commissioning Board.

The Board noted the following messages from the first six-month performance overview:

- adopter recruitment – 20 adopters had been approved and 53 in the process of being approved. The target of 120 adopters in the first year was unlikely to be met. The possible shortfall was largely due to problems with IT systems and transitional arrangements between local authorities in the first three months of operation;
- children placed – 47 children had been placed, of which, 24 had been placed for Sandwell. The target for 34 children placed in year 1 in Sandwell, was anticipated to be met;
- budget – there was a slight underspend for the period, this was part of the settling down process. The Local Authority would transfer actual spend at the end of the year. The Budget setting for 2020-21 would be finalised by the end of December 2019;
- Local Authority scrutiny – an interim report would be considered by Council Leaders and Chief Executives at the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) on 13th November. There would be a report to lead Members for children's services in the new year to give assurance of progress to Corporate Parenting Boards;
- all four Local Authorities would receive a full performance report early in the new year;
- A full performance report would be considered by scrutiny in the new year and comments should be referred to Corporate Parenting Board for consideration.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

- the timeline for an adoption differed and timescale depended on the circumstances of the individual child and family. There was an average timeline of 6 months but this had sometimes taken much longer;
- the 6 months average was a long time in a child's life, and in response to how the Council could help to reduce the transition period and reduce delays, the Board was advised that more people were needed to adopt and that the matching process of child to potential adopters needed to be a good match and must last;
- there had been several campaigns to encourage adopters, many of them in Wolverhampton, however the traditional campaigns, such as posters on buses, were not working as well. The way forward was considered to be targeted social media campaigns, adoptions recruitment in libraries (from next year) and a need to open discussions in communities of Sandwell;
- Members highlighted the need to reach out to communities for fostering and adoption campaigns;
- Members indicated that many people found the long and intrusive process to adopt off putting. They were advised that the national criteria had to be followed;
- Post adoption support was raised, in particular the cost of raising a child and indicated that this was a factor in people not coming forward to adopt. The Board was advised that there was a National Adoption Support Fund in operation until 2021 that could provide some assistance;
- when interagency placements (adopters from other areas) occurred, Sandwell would pay for the family from the other area and if they placed in Sandwell they would pay. Next year, the LA would pay per child placed and it cost more to place Sandwell children in other areas;
- the Board was advised that there were currently 61 children waiting for adoption in Sandwell and that it was not confirmed how many had complex needs.

The Board welcomed the progress made to date but indicated that there was more to do in relation to engagement campaigns with communities in Sandwell, and to reduce the transition period for adoption. The Board requested to see an action plan of how the RAA would address the issues raised.

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
11 November, 2019**

Recommendation:

- (1) that the first six monthly performance report be submitted to the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board at the first available meeting of the new year;
- (2) that Corporate Parenting Board consider the comments and recommendation of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board in relation to the first six monthly performance report;
- (3) that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) be requested to provide an action plan to show how it intends to tackle issues identified by the Sandwell Children's and Education Scrutiny Board relating to reducing transition period and targeting engagement campaigns in Sandwell.

(Meeting ended at 6.35 pm)

Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896
