

# Minutes of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 9 January 2023 at 6.00 pm**  
**in the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Hinchliff (Vice-Chair) (in the Chair)  
Councillors Chambers, Dunn, W Gill, Mayo, McVittie, Preece  
and Uddin.  
Kelly Heeley (Co-opted Member)

**Officers:** Michael Jarrett (Director of Children and Education)  
Margaret Courts (Head of CAMHS Commissioning)  
Sarah Hogan (Deputy Director for Children and Young  
People CAMHS)  
Sally Giles (Assistant Director for Children's Commissioning  
and Partnerships)  
Kate Griffiths (Strategic Lead Early Help SCT)  
PC John Hewitt (Education Partnership Officer, Sandwell  
Police)  
Jon Grant (Chair of Early Help Partnership)  
Yvonne Copeland (Clinical Lead, Health Visitor Services)  
Stephnie Hancock (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)  
Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer)

**In attendance:** Councillors Chidley and Smith.

## 1/23 **Councillor Shackleton Remembered**

Members observed a minute of silence to mark the passing of long serving councillor and Chair of the Board, Ann Shackleton.

Councillor Shackleton had represented the Cradley Heath and Old Hill ward since 2004. She had been Chair of the Children's



Services and Education Scrutiny Board since 2020 and had previously been the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care from 2016- 2019. She was also the Deputy Mayor for the 2011- 2012 municipal year.

## 2/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akhtar and Dhariwal.

## 3/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 4/23 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022 are approved as a correct record.

## 5/23 **Urgent Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

## 6/23 **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) - Transformation and Changes in Demand**

The Board received a presentation outlining the changes to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) since the Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust had taken over the lead provider role in July 2022, and how the increase in demand in recent years was being addressed.

The changes in service delivery would ensure better collaboration with Voluntary and Community Sector partners, Primary Care Networks, Local Authorities and children, young people and their families. The changes it was hoped would enable easier and equitable access that would provide a better patient experience



and improve outcomes. The consequent harmonisation of resources would ensure equity of access across the Black Country.

The Board noted the following key points in relation to the transformation:-:

- Core CAMHS services for Sandwell had improved following investment which had increased capacity by 16 wholetime equivalent staff.
- Investment had allowed for aligning the CAMHS service across the Black Country ensuring support up to the age of 18 years.
- In-patient mental health beds for children and young people had moved from specialised commissioning through to provider collaboratives where BCHFT was a partner. The service as a gatekeeper for young people requiring in-patient facilities. Contracts with the in-patient providers would allow for a greater investment into preventative measures.
- Eating disorders services had been aligned across the Black Country. Sandwell had benefited from being one of the first areas to receive the all age eating disorder provision.
- There was an outreach team being developed in Sandwell that would be working with young people and adults in the community when they were not well enough to attend their out-patient appointment. They would also be supporting lower level services, ensuring everybody was aware of the pathways into specialist eating disorder service.
- The service was taking part in the national FREED research project, which was looking into early intervention for young adults.
- Young Adult Transition 18-25 service was being developed with adult mental health colleagues. The service would focus on those young adults who did not meet the threshold for adult mental health support.
- Mental Health Support Teams in schools was a nationally led initiative.
- The Children and Young People Intensive Support Team was supported those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).



- The tier four delayed discharge programme supported those with eating disorders and supported keeping young people at home or working with them in an acute setting.
- The Barnardo's Keyworkers Pilot would support young people who could not be discharged due to ongoing social circumstances with Barnardo's acting as a conduit to address the social needs of those young people.
- There was now a Single Point of Access lead.
- Patients now had the choice of remote or face to face support, however patients with complex mental health needs and eating disorders were seen face to face..
- Work was underway to embed the I Thrive Model, supporting young people to thrive and move away from the medical model, offering them a helping hand in everyday language.
- A number of services were being reviewed to ensure that they were fit for purpose.
- The waiting times varied depending on need and remained challenging. There had continued to be an increase in both the number of children and young people accessing the service and an increase in the severity of the cases.

Waiting times were noted as:

- Sandwell CAMHS Single Point Access, first appointment:
  - Pre-pandemic 11 weeks
  - During pandemic 5 weeks
  - January 2022 11 weeks
  - Current position 5.8 weeks (Jan 2023)
- Sandwell CAMHS Core, second appointment:
  - Pre-pandemic 14 weeks
  - During pandemic 22 weeks
  - January 2022 18 weeks
  - Current position 31 weeks (Jan 2023)
- Sandwell CAMHS Outpatients, first appointment:
  - Pre-pandemic 6 weeks
  - During pandemic 12 weeks
  - January 2022 10 weeks
  - Current position 15 weeks (Dec 2022)
- Sandwell CAMHS Outpatients, second appointment:
  - Pre-pandemic 9 weeks
  - During pandemic 21 weeks
  - January 2022 13 weeks



- Current position 41.5 weeks (Dec 2022)

The Board noted that while referrals at the early stages of lockdown had decreased and remained below pre-pandemic levels, from March 2021 referrals to CAMHS had increased significantly and continued to do so, with children and young people presenting with more complex needs. Areas of particular focus for practitioners were highlighted as:

- Severe anxiety
- Anxiety with school refusal
- parental concerns around if their child had a disorder on the autistic spectrum continuum
- parental concern around the loss of the richness of information that they share with referring professionals.

There was a number of challenges that continued to impact the service:

- Increasing demand in young people having their challenges understood through the lens of mental ill health as the first approach, while there remained a range of factors that could be contributing to the young person's distress.
- Ensuring there was an understanding of the availability of other wellbeing/support services across Sandwell.
- Continued recruitment challenges across the whole system and conversations were taking place with central government to find a national solution.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- There was a proactive move towards a whole system approach to ensure that the support offered matched what was required.
- A dashboard was being developed as a means of creating a single point of contact or directory for services.
- The Early Help service was well developed and actively worked to support children and young people.
- Reports were being sent to each locality on waiting times and a monthly basis, along with reports to the Thrive Board.



- Digital poverty was an ongoing concern and work continued to support those young people who did not have digital access to services.
- Provision for children and young people from the LGBTQ community was at a regional level.
- CAMHS continued to work with the SHAPE Board to understand young people's concerns.

7/23

## Early Help in Sandwell

The Board received an overview of Early Help provision in Sandwell. Early Help delivered a range of early interventions for children, young people and families at their earliest point of need.

Early Help was a key focus in Sandwell with the Grant Thornton Review, LGA Peer Challenge Report and feedback from Ofsted 2022 all highlighting how important it was to get the provision right.

Early Help provision was made up of a range of partners including the Council, Sandwell Children's Trust, voluntary sector, Police and Health Services focused on preventing escalation of problems and reducing the number of children and young people requiring statutory services. Early Help was able to be flexible in its approach, which was not always the case with statutory services. The Sandwell Early Help Strategy, which had been launched in February 2022, brought together statutory guidance and best practice, embedding partnership working across all approaches.

The Early Help Partnership oversaw the implementation of the Early Help Strategy and reported in to the Children and Families Strategic Partnership. The Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership also received regular updates and assurances on the progress against the Strategy.

The Board noted the universal services that could be accessed by all, and the progression path to statutory services.



To deliver the multi-agency Early Help provision, there were a number of tools:

- Early Help Assessment – an assessment completed with families to identify needs and develop a support plan.
- Early Help Module – an electronic system to record all multi-agency intervention.
- Team Around the Family – a multi-agency meeting attended by the child and family to develop and monitor the support plan.
- Lead Professional Role – the main point of contact for families receiving support.

Members noted a number of changes that had been made over the last few years, including the appointment of three dedicated police officers by West Midlands Police to work across schools in Sandwell including Pupil Referral Units.

(Councillor Preece left the meeting.)

The impact of these changes had been demonstrated with:-

- a 3% increase in multi-agency Early Help led by agencies across the partnership since July 2022 with a further 2% increase since November 2022.
- a 20% increase in the number of families accessing the Strengthening Families Service that would suggest more families were being supported in the Early Help arena.
- there were 400 fewer children open to social care compared to 2021;
- demand for Early Help training had increased.

The areas for further development within Early Help were noted as:

- the ongoing promotion of the Strategy and the messaging around Early Help to ensure commitment and engagement from all partners;
- the Early Help data dashboard to be used to proactively challenge partners across partnership;
- further reduction in the amount of Multi Agency Request Forms received by Sandwell Children's Trust that resulted in no statutory social work intervention;



- continued cultural change across the partnership to ensure a focus on prevention it at every level.

(Councillor Mayo left the meeting.)

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- every child had access to the universal offer, and home visits would only be undertaken if necessary as resources did not allow for universal home visits;
- the Health Partnership actively engaged with young families to identify any concerns;
- partnership events had allowed for networking and relationship building across services and for providers to understand what services were available within the locality;
- the Partnership's Police officers had been working out of the Strengthening Families Hubs working with partners across all services;
- support and supervision was offered to staff on a regular basis to share experiences;

8/23

## **Impact of the Lockdown on Children and Families - Working Group Report and Recommendations**

The Board considered the draft report and recommendations following its review into the Impact of Lockdown on Children and Families, which had commenced in 2021/22.

The working group had investigated several topics including impact of the lockdown on exam results, child poverty and social care. Members each had a specific work-stream on which to focus and were able to interview relevant officers and key witnesses to help their research.

The Director of Children and Education had been consulted on, the recommendations and was supportive of them.

(Councillors Chambers, Dunn and W Gill left the meeting.)



The gap in educational achievement had widened for our most disadvantaged children and it was hoped that the recommendations would help to address this.

**Resolved :-**

- (1) that the Chair of the Thrive Board presents a report to the scrutiny Board outlining its work and the impact of, in relation to the impact of the pandemic on students' mental health and well-being;
- (2) that representatives of the SEND Strategic Board/SEND Operational Board report to the Board on the services and support provided to SEND children and the impact, including attainment data;
- (3) that the Director of Children and Education reports to the Board on the progress and outcomes of the national review into the covid-19 response in so much as it relates to education and children's services;
- (4) that, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board is requested to undertake a review and monitors the recovery strategy of mental health services within the Borough;
- (5) that the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board writes to the Sandwell Children's Trust to request details of its plans to address the challenges of recruitment and retention of social workers;
- (6) that the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board writes to the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to request details of their plans to address the challenges faced by children in care and care leavers and to understand how the pandemic has impacted them and what has been done to address this;



- (7) that the Director of Children and Education reports to the Board, providing an update on the Councils' Covid-19 Recovery Plan, in as much as it relates to education and children's services
- (8) that the following recommendations are submitted to the Cabinet:-
- a) that the Director of Children and Education works co-operatively with the Department for Education to improve the education standards of children and young people, utilising Education Investment Area funding;
  - b) that the Director of Children and Education is proactive in working with schools in the area to consider the creation or adoption of multi-academy trusts;
  - c) that the Director of Children and Education is proactive in considering suitable locations in the Borough for specialist sixth-form free schools which are funded by central government;
  - d) that the Council joins the Department for Education's 1-2-1 attendance mentoring pilot to monitor issues in schools across the Borough;
  - e) that, the Cabinet Member for Children and Education pledges to improve and increase the Borough's educational assessment data in line with the national average by 2027, in line with the aims and objectives of Vision 2030;
  - f) that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for Education, to request that the Government actively engages with education practitioners to understand the long-term problems caused by the national pandemic and prepare appropriate



resources to help children and young people recover academically, socially and psychologically;

- g) that the Director of Children and Education encourages and supports schools in the Borough to provide sports programmes and extracurricular activities to help children catch up in all areas of lost learning and experiences and to improve mental and physical health;
- h) that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for Education, to request that specific monetary assistance is made available to children eligible for free school meals to take part in extracurricular activities;
- i) that the Director of Children and Education reviews the Council's partnership working with education providers and the Sandwell Children's Trust to ensure that actions, outcomes and best practice work are shared to ensure we are working cohesively together;
- j) That the Cabinet Member for Children and Education investigates ways to connect with young people and offer extra support, mentoring and encouragement including, but not limited to:-
  - a) establishing a peer mentoring programme;
  - b) encouraging social youth work, sports, drama, and outdoor activities;
  - c) engaging with local businesses to improve the number of available apprenticeships;
  - d) supporting a holistic youth services experience which accompanies physical and digital offer;
  - e) supporting and championing the new Eco Bus with young people's involvement;



- k) that the Cabinet Member for Children and Education writes to the Secretary of State for Education, to lobby for recurrent yearly funding which will allow for consistent support to address young people's emotional wellbeing and (low level) mental health as we recovery from COVID and the impact that it caused, whilst supporting the Council's ambition to improve academic performance, socialisation, conversation, mental health and wellbeing;
- l) That, the Director of Children and Education works with multi-agency partners to support, engage and monitor the stability within the early years settings.

9/23 **Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted progress on actions and recommendations from previous meetings.

10/23 **Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan and its Work Programme for 2022/23.

Meeting ended at 8.20pm

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