

SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022

**2.00 - 5.20 pm in the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak

Email: amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257714

Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chairman)

Councillors Joyce Barrow (Vice Chairman), Julia Buckley, Steve Charmley, Roger Evans, Robert Macey, Peggy Mullock and Leslie Winwood

4 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies received from Councillors Alan Mosley and David Vasmer. Councillors Ted Clarke and Ruth Houghton substituted for them.

5 Disclosable Interests

None declared

6 Minutes of the meetings held on 4 May 2022 and 12 May 2022

Minutes of the meetings held on 4 May 2022 and 12 May 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

7 Public Question Time

There were no public questions

8 Member Question Time

There were no member questions

9 Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Performance

Members received a summary report and detailed presentation from Sonya Miller, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care & Safeguarding, other officers from Children's Services to address the request made at Cabinet for scrutiny on the following aspects of performance: Reasons for increase in numbers of looked after children; Timeliness of completion of assessments; children on a child protection plan for over 2 years; care leavers not in education, employment or training.

The presentation referred to the feedback received in the report from Ofsted published in March 2022 which had recognised a robust quality assurance framework across children's services.

Responding to questions from members throughout the presentation, it was confirmed that work was underway to determine which key performance indicators were most appropriate for use in delivering the Shropshire Plan; Issues related to sharing data across partner agencies were being addressed; and child journey audits were completed every month by team managers, service managers and Assistant Directors as well as thematic audits where there appeared to be a reoccurring theme;

Members felt it would be useful to see a quality assurance report at a future briefing or meeting

The Committee explored in detail the reasons that Shropshire was an outlier, even compared to statistical neighbours, when it came to numbers of Looked After Children, as this could not be explained by shortcomings related to children's mental health services alone.

Members noted that the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers had increased from 8 to 37, numbers leaving care had slowed due to delays in court proceedings as a consequence of the pandemic; and a larger cohort of under 5 year olds were becoming known to the service for the first time at a significant level of harm, injuries or neglect.

The reasons for this were reported as being linked to the pandemic - services with close contact with children where issues may have been identified earlier on had been closed, or staff had been re-deployed meaning some children had consequently missed opportunities to enter the child protection process. There was confidence that there had been no change in the Council's thresholds.

Members heard how some authorities with large NHS footprints had not had to redeploy front line health visitors and midwives during the pandemic, and this was one reason to explain why Shropshire as a rural county was an outlier. Shropshire had also responded to a letter from government prioritising the vaccination effort whereas some systems had challenged that and protected midwives, and health visitors, rather than redeploying them as requested. The Executive Director said that learning from this experience had been gained and fed into the Shropshire Safeguarding Board.

A reset of earliest possible help was underway and support continued for partners to help understand thresholds and responsibilities. Partner agencies were now referring in at an earlier opportunity and there was early indication of a change in trend. Members also noted that national figures would not be

available for comparative purposes until the Autumn and it might be that these showed Shropshire was not a significant outlier.

The Chairman noted that 80% of the last 50 children who had come into care had not been known to the service beforehand and asked how this could be addressed. Francean Doyle, Head of Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning explained that 'predictive analytics' were currently being piloted whereby all data known about a family, for example, in relation to mental health, drugs, alcohol, debt, eviction, or being known to police could help triangulate a picture down to an individual child or siblings in a household. This would help identify the best lead professional to work with a family that might need support at an earlier stage, eg, a teacher, social worker, health visitor or youth worker. She acknowledged the ethical issues this work raised and learning from a pilot scheme in East Sussex was being reviewed. Early help indicators were already in place but predictive analytics would help take these one step further.

Members enquired about the Stepping Stones and heard that the delay in implementation had been entirely related to availability of staff during the pandemic. A business case for tripling provision was currently under consideration and committee members offered to add their support for any request for additional resources for the programme if required.

Moving on through the presentation, officers also responded to questions from members on timeliness of assessments and children on a child protection plan for over two years as follows:

- Reasons for decline in performance around timeliness of assessments since the start of the pandemic included increased complexity of need, increased demand, other agencies being closed or offering a reduced service, short and long term sickness and reduced capacity, especially in the disabled children's team;
- This was a national and regional trend, not just a local one;
- Gaps in provision had been identified for children and young people with emotional health and mental health needs, the CCG and Bee U service had been called to account at scrutiny meetings and it was hoped partnership working with through the Integrated Care System would bring about improvements;
- An improving picture of timeliness of assessments was now emerging, and the bulk were delivered quickly;
- Workshops on proportionate assessments had been delivered; and outcome for the child was not impacted by how quickly the assessment form was completed;
- The same caseworker would not necessarily stay with the same family all the way through when there were specialist aspects or transition points, transitions could be difficult for families so this was minimised as far as possible

- Disabled children had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic assessment due to staff availability
- There 6,500 vacancies for social workers nationally, the market was extremely challenged; incentives were being offered to work at Shropshire with competitive package of pay and benefits with some success in converting agency staff to permanent staff with a retention package focused on learning and development. The picture in the Midlands was particularly challenged due to a focus on the Solihull and Herefordshire services. A member suggested that the council work with unions to help inform recruitment campaigns.

Members also heard that performance in looked after children school leavers not in employment education or training was currently in line with the national average. The Kickstart scheme had helped boost numbers but this had come to an end. Examples were given of care leavers attending university and gaining employment, others not in employment, education or training for reasons such as illness, mental health, trauma, disability, pregnancy and imprisonment. Work with partners on life skills was underway and the Council itself offered employment and apprenticeships.

It was also confirmed in response to a question that relationship with the police was a positive one, helped by co-location at Mount McKinley.

The Committee heard that self assessment against the 57 recommendations made in the recently published Telford CSE Report would take place and a report made to the People Overview Committee.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee agreed that performance indicators were needed that would work with the Integrated Care System and would make it very obvious as soon as there were any warnings of blockages or gaps in the system.

The Chair said she would be meeting with the ICS to discuss development of these and also continue pressure to improve the performance of children's mental health performance.

It was agreed that a future report in about 6 months time be made to the committee, which could provide a meaningful comparison of performance with other authorities following the publication of national figures; disaggregated to help tease out areas with an anomaly; and provide an evidenced update on the impact of the reset of the early help offer and other initiatives including Stepping Stones. Members asked that the report cover the key areas of concern including the disabled children's team and recruitment and retention.

The Chair thanked officers for their hard work and their time in attending the meeting and said if it was felt there was anything the committee could do to support the service, to make contact.

10 Work Programme

Due to the length of the meeting it was agreed to defer consideration of the work programme.

11 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED:

that, in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and Paragraph 10.4 [3] of the Council's Access to Information Rules, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item

12 Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to one minor amendment.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: