
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2019

Present: Councillors Taggart (Chair), Chaloner, Mintoff, Mitchell and Laurent

Apologies: Councillors J Baillie, Guthrie and Rob Sanders

1. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The apologies of Councillor J Baillie, Councillor Guthrie and also of Appointed Member Rob Sanders were noted.

It was noted that Councillor Chaloner had been appointed at the Council's Annual General Meeting on 15 May 2019 to the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel. In accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Management Procedure Rule 3.4.2, Council would be required to waive this firebreak period at their meeting on 17 July 2019.

2. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED that Councillor Mitchell be elected as Vice-Chair for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - PERFORMANCE**

The Committee considered the report of the Director, Legal and Governance providing an overview of performance across Children and Families Services since February 2019.

The Panel discussed the performance of Children and Families Services in Southampton with the Cabinet Member for Aspiration, Children and Lifelong Learning and the Children and Families Senior Management Team. When considering performance since March 2019 concerns were expressed by the Panel with regards to the increasing demand on services; timescales not being met; reliability of Early Help data; the reduction in the percentage of care leavers in contact and unsuitable accommodation since May 2018; increasing pressure on safeguarding services and rising caseloads for social workers, all of which threatened to undermine the progress made by the service.

Officers informed the Panel that there was a sharp increase in referrals in March 2019 because of the need to review a range of cases that were delayed in the system due to difficulties in gathering consent and pending clarification on elements of referral information. Managers had since made a decision to end a process step in MASH

which led to this backlog. As soon as this was identified an effort was made to ensure 'Working Together' compliance was implemented immediately, leading to a large backlog of cases being converted to referrals in a short space of time. This created a spike in referrals and demand that was now working its way through the service. Timescales had been impacted because of the increase in casework as described above. Additional staff had been recruited into the assessment part of the service to address this and managers had lodged a business case with the Council's Management Team to deliver more capacity, so as to address this in the longer term.

With regards to provision of suitable accommodation for care leavers the Panel were informed that Southampton has a range of contracted services used to support accommodation options for this cohort and they were subject to inspection and quarterly monitoring. Care leavers also attended the Housing Panel and as such were active partners in providing good quality accommodation options. Social workers were also visiting accommodation and monitoring standards on a regular basis.

The Chair welcomed the response from the Senior Management Team with regards to the performance concerns outlined and committed to prioritising the Children and Families Performance item at meetings of the Panel until further notice.

RESOLVED that

- 1) A detailed performance overview be produced to accompany the performance dataset for 25 July 2019 meeting of the Panel; and
- 2) The Panel be provided with information on the Young Inspectors Scheme, an initiative engaging care leavers in the assessment of accommodation.

5. **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY**

The Committee received a power point presentation from the Director of Children and Families Services on the improvement journey that Children and Families Services in Southampton was currently undergoing.

6. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee received and noted the report of the Director, Legal and Governance enabling the Panel to monitor and track progress on recommendations made at previous meetings.