

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF SOUTHAMPTON CHILDREN AND LEARNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT BOARD (MAY/JUNE 2022)

This review has been commissioned by the chair of the Board (Sally Hodges) to review the efficiency and effectiveness of the Board and to explore the impact of Southampton's new children and young people's governance framework upon its function and delivery.

Review Scope: -

The review covered 3 key areas.

1. Functions of the Board
2. Board Effectiveness
3. Future Arrangements

The review took place from 23/05/22-01/06/22. Twenty eight Board Members were interviewed. Some interviews were 1-1, others in small (agency specific) groups and undertaken virtually.

Prior to the interviews, the reviewer undertook desktop research by reading a plethora of documents and reports relating to Board activity and relevant performance reports, to understand the journey of the Board. In particular, the Improvement Plan, performance and QA were looked at. The reviewer considered whether the plan considered the outcomes to be achieved and how progress and impact were measured.

Throughout the interviews, there was a focus on the value of the Board going forward and how each member saw their

role. There was a consensus in terms of opinion on both function and effectiveness.

FUNCTIONS OF THE BOARD

- Unanimously, Sally is held in high regard in terms of her technical knowledge and chairing ability.
- The function and remit of the Board is understood by Board members.
- Whilst the Board is seen as inclusive most members thought it had too many people on, with some inputting very little or not at all.
- Everyone thought they had the opportunity to contribute if they wanted to.
- Most Board members felt there is too much data, and it can be difficult to prioritise; most thought there was limited analysis.
- Given the agenda there is often not enough time for robust discussions.
- Whilst Board members thought there was a will to understand progress against children's outcomes, such were difficult to articulate.
- The Board predominantly focuses on Local Authority business, as key partnership issues are picked up via other Boards.
- The input from the staff reference group is valued by the chair and others.

BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

- Without exception, given where Southampton are on their improvement journey, the view was that an I.B was needed.

- There was, without exception enthusiasm and energy in making improvements.
- Most of the challenge at I.B came from the chair or external bodies, rather than partners.
- Many members described a Board whereby there was a lot of presentations offered, mainly by the L.A, resembling a “show and tell” type presentation.
- It was said several times, that due to the volume of the materials presented it was difficult to really monitor and challenge pace and progress in a meaningful way.
- Whilst there was some holding to account for actions, they sometimes were lost or would lose importance between Boards.
- It was generally agreed that impact of activity and improved outcomes were difficult to articulate.
- The quality of improvement or of social work practice wasn’t understood well; whilst some thematic auditing occurs, a regular reporting of quality of practice and trajectory of improvement was hard to evidence.

FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

All Board Members saw a clear link with the new Strategic Partnership (summer 2022) and could envisage, the revised Improvement Board having a clear line into this Board with its focus on L.A and Partnership improvements in Children’s Social Care as well as Ofsted readiness.

IN SUMMARY

There is political, executive and partner will to be both ambitious and successful for the children and young people of Southampton. However, the Improvement Board is big, and its wide span of agenda can result in improvement activity not always being clear in terms of both the ask of partners and the evidenced key quantitative and qualitative performance outcomes. The Board may be trying to do too much. In its current form it is difficult to answer the question “So what difference are we making?”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To reset the current Improvement Board-to consider if it should be closer aligned to the requirements of the ILACS OFSTED framework.
2. To review membership and terms of reference-are the right people on; can they bring about change quickly in their organisation as well as understanding practice on the ground?
3. Reconsider the KPI's that will be monitored and tracked e.g., top 3 for each agency and the core (12ish) that are of major significance to the L.A (e.g., number of CLA, children with an up-to-date plan,)
4. Consider a basket of Qualitative “checks and balances” that would give the IB assurance on quality of practice, e.g., regular audit activity, complaints and compliments.
5. Re-establish how impact and outcomes would be measured for children and how the Board could effectively measure the progress being made in

Children's Social Care for the cohort whom the Board defines as their responsibility

6. Consider Board "champions" who take responsibility for sections of the plan
7. Consider co-production for parts of the plan
8. Bring real lived experiences to the Board to evidence impact and progress.
9. Consider the current 'Staff reference Group' to consider partner practitioners and use as a sounding board for Improvement Board priorities and as a means of triangulation of progress.

I look forward to sharing my thoughts further and in helping Southampton City Council-Children+Learning Service Improvement Board transition into its next iteration, in order to deliver even better outcomes for its Children and Young People.

Linda Clegg

07/06/2022