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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Councillors Taggart (Chair), Mitchell, J Baillie (except for items 20, 21 and 22), Laurent and Mintoff
Appointed Member Rob Sanders (except for items 18 and 19)

Apologies: Councillor Chaloner, Councillor Guthrie and Catherine Hobbs

18. APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)

The apologies of Councillor Guthrie, Councillor Chaloner and also of Appointed Member Catherine Hobbs were noted.

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record.

20. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - PERFORMANCE

The Panel received the report of the Director, Legal and Governance which provided an overview of performance across Children and Families Services since August 2019.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Aspiration, Children and Lifelong Learning; Hilary Brooks, Service Director, Children and Families Services; Sharon Hawkins, Interim Service Lead, Children's Social Care; and Phil Bullingham, Service Lead, Safeguarding, Improvement, Governance and Compliance; were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the officers, the Panel noted the following:

- Nationally there had been a 78% increase over the last ten years in the number of people who had contacted Children's Services.
- In Southampton referrals increased by 119% between January and July 2019, compared to the same period in 2018.
- There had been an increase in crime, which had contributed to an increase in referrals from the Police.
- There had also been an increase in low income families in the city.
- There had also been media coverage of a serious incident where a child was murdered and these events tended to cause an increase in contacts.
- In Southampton the group with the largest increase in referrals was teenagers. There had also been a significant increase in referrals that featured mental health, domestic abuse and neglect.

- Referrals from schools had also increased and a strategy had been implemented to support community organisations and other services to manage risk in the community.
- The occurrence of repeat referrals remained within normal ranges, the spike in referrals between January and July 2019 had been caused by an increase in new referrals.
- Three peripatetic teams had been put in place to help manage the increase in referrals and assessments.
- Workshops had been held with team and service managers to calibrate the decision making on referrals and assessments across the service.
- Weekly Performance Improvement Boards had been implemented to monitor the progress of referrals throughout the service.
- Ofsted had been kept informed through monthly reports and the Department of Education were interested in the rich learning that will come from Southampton's Children's Services management of the high increase in referrals.
- The high number of contacts made to Children's Services since January 2019 had transferred into a high number of referrals and this had created pressure on the completion of assessments. Safe planning had been prioritised over rushed planning.
- The retention of social work staff had stabilised and a Smarter Ways of Working refresh was planned for January 2020 as well as a refresh of recruitment webpages.
- A vision for children and a 5 year plan for children in Southampton was in development.

21. **THE VIEWS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHAMPTON**

The Panel received the report of the Director, Legal and Governance which enabled the Panel to develop their understanding of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-18 years in Southampton and the improvements planned following the publication of the findings.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Aspiration, Children and Lifelong Learning; Sharon Hawkins, Interim Service Lead, Children's Social Care; and Phil Bullingham, Service Lead, Safeguarding, Improvement, Governance and Compliance; were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the officers, the Panel noted the following:

- Placement stability was improving.
- The cohort that were surveyed this time included more complex cases who cannot have contact with parents which would have influenced the increase in children saying they want more contact.
- Where there was no contact with siblings, this would have been agreed through assessment and the court process, where there were siblings and plans for adoption togetherness was assessed thoroughly.
- The question of contact with family had been added to each child protection or care plan review.

- A social worker had been allocated to pick up all new court proceedings and deliver life story work with the children.
- The Children in Care Council had carried out a review of the use of language by Children's Services and would be reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board on Language that Cares for Southampton children.
- The Mind of My Own App, that enabled looked after children to communicate with their social workers had been successfully implemented.

22. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The Panel noted that all the information requested at previous meetings had been received.

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