
SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2021

Present: Councillors Taggart (Chair), Mitchell (except items 39 to 41) (Vice-Chair), J Baillie (except items 38 to 41), Chaloner, Guthrie, Laurent and Mintoff
Appointed Member: Rob Sanders

35. **STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Paffey back from paternity leave and thanked Councillors Fielker and Barnes-Andrews for their support and contribution during his absence.

The Panel in turn thanked the Chair for the work that she has carried out during her term of office, this being the last meeting of the municipal year and Councillor Taggart will not be standing for election this year.

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February, 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

37. **CHILD FRIENDLY CITY**

The Panel considered the report of the Executive Director – Children and Learning which recommended that the Panel noted the progress and commented on the Child Friendly City vision for Southampton.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning and Robert Henderson, Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning), Southampton City Council, were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

- The Council was working closely with UNICEF to understand fully the needs of young people, ensuring they have access to advocacy services across the whole of the Council.
- There was a commitment to ensure those not in education or training (14-25 year olds) were included.
- The City of Culture Bid was a prime example of how all schools could engage with the project, including those children in care.
- Planning across all Council services was taking place for more facilities for families and young people targeting specifically mental health coming out of the pandemic, prevention and engagement with those at risk of exploitation, offending and gang activity.

- Budget and resources were being aligned with commitments by schools, the Police and other agencies, for all children in the City.

RESOLVED to receive a further progress report in 6 months' time.

38. **SERVICE RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The Panel considered the report of the Executive Director – Children and Learning which recommended that the Panel note and challenge the current service response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report on the experiences of Looked After Children and consider the opportunities identified for future scrutiny.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning and Robert Henderson, Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning), Southampton City Council, were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

- Unregulated placements were taken up by 16 or 17 year olds. Risk was assessed and placements were made for those who struggled with foster homes that were found challenging for any particular child. Not considered to be a problem in Southampton at this time.
- Foster placements had been difficult to achieve during the pandemic, however the courts had awarded 10 secured adoptions in February and it was hoped these placements would be returning to normality as the lockdown eased.
- The Council had a duty and obligation to have children's homes in the area. Some young people will choose a residential home over foster homes.
- The challenges of moving children during a period of online learning.
- Provision of extra support for Foster Carers to permanently adopt.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Panel to receive information of how many children had been moved during the period of online learning.
- (ii) Further scrutiny be programmed to enable a consideration of the sufficiency of placements, looked after children's mental health together with the Child Protection Chairs report to provide further context.
- (iii) Executive Director to provide details on waiting times for children with special education needs seeking a new school.

39. **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY WITH LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Panel considered the report of the Executive Director – Children and Learning which recommended that the Panel reviews and comments on the initiatives outlined in the report.

Councillor Paffey, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, Robert Henderson, Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning), Southampton City Council and Jenny Malloy, Voice of the Child Programme Lead, Southampton City Council, were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

In discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel noted the following:

- There was a need for improvement, despite children in Southampton having a strong identify with the Council being ‘their parent’ more work was needed.
- 23 children were engaged at present with capacity for more to join.
- Whilst online connection had been a necessity the return to face to face engagement was welcomed.
- Expectation that corporate parents and Council staff undertake the Total Respect training.

RESOLVED to undertake the Total Respect training and encourage other agencies to do the same.

40. **CHILDREN AND LEARNING - PERFORMANCE**

The Panel received the report of the Director, Legal and Governance which provided an overview of performance across Children and Families Services since December 2020.

Robert Henderson, Executive Director Wellbeing (Children and Learning), Southampton City Council; Phil Bullingham, Head of Service: Children’s Social Care, Southampton City Council; and, Julian Watkins, Head of Service: Safeguarding, Southampton City Council were present and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel.

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

- Decrease in demand by 11% received in MASH.
- Conscious of the potential for hidden harm during a period of school closures and online learning. There had been an increase in educational welfare activity which captured vulnerable children, helped by keeping children’s centres open providing food parcels and safe places for children to go.
- Early assessments are helping to reduce new referrals to MASH.
- Child Protection orders had reduced by 19% which was a continuing trend.
- There was a reduction in Foster Carers and this would be further scrutinised in the coming months. There was a known natural retirement age for some of the carers.
- Staff sickness had reduced slightly.
- There were still 70 agency staff employed.

RESOLVED that the Child Sexual Exploitation indicator was reviewed at the June 2021 meeting.

41. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The Panel noted that all the requested information had been provided and utilised to inform the discussion of the agenda items.