

Minutes of the Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17 June 2021

Present: Bob Spencer (Chairman)

Attendance

Gill Burnett (Vice-Chairman (Overview))	Gillian Pardesi Kath Perry, MBE
Janet England	Jill Waring
Richard Ford (Vice-Chairman (Scrutiny))	Mike Wilcox
Jason Jones	
Peter Kruskonjic	

Also in attendance: Jonathan Price and Mark Sutton

Apologies: Julia Jessel

PART ONE

13. Outcome Focused 1-1 Support, and Home Care and Community Support (including Domiciliary Care) for Staffordshire Children with Disabilities

Staffordshire County Council has a legal duty to ensure Children's Community Support (including Domiciliary Care) provision was in place to support children and young people with a range of disabilities who had been assessed by a suitably qualified Social Worker as being eligible for a personal care service within the family home and local community. A further legal obligation for the Council was to offer a range of commissioned community short break opportunities, ranging from community-based breaks of a few hours, to overnight short breaks for Children with Disabilities under the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children regulations 2011. Staffordshire had developed its "Aiming High for Children with Disabilities" programme to support these duties. The programme augmented the in-house and commissioned Overnight Short Breaks Unit, and the support of Short Breaks Foster Carers in providing the range of short breaks for children to give parents and carers a meaningful break from their caring responsibilities. The Council also commissioned a range of providers from across Staffordshire to deliver Children's Community Support and Short Breaks on their behalf, currently commissioned and contracted as two separate support programmes.

Members considered the proposal to bring together arrangements for both these service (short break and community support) under one commission. This suggestion had been made following an in-depth options appraisal, concluding that one commissioned service would provide more flexible, responsive support that drew on children and families' existing strengths, focusing on development, independence, preparedness for adulthood and was cost effective.

Cabinet were due to make a decision on this proposal at their meeting of 21 July.

Members raised concerns around ensuring enough provision and heard that considerable work had been undertaken to increase the marketplace, including working

with adult colleagues to maximise the range of care for children and young people. This was of particular interest when considering most service users would transition from children's to adults' services, therefore allowing continuity. Work to continue to grow the market will be ongoing and could include providing training to help support opening up this market. The Place Based approach also encouraged providers from the voluntary sector so every effort would be taken to engage local providers, although Members sought assurances that the voluntary sector was there to add value, not replace statutory service provision. Members also discussed how to ensure service users were receiving fulfilling care and were informed that the quality of provision was monitored and that the CQC inspected homes providing this service. If Members had any specific concerns or examples of care concerns they could raise this with officers directly.

Members also shared concerns around recruitment, particularly where wages were often poor which devalued such an important service. Option 2 proposed the development of more in-house provision and it was felt this would give opportunities for better involvement and ease of awareness of the service provided. This would also avoid any tendency to cherry pick the more financially lucrative work. The Cabinet Member agreed that the profile of social care needed to be raised and the vital importance of the work understood better. He also felt it was important to have an open mind when considering service delivery to ensure best outcomes.

Some concern was expressed around the different skill sets needed to provide for children as opposed to adults and whether seeking to recruit adult providers for the children's service would work well. There was a need to ensure training provided for any skill set gaps. Members also reiterated that whilst the voluntary sector provided excellent services, they were services that should complement those provided by Children's Services, not replace them.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the commissioning of the previously separate arrangements for Children With Disabilities' Community Support and Aiming High 1-1 Intensive support and short breaks be brought together into one contracting arrangement be supported;
- b) the open tender approach and implementation of a Dynamic Purchasing System detailed in the costed Options Appraisal to secure the required provision at optimal Value for Money commencing from April 2022 be supported;
- c) the regular breaks clauses in the proposed contracts (2+1+1 years) which allowed time to develop joint approaches to the commissioning and procurement of this provision with Adult Social Care colleagues and other Authorities including with the West Midlands Authorities to attempt to overcome the current challenges for providers with respect to service volumes be noted;
- d) proposals to use the first two years of the contract to further investigate the merits and risks associated with In-house delivery of this support, and the efficacy of this model within the proposed new Children's System be supported, particularly as the Option Appraisal demonstrated a number of potential strengths to this approach; and
- e) that a future report be brought to the O&S Committee outlining developments with this proposal and its successes/challenges.

Chairman