

Minutes of the Safeguarding and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 25 July 2024

Present: Bob Spencer (Chair)

Attendance	
Gill Burnett-Faulkner (Vice-Chair (Overview))	Gillian Pardesi Paul Snape (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))
Johnny McMahon Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf	

Also in attendance: Victoria Wilson

Apologies: Janet Eagland, Ann Edgeller, Julia Jessel and Kath Perry, MBE

Part One

6. Declarations of Interest

There were none at this meeting.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the Safeguarding & Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 June 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

8. Resettlement Team

(Natasha Moody, Assistant Director for Wellbeing & Partnership, in attendance for this item)

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture presented her report detailing the work of the Resettlement Team, who provide support to refugees settled in Staffordshire. Staffordshire County Council (SCC) had a proud history of supporting refugees and, since 2014, had worked with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Home Office, in facilitating the Homes to Ukraine and Afghan resettlement schemes and welcoming arrivals from Hong Kong, Pakistan and Syria. Integration was a key theme of the report, with a “wrap-around service” in place to aid refugees in the community. Whilst there had been some initial criticism around adequacy of provision, the success of the programme had subsequently eclipsed this. The Committee heard that the Resettlement Team was designed for small numbers of arrivals initially, with Spring Housing and Refugee Action commissioned to address needs surrounding accommodation, work and integration.

Funding for resettlement operated on a tariff basis, with £10,000 allocated per family. In turn, this funding had helped the Resettlement Team to maintain operations. The lack of permanent funding had created challenges for the Team, especially relating to emergency capacity and resilience, which was the primary reason for seeking permanent appointments. Members heard detail of personalised and bespoke budgets, with examples of how they have been used including funding driving lessons and university costs. In-house support for families was also discussed. Members were informed that the Home Office did not have a stand alone single strategy for resettlement, instead operating individual schemes for each refugee group.

The Committee noted the differences in eligibility criteria and strategic implementation between the Afghan Relocations & Assistance Policy (ARAP), Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and the Homes for Ukraine schemes respectively, despite shared common objectives/outcomes. They noted the unique nature of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, especially in respect of British citizens volunteering to host individuals and the live nature of arrivals following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Members queried the long-term implications of temporary visa arrangements for refugees (e.g. Homes for Ukraine), in supporting those who want to remain in the UK as opposed to those who wanted to return to the Ukraine. They were reminded that the remit for immigration policy lay with the Home Office. Whilst it was possible that refugees may be facilitated in returning home in the future, SCC did not anticipate a significant role for the Resettlement Team in this process.

The Committee queried whether there were contingency plans in place for addressing shortfalls in funding, given how funding fluctuated in line with the number of refugee arrivals. Demand currently remained static and the Resettlement Team had budgeted for the next four years. Members also queried the suitability of the term "guest" when describing refugees and whether it reflected the fact that visas issued for the Homes for Ukraine scheme were temporary. Members noted that the fall in the number of resettlement practitioners reflected the easing of initial demand following the invasion. As a result, the current number of resettlement practitioners remained adequate.

The cultural capital brought by refugees was highlighted with refugees assisted to pursue interests through bespoke funding plans. Members queried the scalability of the Team, should this be necessary. Foundations had been laid to prepare for significant increases in demand, so operations could be scaled accordingly. Members were also aware that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Swynnerton site had originally been intended

to be temporary. However it had been difficult to house larger families in more suitable accommodation and therefore there remained a need for this facility.

Members wished to reassure themselves over the extent to which the identity of refugees was respected. Proactive attempts were made to foster mutual understanding and promote community integration, including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision. Work around interfaith relations was also undertaken. Members were particularly pleased to hear of the work around the co-production promise, helping to understand an individual's perspective, helping to recognise the challenges an individual could face and understanding that these were unique to each individual. They also heard of a case study from the first Afghan family that was settled in Staffordshire, which had been used as part of an awareness raising and training programme, learning from each other, promoting efforts to understand cultural identity whilst helping them to understand the community they have moved into, enabling a truer integration into the community and informing future work.

Whilst funding for the Team was in place for the next four years, Members welcomed the suggestion that their Committee consider the Resettlement Team's funding after 12 to 18 months, in comparison to the work load moving forward to help ensure longterm planning and provision was in place. The Committee also welcomed the work undertaken to ensure learning from resettlement programmes, from refugee experiences and from partnership working informing training and development moving forward.

Resolved: That:

- a) the progress to date in relation to the government schemes be welcomed;
- b) the Team be congratulated on the changing reactive nature of the work which is challenging to plan for the longer term;
- c) the proposed approach for the Resettlement Team be endorsed; and
- d) consideration of the Resettlement Team's funding in comparison to work load be included on the Committee's work programme in 12 to 18 months.

9. Domestic Abuse Services – Six months on

(Catherine Mann, Assistant Director for Culture, Rural & Safer Communities, Trish Caldwell, County Commissioner for Regulatory

Services and Community Safety and Superintendent Nicky Furlong, Staffordshire Police, in attendance for this item.)

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture presented her report, which provided an update on the commissioned Domestic Abuse (DA) Services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. A breakdown of the contract value for the Victims and Perpetrator provision was provided; separate contracts had also been awarded to Glow, the Pathway Project and Staffordshire Women's Aid to support victims living in safe accommodation.

Superintendent Nicky Furlong was in attendance to provide the Police response wider context and how this linked to the commissioned service. Domestic Abuse remained one of Staffordshire Police's priorities, alongside Children and Serious and Organised Crime. She informed Members that DA was scrutinised daily across all levels from the operational frontline to the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) level. There had been a small reduction in the number of domestic abuse crimes and incidents in the last 12 months, although the number remained relatively stable. Domestic abuse crime specifically had fallen by 17%, which the Superintendent attributed to changes in principle to the method of crime recording. Members also welcomed details of Police initiatives that would be introduced over the next 12 months, which included an enhanced video response enabling victims to have an alternative response mechanism with a specialist team, taking statements and completing risk assessments in a timely manner. This will be piloted in Stoke on Trent. They also heard of the Multi-agency Tasking & Co-ordinating (MATAC) perpetrator focused repeat offenders initiative which had been piloted in Newcastle last year, with partners now keen to roll this out across the County, looking to develop a partnership approach to expanding this initiative.

The report detailed progress made during the previous five-year contract period to support adult and child victims, as well as perpetrators of Domestic Abuse. It outlined the service achievements, the increased demand for domestic abuse services, and the improvements made in supporting individuals affected by domestic abuse. It also discussed the recommissioning of the service, the financial contributions, and the contracts awarded to Victim Support under the brand name of New Era. The report highlighted the introduction of a Children's Neutral Front Door as part of the Victim Service, which assessed the support needs of children and referred them to the appropriate service. Additionally, it

addressed the impacts of increased demand and the actions taken to mitigate waiting times, including the triage process and maintaining contact with individuals waiting for support. Members noted that the report linked to the County Council's strategic priority of encouraging good health and wellbeing, resilience, and independence.

Recent reports of rates of assaults on women nationally suggested it was reaching epidemic levels, with a 35% increase over the past 5 years. This reference was to broader violence against women and girls, not just domestic abuse. Some of this increase was connected to an increase in reporting, which was welcomed, although it would be hoped that alongside this would come a corresponding increase in appropriate outcomes. It was anticipated that the enhanced video response initiative would help with this. Ensuring positive outcomes could, however, be challenging, especially in keeping victims on board during protracted legal proceedings. Members heard that, where the Enhanced Video Response system had been employed, there had been an increase in victims satisfaction with their experience of the process.

Engaging key stakeholders including New Era and third sector domestic abuse support agencies in Staffordshire was key to informing positive outcomes from domestic abuse reports. Members had some concern that numbers accessing perpetrator services remained relatively low but were assured that this was actively being addressed.

Members raised concerns around the limitations on funding for a number of organisations providing refuge from victims of domestic abuse, these being Glow, Staffordshire Women's Aid and the Pathway Project. SCC had a contract for safe accommodation funding from DLUHC and this had enabled a contract to be put in place with these organisations for more than a year. This has given a little more security and sustainability to these organisations. It was hoped that the DLUHC funding would remain at this level to enable these contracts to continue.

The role of misogyny in current rates of child and adolescent recidivism was recognised and Members were informed that this featured as an item on the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. It was recognised that early intervention was key to reducing child and adolescent recidivism and a single referral point was in place to ensure that children were directed to

the appropriate service (i.e. Victim Service, Behaviour Change Service).

Members were aware of the robustness of safeguarding procedures in schools, particularly in recognising behaviour patterns and guaranteeing appropriate safeguarding arrangements. Domestic abuse, as a learnt behaviour amongst children, was now reflected by their categorisation as victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Additional measures were in place to address households where children were subject to domestic abuse including Operation Encompass, which notified schools of domestic abuse following the completion of a risk assessment.

The approach to prosecutions was raised, with victimless prosecutions actively sought when appropriate.

Resolved: That:

- a) Officers be thanked for their detailed report;
- b) Superintendent Nicky Furlong be thanked for attending on behalf of Staffordshire Police and supporting scrutiny;
- c) the progress made over the five year period of the previous contract to support both adult and children victims and perpetrators of Domestic Abuse be welcomed.

10. Work Programme

The Committee had held an informal work programme planning session on 8th July. From that meeting the following approaches to proposed work and/or changes to the work programme had been suggested:

- a) Briefing notes will be requested on: the Family Help Pilot Project in Stafford & Lichfield; Academies and the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner; and educational absenteeism.
- b) Exclusions – looking at county wide exclusion numbers to understand if this is a common problem or area specific, capturing the reasons for this.
- c) Social integration – concerns that difficulties for young people around social integration can be caused and/or exacerbation by exclusions, special school home to school transport, EHE etc. Members would like to identify if these problems exist and how any issues identified can be addressed
- d) Care Management System – Members suggested a possible joint working group with Members from Health O&S to ensure the new software is seamless and fit for purpose, particularly around transition between adults and children's services

e) SEND – some Members had received representation from family members around whether their child had been allocated the right special school to meet their needs. Initially Members would like detail of the process for allocating special school places to understand better how decisions are made.

f) EHE – Members felt they should consider revisiting the need to lobby central government around changes to law for a requirement for parents to register their school aged child with the LA even if they are Electively Home Educated

g) The ILACS Improvement Plan – Members want to ensure that they have regular detail on developments with the Plan and suggested progress be reported to their meetings on 28 Nov and 20 Feb. They have also requested a table showing the governance of, and accountability for, delivering the Plan.

Resolved: That the proposed changes to their work programme be agreed.

Chair