

**At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY 19<sup>th</sup> JULY, 2016 at 5.30 p.m.**

**Present:-**

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Beck, Bell, Francis, Jackson, O'Neil, Stewart, M. Turton, Tye and G. Walker.

**Also in attendance:-**

Councillor N. Wright, Chairman Scrutiny Committee

Ms. Karen Brown, Scrutiny and Member Services Coordinator  
Mr Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy Officer for Community Safety  
Mr. Gary Hetherington, Strategic Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator  
Mr Alex Hopkins, Director of Children's Services  
Ms. Marie Johnstone, Complaints Manager – Adult Services  
Ms. Joanne Stewart, Principal Governance Services Officer  
Mr Gavin Taylor, Deputy Independent Reviewing Manager

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hunt and Scullion and also on behalf of Ms A. Blakey

**Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2016**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the of the last ordinary meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2016 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**Proposed Arrangement for Meetings with Social Work Staff**

The Director of Children's Services and Head of Area Arrangements, Scrutiny and Members Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which set out for Members the proposals for a series of meetings with social work staff in order to obtain their views and feedback on their work.

(for copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. Alex Hopkins, Director of Children's Services presented the report advising that it was proposed that a series of visits be arranged during the year which would reflect a child's journey through social care and it was envisaged that the visits would comprise of a brief overview to outline core business followed by an open opportunity to ask questions and discuss work related issues with a broad range of staff members which could include staff from the following teams:-

- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH);
- Locality Team;
- Permanence Team; and
- Next Steps Team.

When asked if families accessing the services would be included in the discussions, Mr. Hopkins advised that, with the agreement of those families, he was certain it could be organised that they be invited along to one of the meetings when arranged.

The Chairman welcomed the report, stating that it was something the Committee had been keen to undertake for some time, and it:-

2. RESOLVED that the proposed arrangements for the meetings with social work staff be received and noted.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation – Progress Report**

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided progress that is being made in relation to the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2015-2017.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Gary Hetherington, Strategic CSE Coordinator and Mr. Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy Officer for Community Safety to the Committee.

Mr. Hetherington explained that child sexual exploitation was a priority for Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) which in 2015 produced a child sexual exploitation strategy. He gave a presentation on the progress being made on the Strategy with Mr. Douglass being in attendance to discuss the role and impact of the Safer Sunderland Partnership in tackling child sexual exploitation. Members were provided with a copy of the strategy for information and a copy of the delivery plan 2015-16.

Councillor Tye commented that it was obvious from the Ofsted report on the SSCB that there were a lot of actions to be put in place and issues addressed and yet from the presentation the Committee were being painted more of a rosy picture of developments. He stated that from his experience, certainly in the West Sunderland area, Councillors were being informed that the biggest issue partners were struggling with were the resources available to them and the compiling and sharing of data between services. He asked how much in a real life situation was being done as resources within the Council and Northumbria Police continued to be cut with still a massive amount of work to do.

Mr. Hetherington commented that at present they were only six months into a three year journey and that awareness of the problem of child sexual exploitation had double but that there were still areas of concern and the unknowns could provide a completely different picture to the Committee they next time they report back. Child Sexual Exploitation was very much a hidden crime as victims were not always those to report it and it was much more that professionals had to go out searching for it.

He understood Councillor Tye's concerns and commented that the only way we would succeed in tackling child sexual exploitation were if people were prepared to talk about the issues, listen and do something to tackle it. He advised that in Sunderland the Boyfriend model was most prominent whereby a young person thinks that they're in a loving relationship with an older adult and that they're pressurised into doing something that they don't want to with them or maybe others.

Mr. Douglass highlighted that tackling CSE was a corporate issue and it was about how services within the Council and partners could work together to respond during times with difficult budgets. For example, he explained that CCTV and security around the city play a massive role at key hotspots areas in surveillance and highlighting any behaviours of concern and that trading standards and licensing played a part through their ongoing investigations, bringing to light any concerns they may have in relation to underage sales, etc. He explained that it was about having a tier of information work that was already being undertaken being alert to any concerns they may uncover as part of their regular checks and ensuring that that information is referred to the relevant bodies.

In response to a further comment from Councillor Smith regarding not being aware of the issues sooner and having been informed that there were little to no areas of concern, Mr. Hetherington advised that it was difficult as at any one time they could only advise of the numbers of children they were aware of and working with. They were relying more and more upon practitioners to share information and concerns that they may have and that as they were referred.

Councillor Wright asked if in future a glossary of terms could be included with reports, as had been asked for in the past, as it could be difficult to remember what all of the acronyms used stood for.

In relation to a query from Councillor Wright regarding the lessons that needed to be learned from the Ofsted report into SSCB and what was most helpful, Mr. Hetherington commented that there had already been an increase in the commitment to tackling CSE in Sunderland. He explained that the first implication of the report had been making the first steps toward a fully integrated multi agency team (Sanctuary). Most of all it had been identified that services needed to clearly identify any young persons at risk and for discussions to be open and frank so that they understood the risks.

Councillor Francis commented that from reading the report he had a lot of questions around who does what within the process, who sees the reports, chases up issues, works with staff, and was informed by Mr. Hetherington that CSE had to be multi agency so had to be answered and addressed by all those involved. He explained that there was no bar on what could be referred and that there was a coordinated approach dealing with cases, with the operational group meeting to review all cases, including any new referrals. Part of the process was for a number of managers from

partner agencies to come together so that everything required for the case could be drawn out at a strategic level. Councillor Francis still raised concerns that with so many possible victims it could be possible for individual cases to fall through the gaps and be missed.

In relation to questions from Councillors Francis and O'Neill around support networks for harder to reach groups such as minority groups or middle class families who may not be accessing services, Mr. Hetherington advised that there were many factors that could give rise to concerns being raised for young people. They had had reports of young people breaking out of the family home to engage in CSE activity, or children who had been witness to domestic abuse on a daily basis but came across outside of the family home as the perfect family and these were the families where the services may never know about them unless they are told of them. In the past there had been stigma attached to seeking help for CSE related issues and families may look to struggle on with the problems because of them rather than seeking out the professional help that was on offer.

Mr. Hetherington advised that there were a number of agencies such as NSPCC, Better Futures and the Pants campaign that went into schools and worked with young people around identifying risks and how to access help and raise awareness.

In relation to the delivery plan, Councillor Stewart asked if it would be continuous document that was always ongoing so that those actions that were not green would be carried forward into 2016/17 and was informed that there were a lot actions within the delivery plan that were operational and that some elements were very ambitious at the time of production and would need to be carried on. Councillor Stewart went on to ask if the Committee would have sight of the Plan for 2016/17 and was advised that they were undertaking a benchmarking process at the moment with a survey out for completion and that results would be submitted to the November meeting of the Safeguarding Children's Board in the first instance.

With regards to action 3a on the delivery plan to engage directly with communities, Mr. Hetherington responded to Councillor Stewart by informing him that they had developed a joint engagement model with Northumbria Police with the intention to cascade this through communities but that this had proved difficult to do and therefore it was hoped that following further discussions they would be able to report better progress in this area at a future meeting of the Committee.

There being no further comments or questions for the Officer, the Chairman thanked them for their attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that report on the progress being made be received and noted.

### **Complaints and Feedback – Children's Services Issues**

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information regarding complaints and feedback received by the Council in relation to children's services issues.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Ms. Marie Johnstone, Complaint Manager who presented the report advising that the Council produced an Annual Complaints and Feedback report which was considered by the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on 30 June, 2016 and it had been agreed that an extract of this report focussing on complaints relating to children's services be submitted to this Committee for consideration.

Ms. Johnstone advised that for the year 2015-16 there were 176 stage one complaint which was a drop of 22% from the previous year, of these 87% were resolved at stage one. There had been 23 requests for stage two complaint which was the same as the previous year and there had been 12 complaints progressing to a stage three review panel, an unprecedented increase on the previous year of 1110%. There had been no Ombudsman complaints received to date 23 compliments received.

Councillor Stewart referred to only 59 of the 176 stage one complaints being responded to within the statutory timescale of 10 working days and felt that this should be 100% and asked what was in place to improve this. Ms. Johnstone advised that the 10 days could be extended to 21 days so Officers would initially look to define the elements of the complaint and work with the provider of the information to provide a response to the complainant as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this could not always be carried out in time but Officers did try to keep customers fully informed at all times. Councillor Stewart asked if, in future, the report could breakdown further how many of the complaints had received a response within the 21 days also.

Mr. Hopkins commented that the number of complaints made by children or young people was very low and felt that this may be because they either didn't know how to lodge their complaint or if they had it was not being recognised as being made by a young person. He advised the Committee he would be sure that conversations were held with young people to ensure they were able to do this and were aware of the process to carry out should they wish to ever make a complaint.

In response to a query from Councillor Jackson regarding the policy when it becomes clear that a member of staff is responsible for having made a mistake, the Committee were informed that the Council as a whole would collectively take the blame and not just pinpoint one person who may have made a mistake. Internal processes would ensure that the reason for the error having been made was investigated fully and procedures put in place to ensure that the reasons behind it were addressed to lower the risks of it reoccurring.

With regards to a query from Councillor Stewart regarding learning from past mistakes and following up on them, Ms. Johnstone advised that they were logged within the complaints team and then followed up with the Heads of Service. They were then continually updated and fed into the improvement plan so that they could go back and do a review of actions put in place.

There being no further comments or questions for the Officer, the Chairman thanked them for their attendance and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that report be received and noted.

## **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2016.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the Notices of Key Decisions be received and noted.

## **Annual Work Programme 2015/16**

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the work programme for the Committee's work being undertaken for the 2016/17 council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

(Signed) P. SMITH,  
Chairman.