

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 24 October 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Higgins, Nugent, Uddin and Wilson.

OFFICERS: S Butcher, J Dixon and G Watson.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mawston and J Walker.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES – 27 SEPTEMBER 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 27 September 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

SOUTH TEES SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP – ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

G Watson, Partnership Manager – South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership, was in attendance at the meeting, accompanied by S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services, to provide the Panel with an overview of the local partnership arrangements for safeguarding children, the work undertaken by the Partnership and to highlight areas of significance within the 2021/22 Annual Report.

The Panel was informed that the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (STSCP) was established in 2019 in response to changes to the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements introduced in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It succeeded the Middlesbrough Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Redcar & Cleveland Safeguarding Children Board (LSCBs). The STSCP was a formal partnership between the two South Tees Local Authorities of Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland, Cleveland Police and North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. The Partners had a shared ambition to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children in their area, many of whom faced multiple disadvantage.

Middlesbrough Council was the host for the STSCP, as outlined in the legal agreement establishing the Partnership. The STSCP Executive was the key decision-making body and consisted of the Executive Leads of the four statutory partners. During the period covered by the annual report (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022), the arrangements included:-

- Meetings with Key Partners Chief Officers, chaired by the Chief Executive of Middlesbrough Council.
- Meetings at Executive level to set the strategic direction for the Partnership.
- Partnership meetings attended by the executive leads of the four statutory partners and the broader partnership, chaired by an Independent Chair.
- Sub groups and task and finish groups.

The Panel was advised that representation on the STSCP's Executive had been extended to include the Directors of Education from Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland and work was ongoing to extend this further to include the Director of Public Health for South Tees.

The Working Together (to Safeguard Children) 2018 guidance described the features of effective multi-agency safeguarding partnerships. Local arrangements must support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system placing the child at the heart of the process and aimed to ensure:-

- Children were safeguarded and their welfare promoted.
- Partner organisations and agencies collaborated, shared and co-owned the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and held one another to account effectively.
- Early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats.
- Learning was promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families could become more reflective and implement changes to practice, informing the local approach to prevention.
- Information was shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

The Panel was informed that the STSCP had four key priorities:-

- VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked) - The aim was for children and young people to be free from the risk and harm of exploitation, going missing or being trafficked.
- Neglect - The aim was to reduce neglect, reduce the impact of neglect and ensure help and support was provided at the earliest opportunity.
- Empowering Young People - The aim was to create a clear focus on the needs and experience of young people.
- Working Together - The aim was to achieve excellent partnership working across all areas.

This STSCP Annual Report highlighted key areas requiring focus during the year, including:-

- Criminal Exploitation and Violence in Young People – The number of Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked (VEMT) cases across South Tees had increased. A number of multi-agency development sessions had been held, supported by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Tees VEMT Strategic Group sponsored a workshop to review processes and understanding of VEMT issues across the Tees region that had led to a review of the Tees VEMT Strategy and action plan.
- Neglect - The understanding of neglect and importance of prevention and early help had been increased, with training available to professionals and staff working across South Tees. The Tees Safeguarding Procedures website was recognised by the inspectorate as a reliable and useful source of information and was well accessed by a diverse variety of people. The Tees Procedures Group had reviewed and updated the 'Neglect' section on the website as a result of the recent work undertaken.
- Serious Case Reviews – The number of serious incidents had peaked during lockdown, leading to a backlog of serious case reviews. Good progress had been made in reducing the backlog with no outstanding reviews. There were currently just two safeguarding practice reviews ongoing.
- In relation to published serious case reviews, it was identified that “the risk of drug using parents actively giving drugs to their children” should be covered in all relevant multi-agency training. Public Health had co-ordinated and delivered multi-agency training to include the signs and symptoms in children of drug ingestion, and clarity about what professionals should do if they suspected this was happening.
- It was also highlighted that criminal exploitation and neglect were major factors in the serious incident cases. The STSCP was working with the Cleveland Police Violence Reduction Unit in relation to addressing criminal exploitation.

In terms of moving forward, embedding the voice of the child in practice was key. The Voice of the Child was now part of all STSCP multi-agency audits and was reported back directly to partner agencies. Work had been taking place in schools to gather young people's opinions on a range of issues including personal safety and knife crime.

The STSCP training programme reflected the safeguarding priorities, including training around child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, neglect including adolescent neglect, trauma-based practice and criminal exploitation. Training had been provided on-line during the pandemic, however, it was planned to reintroduce face to face training as this also provided networking opportunities for those attending. On-line, or E-Learning, was accessible to professionals working in both adults and children's services as well as the voluntary and community sector. Learning from audits and reviews was impacting on planning and service delivery by changing procedure and practice.

The former Independent Chair of the STSCP's Executive had now been appointed as a Scrutineer and was in the process of undertaking a piece of focused work with a report anticipated to be finalised by the end of November 2022. The Scrutineer would examine the Serious Case Reviews that had been undertaken and identify learning from those reviews, in addition to the Section 11 audit on safeguarding and also the progress being made by all key partners. Once finalised the report could be submitted to the Panel for information.

The Executive Director of Children's Services added that Middlesbrough worked well with Redcar and Cleveland on many fronts and that the STSCP, which was once an under-developed partnership, had really grown. The previously large backlog of serious case reviews was now up to date. The Director wished to thank the Partnership Manager and his colleague, A Fishwick, for their hard work and recognised the challenges of being such a small business unit of just two staff. There were currently two vacancies within the unit, however, there had been difficulties in recruiting to the posts. It was highlighted that the Independent Chair reported to Middlesbrough's Improvement Board on a regular basis and felt confident that the STSCP was now in a much stronger position to take over some of the work of the Improvement Board as moved away.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised by the Panel:-

- A Member of the Panel expressed concern over the increase in criminal exploitation issues and queried whether this was increasing nationally as well as locally. The Panel was advised that unfortunately it was particularly prevalent in Middlesbrough in terms of criminal gang activity, particularly involving young people. It was more so an issue in Middlesbrough than in Redcar and Cleveland and other local authority areas and it was something Middlesbrough was having to deal with more and more. In addition, there was a significant level of violence, particularly amongst young people, and the use of weapons was very stark.
- Reference was made to recruitment and the Panel was informed that recruitment to posts within the STSCP business unit had proved difficult. One admin post that had been advertised across the North East region had received just one application. Attempts to fill the positions would continue and consideration would be given as to how this could be done differently to attract applicants.
- In terms of recruitment of Social Workers within Children's Services, it was highlighted that the Improvement Adviser was paying particular attention to recruitment and retention and holding Children's Services to account to ensure that everything possible was being done to attract and retain staff. Even a 15% market supplement on top of a post's salary could not guarantee it would be successful. Recruitment and retention was also being closely scrutinised by the Improvement Board and that would continue once the Board moved away. Recruitment was challenging for other local authorities and also for other professions within the local authority. It was a particular challenge within the north east and some London boroughs.
- In response to a query regarding take up of training provided by the STSCP, the Panel heard that training was moving towards face to face provision once again, although e-learning would still be available. It was noted that training take up had dipped during the pandemic and whilst it had increased it still remained at half the level it was in 2012. The Panel was advised that additional courses were being developed and more 'event style' training was planned to increase take up.
- In terms of who the training was aimed at, the Panel was informed that the courses were aimed

at professionals across all social care sectors, Police, education and schools.

- It was queried whether the STSCP knew whether the training it provided was being put into practice. The Practice Manager stated that they were looking into introducing a measure that would examine the impact of the training. Online training provided a good opportunity to collect this information. There were currently 26 courses available for access on the Tees-wide E-learning website. The Partnership Manager stated that they were also looking into the possibility of recording events to use as an online training tool.
- A Panel Member expressed concern in relation to the issues of exploitation and trafficking and provided examples within her own ward of young people becoming involved in gangs, and queried whether the STSCP had good engagement with the Police. The Partnership Manager advised that the STSCP was involved in Police exploitation groups and that the Police chaired some of the STSCP's sub groups.
- In response to a query regarding the prosecution of trafficking perpetrators, it was explained that it was very challenging for the Police as young people were reluctant to provide names of perpetrators or those also involved in gangs or to give evidence, as they were often afraid of retribution. Several groups involving Police had focussed on this work and were very much part of the safeguarding partnership. This included the Exploitation Group and the Risk Management Group. The Police were working hard to try to disrupt the criminal gangs by targeting gang leaders who were carrying out the exploitation and recognised that many of the young people involved were victims themselves.
- It was queried how much work was being done in relation to listening to the Voice of the Child. The Partnership Manager provided an example of a recent event held at the Riverside Stadium in relation to knife crime, involving young people from 19 schools in Middlesbrough and 15 schools in Redcar in Cleveland taking part in a drama presentation. During the question and answer session that formed part of the event, young people's views had been gathered and it came through strongly that they felt once young people engaged in crime, they did not engage with professionals.
- It was queried whether the STSCP had noted a significant impact on communities due to Covid and the cost of living crisis. The Partnership Manager advised that during the pandemic there had been a significant number of serious cases reviews, with ten ongoing at one point. It was considered that Covid had impacted on those cases in some way, for example, children were not being seen as regularly as they had been and/or families were not able to access the services they needed.
- The Panel noted that a number of the serious case reviews related to children ingesting drugs and it was asked whether this was something that had been or would be covered as part of the training courses available. The Partnership Manager confirmed that issues identified in the learning from the serious case reviews were fed into training development. There appeared to be a problem in Middlesbrough with children ingesting methadone, this had resulted in one child death and one near death. It was highlighted that the serious case reviews had to be reported to a national panel which held the STSCP to account as well as providing national learning.
- In relation to a question regarding timescales for reporting to the Safeguarding Board, it was stated that learning reviews were required to be submitted to the National Panel and were published on the NSPCC website. Unless there was a significant reason why not, they must be published, but were anonymised. When a serious incident was referred in, for example, a baby being left at home alone, a Rapid Review meeting was held internally to look at the severity of the case. If it was deemed to be serious it would be presented to the Panel.
- The STSCP Executive met every other month and was looking to broaden its membership to relevant partners such as the voluntary sector.

- It was queried whether the STSCP held dialogue with the Stockton and Hartlepool safeguarding boards. It was confirmed that the STSCP worked closely with them and shared learning with them and this was seen as a positive way forward to share work across the Tees area in a similar way that the Adult Safeguarding Board worked across the Tees area.
- In response to a question as to whether sufficient support was received from central government, the Panel was advised that a North East round table discussion and a National round table discussion was taking place in relation to support development. Resources had an impact on everything so it was crucial to ensure as much partnership working as possible across everything.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and information provided arising from the very informative Annual Report of the STSCP.

AGREED that the STSCP Annual Report for 2021/22 be noted.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Monday, 14 November 2022 at 10.30am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Overview and Scrutiny Board Updates

The Chair referred to an issue raised recently in another Scrutiny Panel regarding the Overview and Scrutiny Board updates provided to individual Scrutiny Panels and confirmed that consideration was being given as to how this could be improved in terms of providing Members with more detailed information arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings.

Audio Equipment

In addition, a Member of the Panel wished to formally minute a request for a suitable audio system to be introduced in all Committee Rooms to ensure that all guests were able to hear and participate fully in meetings.