Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 16th March, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Pantelic (Chair), Abe (Vice-Chair), Bal, Brooker, Dhillon, Matloob, Morris and Rana

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Mann

Education Voting Co-opted Members
James Welsh – Catholic Diocese of Northampton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Cheema

PART 1

39. Declaration of Interest

No declarations were given in relation to the agenda items.

40. Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th January 2016

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2016 be approved as an accurate record.

41. Member Questions

No questions from Members were received prior to the meeting.

42. Ofsted - Inspection Of Services For Children In Need Of Help And Protection, Children Looked After And Care Leavers

In introduction, the Chair requested that a note should be made of the Panel's disappointment with progress. In particular, the absence of some fundamental aspects of the work expected of Children's Services was a concern. Equally, the Panel wished to focus on the future improvement of services for local residents; however, it would also need to clarify some aspects of previous failings in order to learn and increase service levels. Underpinning all of this was a need to ensure that Slough Borough Council (SBC) put children first in provision.

The Ofsted inspection was held in late 2015 and published on 17th February 2016. Councillors were then given a presentation on the report immediately following publication. The inspection was the third consecutive 'inadequate' rating, and given the fact that the inspection was in the weeks following the Trust's commencement it mostly covered SBC's work. Some improvements were noted in the report, but these were insufficiently rapid or wide-ranging to make significant changes; Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) was taking action on this.

In such situations, the Department for Education (DfE) would usually install an improvement board. However, SCST's role meant that different governance arrangements were required. A Strategic Monitoring Board (SMB) would meet monthly whilst the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) would attend a meeting with SBC, SCST and the Commissioner on a quarterly basis (such meetings would be held after every SMB, but not always with LSCB in attendance). These meetings would be chaired by the Commissioner and request updates on progress being made. SCST also had its own Board to act as a governance mechanism, with SCST's Chief Executive accountable to it.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- SCST was not required to present its development plan to SBC scrutiny; this would be the role of SMB. A joint delivery plan was being agreed and would be presented to Ofsted in May 2016. This plan contained four strands and would be shared with the Panel, serving as a future reference point for holding service providers to account. SCST would also publish reports on a monthly basis on its progress; this would be a public document.
- Members wished to be as involved as possible. Despite the alteration in provision arrangements, SBC retained its role as corporate parents and had also made a financial investment in SCST which required justification. In addition, the Ofsted report did note that scrutiny needed to focus on the detail of performance to drive up standards (finding 107).
- Councillors would also receive a minimum of 4 updates from SCST at a variety of meetings as part of the contractual arrangements. However, SCST signalled a willingness to attend extra meetings if appropriate to ensure effective governance.
- In addition, SBC had oversight of the matter via the Director of Children's Services; this post holder could report to scrutiny more frequently. The Commissioner also reported to Government Ministers on a quarterly basis, ensuring that the system did have appropriate reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability.
- SCST had initiated some significant work since acquiring its responsibilities. The virtual school now had a designated head teacher, whilst the pupil premium (which had been underspent) was now being given to heads of primary and secondary heads. Schools were also contacted on the matter, with frequent meetings to ensure appropriate use of the premium for the individual recipients. To support this, personal education plans and child-specific aspirational targets were also being compiled. 16 GCSE candidates were in receipt of the premium, and a target on attainment had been set and would be tracked.
- SBC remained statutorily accountable for Children's Services, and retained direct responsibility for youth services, corporate parenting and the impact of other services on children. SCST was delivering all other aspects of Children's Services.
- In order to bolster performance as a corporate parent, SBC would alter its approach. Previously, an annual forward plan had been considered

in its totality on a periodic basis. In future, it would focus on different specific areas periodically to conduct deeper, narrower analysis and improve its strategic overview.

- In 2014, DfE requested that SBC discontinue its improvement board and modify its approach. A replacement body was configured in September 2014 and 2 peer reviews were undertaken. The feedback from these was one of slow, steady improvement but it was acknowledged that this had been overly optimistic. SBC officers and Members shared many of the same concerns and limitations on this matter.
- Given concerns over the deployment of resources, a review into the head of virtual schools was instigated in 2014. However, the reporting was too diffuse (e.g. 4 plans on the matter) which lead to the creation of data which was difficult to interrogate effectively.
- SBC officers had been challenged, but the long terms absence of the relevant Director from late 2014 onwards hampered effectiveness. However, the appointment of the current Interim Director of Children's Services had assisted, although the negotiations with DfE regarding the start of SCST had taken a significant amount of effort and focus.
- The delivery plan was being compiled in light of Ofsted's findings and would focus on essential matters. Key performance indicators would reflect this and provide greater clarity on the level of improvement. The indicators were agreed by SBC and SCST and were based on DfE guidelines (e.g. number of re-referrals, assessments conducted within 45 days). In addition, these indicators would be set at levels which reflected a desire to move towards 'good' or 'outstanding' ratings rather than accept the current situation. However, there would also need to be qualitative analysis to support these quantitative measurements.
- Resource allocation would also be recalibrated to focus on the central concerns of Children's Services (e.g. support for the Corporate Parenting Panel on implementing the Parenting Strategy). As part of the wider alteration in SBC's focus on children, services such as libraries would be required to include 'the voice of the child' in their provision as part of a new project management system. The Interim Director of Children's Services had also used the SBC Senior Leadership Team to reinforce this message and ensure there was understanding and ownership of these issues.
- SCST also could raise concerns with scrutiny as to where performance may need improvement, although the Panel retained jurisdiction over its work programme.
- Auditing had not been comprehensive; the Interim Director of Children's Services acted on this. The social enterprise company 'Achieving for Children' were approached to improve the system, whilst SCST's Chief Executive also highlighted areas for improvement. However, a complete overhaul was not undertaken given the desire to allow SCST to impose its own system once in position. SCST then conducted a comprehensive audit upon going live, involving 5 independent auditors; its findings were confirmed in the Ofsted report.
- Cabinet also raised concerns over several matters (e.g. virtual heads) and had been frustrated with the level of progress. However, it was

acknowledged that the level of focus on care leavers and the lack of aspiration for looked after children had been problematic.

- The new governance system was designed to raise concerns before they deteriorated. The contract between SBC and SCST included a monthly Partnership Board to identify low-level concerns, with SMB dedicated to more systematic issues. The escalation process was also fully codified; it was hoped that scrutiny could serve to support this approach.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub required partners to be involved, which had proved difficult. One possible cause of this was SBC's reputation, which led to inaction from other organisations if asked to conduct work by SBC. The MASH now had a dedicated leader, with a 'soft launch' set for July 2016 and a full launch in September 2016.
- Assessments had been unsatisfactory. This was being worked on, as their quality was based on the original social worker interaction.
- Independent Reviewing Officers were being trained to address issues in Children's Services; it would take time for this to embed in the working culture.
- A permanent Director responsible for Children's Services was being appointed; the structure would not mirror the previous system with a Director of Wellbeing. This would be advertised in Spring 2014, with the eventual post holder entering SBC in the Autumn. The current Interim Director of Children's Services was leaving their post at the end of June 2016, and the transition would be planned.
- It was customary for Councillors to be involved in the appointment of Directors. In this case, it would also see input from local young people and SCST. Members also requested information and involvement regarding any payments made to outgoing Directors.
- SCST was working to impose a new working model involving greater transparency at all levels. At present, 50% of staff were agency; given the need to recruit new staff who would support the new working model, it was not possible to provide a precise date and target for permanent staff, although increasing this level was the overall aim. Career pathway interviews were also being conducted with current staff to develop suitable plans to assist them in this culture change.
- Budget management was prioritised by the Trust Board and being reported monthly. The Invest to Save bids were for agile working and alternatives to care.
- At present, there were 11 cases subject to Annexe H of the Crown Prosecution Service's 'Good Practice Model'. Of these, 3 had received immediate action whilst the others received fast responses.

Resolved:

1. That the Delivery Plan presented to Ofsted in May 2016 be circulated to Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel members and reported on regularly at Panel meetings.
2. That Councillors be involved in the appointment of the permanent Director responsible for Children's Services on a cross party basis.

43. Ofsted - Review Of The Effectiveness Of The Local Safeguarding Children Board

The work of the Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board (SLSCB) was based on co-operation and commitment from partner organisations. The Panel had discussed the SLSCB's annual report in November 2015, noting concerns over quality assurance, resourcing and the potential duplication of work given the installation of SCST. The Ofsted report had been published subsequently.

The Ofsted report issued six recommendations, which would be used for future work to focus SLSCB's efforts. However, as well as requiring partner engagement, SLSCB also may need to address the structural issues arising from its status as a relatively small board given Slough's unitary status; many equivalent bodies covered an entire county, but SLSCB needed to undertake an equal amount of work in many areas (e.g. organising meetings). The Prime Minister had announced a fundamental review of the system, which would report Spring 2016, and this may well impact on future arrangements.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The understanding of roles and responsibilities regarding SLSCB was inconsistent in partner organisations. Thames Valley Police were very engaged although funding remained an issue. SCST was also very involved (especially with regards to child sexual exploitation and missing children) whilst SBC was adjusting to its new role since SCST's installation. Other partners could be more passive. The SLSCB Chair's position was based on influence and applying pressure for action.
- However, a major issue was ensuring that agreed actions were carried through. One issue on this matter was getting representatives with sufficient seniority to attend SLSCB meetings.
- A CSE Co-ordinator had been appointed, as well as a permanent Business Manager and administrative support.
- Multi-agency auditing was taking place and partners had been asked to address issues arising. Whilst this was not fully completed by the time of Ofsted's inspection, SLSCB would now be in a position to demonstrate the completion of these audits.
- A threshold document had also been circulated, although required updating in light of Ofsted (e.g. CSE, female genital mutilation and Prevent legislation). As a result, this had been worked on and was ready as a draft document for SCST. SLSCB was offering challenge to partners regarding the quality of referrals, and performance indicators were demonstrating a greater understanding of related matters.
- As trust in the system improved, so matters coming to SLSCB would be filtered appropriately. Previously, the reputation of social services had led to too many disparate or unsuitable issues being referred to SLSCB.
- The SLSCB Chair was not in a position to enforce changes in membership, although they could advise partners. Representation from

officers who were insufficiently senior to enforce actions in partner organisations had been an issue. As a result, a request had been made for Director level representatives, and this was increasing.

- Regardless of the outcome of the review into boards, SCST would remain a provider and SLSCB a co-ordinator; therefore, SCST could not take over SLSCB. However, SLSCB did support different means for achieving its objectives, and the review could allow it more freedom in pursuing this. SLSCB also had ambitions to become an 'early adopter' of any changes, rather than waiting passively for their imposition.
- The issue of resourcing was regularly raised at SLSCB meetings and in its annual report. SLSCB would overspend by approximately £20,000 in 2015 – 16, and next year stood to have the same budget. As a result, it needed to consider its delivery plan.
- Funding difficulties had also led to SLSCB meetings being too focused on this matter, when effort could have been more effectively spent elsewhere.
- SBC had supported SLSCB's improvement initiatives and made some direct interventions.
- SLSCB was disappointed with the progress noted by Ofsted. Performance data and auditing would be needed to analyse the work of partners effectively, although SCST had helped improve SLSCB's position.
- Cabinet was committed to placing children as the top priority. This needed to be disseminated to partners, and reciprocated to build trust in working relationships.
- As part of any realignment of SLSCB work, agendas would be focused on a smaller number of central issues to improve impact. However, it was a concern that partners who worked well together in other forums were less effective in SLSCB.
- To improve frontline practice, the work of SLSCB sub groups would be assessed. This would then be used to raise all sub groups to the levels of the most productive.
- Members raised concerns as to whether problems with auditing affected all areas of SBC. SBC's Chief Executive had raised concerns as to whether audits were being completed in Children's Services, and if so whether this was to an adequate level. In future, SBC needed to reach a point where auditing was an automatic function rather than an activity which was only conducted upon request.

Resolved:

1. That the Panel receive a report on progress in July 2016, and a full update on progress made on Ofsted recommendations in autumn 2016.
2. The Commissioner for Education and Children to investigate potential funding from SBC for SLSCB.
3. That a Member of the Panel would attend an SLSCB meeting, with a reciprocal return visit also to take place.

44. Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation In Slough - An Update

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) had been established as an absolute priority for SBC, SCST and Thames Valley Police. Since the establishment of SCST, a number of key strategic and operational areas had seen progress.

Firstly, a multi-agency CSE team had been set up and was modelled on the Kingfisher Team operating in Oxfordshire. In addition, the team dealing with CSE and missing children would be revised; this had been agreed by the CSE Sub Group and would be signed off in March 2016. Finally, resources had been identified for this work (a manager and 2 dedicated social workers plus a separate CSE Co-ordinator). This project team would be led by a Thames Valley Police representative and also include members from health and education. Return home interviews were now being undertaken and the intelligence gained shared with police; additional training on information sharing was being held to support this.

The Panel raised the following issues in discussion:

- Intensive research into CSE and related areas was being undertaken in order to identify vulnerable children. Panels also had a variety of mechanisms for raising cases as they emerged.
- Schools were also identifying potential CSE, whilst Neighbourhood Teams were being trained to recognise warning signs of CSE when accessing properties.
- SCST was working with the Young People's Service to tackle CSE, and also adopting a varied approach as appropriate when dealing with agencies.
- The Safer Slough Partnership had also discussed CSE and domestic violence in the context.
- Community Safety Teams were working on cases of long term grooming, with targeted family support also offered directly to affected parents.
- Alternative schooling was an area of national weakness for local authorities, with the regulation of tutors proving problematic. SCST was working with other agencies to map responsibilities for the matter.
- A new initiative (CSE Awareness Champions) had been established amongst social workers.
- Members wished to record their support for the work being undertaken and the partnership approach being used to secure progress.

Resolved: that the update be noted.

45. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: that the work programme be noted.

46. Attendance Record

Resolved: that the attendance record be noted.

47. Date of Next Meeting - 21st April 2016

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.33 pm and closed at 9.37 pm)