

## **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 3rd December, 2015.**

**Present:-** Councillors Abe (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Brooker, Cheema, Dhillon, Matloob and Pantelic

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Nazir and Strutton

### **Education Voting Co-opted Members**

James Welsh – Catholic Diocese of Northampton

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Bal, Morris and Rana

## **PART 1**

### **20. Declaration of Interest**

Cllr Brooker declared his daughter's attendance at Burnham Park Academy and his position as Governor at Churchmead School. Cllr Cheema declared her daughter's attendance at East Berkshire College.

### **21. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 21st October 2015**

Cllr Cheema had given her apologies for the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015 . In addition, Cllr Brooker's daughter's attendance at Burnham Park Academy was in the past tense, rather than the present tense noted in the minutes.

**Resolved:** that, subject to the above comments, the minutes of the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015 were approved as an accurate record.

### **22. Member Questions**

No Members' questions were received prior to the meeting.

### **23. Slough Safeguarding Board - Annual Report**

The Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board (SLSCB) was focused on multi-agency work rather than the resolution of individual cases. The aim was to ensure that comprehensive approaches were taken to safeguarding issues, with agencies co-operating to maximise the impact of their knowledge and competencies. SLSCB monitored and evaluated work taking place, and informed partners on the effectiveness of their efforts.

The Annual Report was an opportunity to review overall safeguarding arrangements. Given the reporting year, the document presented to the Panel covered work up to the end of March 2015; however, since this time more work had been undertaken and the Panel was encouraged to ask for details

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on this. The foreword of the Report gave an overview of April 2014 – March 2015; this period had seen much effort on the transition from Slough Borough Council (SBC) controlling Children's Services to the service being delivered by the Children's Services Trust (CST). SBC was only the second local authority to be subject to such an arrangement (Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council being the first) and management at SBC had been heavily involved in this process.

Funding was vital for the long-term viability of SLSCB; Thames Valley Police had withdrawn 80% of their financial support (from £10,000 to £2,000) but the local Commander had covered this potential shortfall. However, the permanence of this arrangement was not yet clear; SLSCB was advocating that the Police should fund Local Safeguarding Children's Boards on the basis of local need, rather than through a general, even distribution of funds across all relevant Boards. Given funding issues and the emphasis on the transitional arrangements for the new CST, previous wide-ranging SLSCB plans had narrowed in focus for 2014 – 15.

SLSCB was to place great emphasis on improving quality assurance (QA) and audit. If these functions were weak, then efforts at case evaluation would be compromised; therefore this was a key aspect of SLSCB's work. In addition, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was not yet established. Whilst the co-location of Police and CST staff had taken place, this was merely the first element of creating a MASH rather than the completion of the process. In addition, other partners beyond these two bodies would need to be integrated into any future MASH. Other priorities for the future included resourcing, establishing relationships and working arrangements with CST and encouraging greater positivity, willingness and openness in discussions between partner organisations.

In terms of cases, those involving child sexual exploitation (CSE), female genital mutilation (FGM) and radicalisation often attracted the most attention. However, neglect, domestic abuse between adults in the house, substance abuse and mental health issues were key aspects in many cases. For CSE, a strategic group had been established to evaluate policies, procedures and plans on the issue. This group involved a range of agencies and met monthly to look at individual cases in order to make overall assessments. At present, this group had not encountered evidence of large scale gang or group activity; tracking and mapping of cases was used to establish any patterns in activity. SBC was also working with licensing (e.g. taxis, hotels, alcohol vendors) on a proactive basis to resolve any problems. In terms of radicalisation, SLSCB was not responsible for the Prevent agenda; rather, it evaluated the involvement of partner organisations. On FGM, research had estimated that over 1,000 children would have been subject to this practice; the health sector had identified cases. The risks for children were assessed; many of the cases may involve children being moved outside of Slough to undergo FGM, and no cases had been identified as having taken place in Slough.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

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- SBC had retained the independent Children's Partnership Board. Previously, this had been obligatory; however, this was no longer the case and many local authorities had disbanded theirs. In contrast, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards were statutory bodies.
- CST was delivering services on behalf of SBC. If CST was not providing a suitable level of service, SLSCB could challenge both SBC and CST as it was at liberty to hold discussions with both the commissioner and the deliverer.
- Relationships between SLSCB's Chair and SBC's Chief Executive ran along contract management lines. Both parties could challenge each other regarding progress and future plans.
- In terms of establishing a more positive and receptive culture, no simple or rapid solution was available. Keeping improvements on track would encourage better partnership work, whilst attendance from Director Level representatives at meetings of the Executive Group would ensure that those who gave undertakings at meetings had the authority to enforce them. Establishing networks and building confidence would develop momentum for SLSCB, whilst the opposite would see its work meet increased resistance.
- Ofsted was currently undertaking an inspection which would report on SLSCB and Children's Services. The Panel signalled its intention to discuss this with SLSCB at the start of the 2016 – 17 Municipal Year.
- In terms of ensuring that actions agreed were undertaken and completed, improvements were being made although SBC needed to improve this aspect. Over optimism could lead to promises being made which could not be fulfilled; in addition, more commitment was needed to ensure that realistic pledges given were then seen through. SLSCB could challenge occasions on which pledges had not been fulfilled and escalate where appropriate at Board level within the relevant organisations. However, going public with such statements would be an unusual step and may also prove counterproductive.
- Despite the funding issues mentioned earlier, SLSCB was financially sound at present. However, Serious Case Reviews could be costly; whilst only one of these was presently underway there was the chance that this number could increase in future. As a result, whilst £108,400 was sufficient for 2014 – 15 this may not be the case in future years.
- Should finances become difficult, SLSCB may have to discuss how it delivers its service differently. The already small administrative team supporting SLSCB meant that this did not offer opportunities for savings to be made; instead, initiatives such as increased joint working may deliver the solutions required in future.

(At this point, Cllr Dhillon left the meeting)

- The autumn statement had not delivered the cuts to police funding which had been anticipated. This offered some cause for optimism, as had the continued (and increasing) commitment being offered by police to safeguarding matters.

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- To improve QA, SLSCB had introduced performance management (which had previously been absent). This was assessed on a quarterly basis, and also supported by CST's appointment of a Business Analyst and Thames Valley Police's new IT system.
- The previously low priority of auditing had caused problems with identifying weaknesses and was being resolved. Partners were receptive to this change, whilst multi-agency auditing was using specific cases to evaluate interaction. Two multi-agency audits had been completed on CSE and child protection, whilst a third on domestic abuse would be completed in January 2016.
- Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004 laid out 8 standards for safeguarding compliance in public sector organisations. SLSCB was committed to ensuring that partner organisations were undertaking self assessments to check their adherence to these. SLSCB would also report SBC's performance on this to Councillors in 2016.
- Private sector funding had not been dismissed as an opportunity for SLSCB, but was problematic. Firstly, such funding may lack the long term commitment required for permanent stability. Secondly, private sector organisations were not frequently attracted to an agenda featuring such emotive issues which also had the potential to generate negative publicity.
- SLSCB should include two lay members, but at present included only one. Recruitment had not been SLSCB's foremost priority, and then the recruitment of a second member was soon followed by the resignation of the other lay representative. An attempt had been made to recruit to this vacancy, but did not have a suitable candidate available for interview. As a result, the possibility of seconding such an individual was being investigated (although would require a robust process to ensure the nominated individual was suitable).
- Whilst SLSCB did not encounter active resistance from its members, it could find that they lacked engagement or were overstretched in terms of responsibilities. As an example, Thames Valley Police were required to be involved in 10 Local Safeguarding Children's Boards. In addition, SBC's transitional arrangements had seen a high level of staff turnover, whilst those who remained were often subject to changing roles and responsibilities.
- The competing priorities of partner organisations had led to difficulties in establishing a shared vision across all partner organisations. CST's installation as service deliverer could provide an opportunity to refresh that vision.
- Police supported the creation of MASHs nationally, but other organisations could find issues with providing the relevant support. For example, there was debate as to whether health organisations should offer clinical or operational representatives on such bodies. Such questions had made creation of MASH difficult and caused delays.
- In terms of future priorities, QA would have the most impact. Building relationships and partnerships, including an element of challenge and constructive criticism would underpin this, and all such improvements needed embedding to ensure they survived any changes in

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membership or staffing. These would be long term objectives, but the present situation offered the best opportunity for this in some time.

- Major challenges SLSCB had encountered in the last 5 years included communications, a lack of focus and transparency. In order to increase the level of effective challenge offered by SLSCB, these would all need to increase to ensure that open discussions did not lead to negative relationships and defensiveness.
- Whilst SLSCB received KPIs and data from partner organisations, the work of SLSCB itself did not generate such statistics. Instead, its work was more qualitative and based on intangible aspects such as partnership working and interaction. Given this, Ofsted would identify problem areas arising from the data offered by partner organisations and ask SLSCB to account for its activity. This mirrored the work of SLSCB in many regards.
- The Chair of SLSCB was independent and had no executive powers. As such, no one could be compelled to comply with requests, but rather the relationship with partners was based on influence.
- At the next meeting of the Panel where SLSCB were to be in attendance, partner organisations could also be present. In addition, Members of the Panel could attend SLSCB meetings.

### **Resolved:**

1. That the Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board return to the Panel to discuss the Ofsted inspection at the start of the 2016 – 17 Municipal Year.
2. That the Panel indicate to Cabinet its support for the policy that all contracts with outsourced service providers must stipulate that they conduct a safeguarding audit to Section 11 (Children's Act 2004) standards to underpin SBC's responsibilities in the area.

## **24. Children's Services Trust - Verbal Update**

CST became operative on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 and was based in St Martin's Place. Its offices had been refurbished and new IT had been installed, but the process of transition was still being completed. Governance arrangements had been agreed with many parties involved in the discussions. Key performance indicators had also been agreed, although the targets for these KPIs had not. The targets for years 2 and 3 of the contract would be agreed by the end of March 2016 (with year 2 defined as starting 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016). At the time of the meeting the baseline assessment was still being completed; the findings of this initial audit would be reported to a joint meeting of the Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Ofsted had also begun an inspection of Children's Services and the completion of this should add robustness to the findings of the baselining exercise.

A monthly Strategic Monitoring Board had been established, consisting of SBC's Head of Director of Children's Services, SBC's Commissioner for Children and Education and the Chair and Chief Executive of CST. This forum allowed both CST and SBC to be held to account; CST was not operating in

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isolation, and even where it held responsibility the work of SBC had a significant impact on its remit. The first meeting of this Board had been held, with the body becoming more formalised as it became established. At present, the Client Side Team had not been put in place. This Team would be funded by the Department for Education (DfE).

The Children's Commissioner reported to the Secretary of State and was charged with supporting improvement activity. The only previous local authority subject to a similar process had terminated the role of Children's Commissioner once the Trust went live. However, Slough would continue to have a Children's Commissioner until the end of December 2016 at the earliest. CST also had its own non-executive board, with two sub groups (finance and equality & innovation). The sub group on equality and innovation would be funded by DfE.

CST was working on a new social care model, with CST's Chief Executive working with staff to deliver this. Staff had been engaged with the process, allowing good progress to be made. The final overall structure was likely to involve fewer layers of management, with one Assistant Director role having already been deleted and some other movements within staffing having taken place. The high number of interim post holders allowed for greater flexibility in creating the new staffing structure, with much emphasis being placed on the initial stages of receiving referrals and initiating action. However, MASH partners were in agreement that they were not yet ready to establish MASH, with audits having substantiated this conclusion.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- With regards to 'front door' referrals, thresholds had not changed.
- DfE had been in receipt of SBC's submitted request for funding for 6 weeks. However, there was no absolute deadline for DfE's response.
- The Client Side Team would consist of contract managers and would also examine the roles retained by SBC since the transition to CST.
- The exact level of the budget from DfE was unclear, however it could be estimated as a low six-figure sum annually as it consisted of 3 roles at a non-senior level. At present, current resources were being used to cover these roles but this was acknowledged not to be the permanent solution. DfE also paid for the renovation of St Martin's Place in preparation of CST staff.
- Councillors had felt uninformed about changes to the plans for MASH. However, if the message had been given that it was on course for completion this had not been the case; the co-location of SBC and police staff was not in itself confirmation that all parties were working on establishment of MASH.
- During the transition from SBC to CST, a high level of work had been undertaken to ensure that there was neither a duplication nor omission of responsibilities in the new roles being created. However, transitional work was still being undertaken and it was imperative that clarity was sought on roles and responsibilities to ensure that all areas were covered appropriately.

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- In contrast with Doncaster MBC, SBC had retained its Children's Commissioner given the fact that more services were contracted out in Slough than Doncaster (e.g. Cambridge Education for schools). CST would take over the work of Cambridge Education in September 2016, and the Children's Commissioner would oversee the considerable work required on this matter.

**Resolved:** that the verbal update be noted.

### **25. Forward Work Programme**

**Resolved:**

1. That an item on SLSCB be added to the forward work programme, for the first meeting of the Municipal Year 2016 – 17.
2. That a report on the Ofsted inspection be added to the agenda for 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

### **26. Attendance Record**

**Resolved:** That the attendance record be noted.

### **27. Date of Next Meeting**

There would be a joint meeting of the Panel and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016. The next meeting of the Panel after this would be 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.58 pm)