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| Item No. 6 | Classification: Open | Date: 6 Feb 2023 | Decision Maker: Not applicable |
| Report title: | | Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership | |
| Ward(s) or groups affected: | | All wards | |
| From: | | Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services | |

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. The Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission note the contents of this report

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) reformed the framework supporting the delivery of multi-agency services to protect and safeguard children. Regulations for implementing these changes required all local authority areas in England to have adopted new arrangements by no later than September 2019. The legislation abolished local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs) and introduced the concept of three statutory safeguarding partners - local government, the police and health services.
3. Thus in 2019 the Southwark Safeguarding Children Board was replaced by the Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP). The three statutory safeguarding partners were the council, Metropolitan Police and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The detailed plans for such arrangements were set out in [Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership New Arrangements \(June 2019\)](#).
4. The SSCP last published annual report of the SSCP is for 2020/21 ([SSCP Annual Report 2020/21](#))
5. The aim of the SSCP is to make sure that children and young people in Southwark are kept safe from harm and abuse. Its job is to co-ordinate the work of everyone working with children and their families so they can protect children effectively.
6. In September 2022 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (Ofsted) inspected arrangements for the help and protection of children in the borough through the council's children's services. In summary it judged the services as good, the same judgement from its last graded inspection five and a half years previously in March 2017.

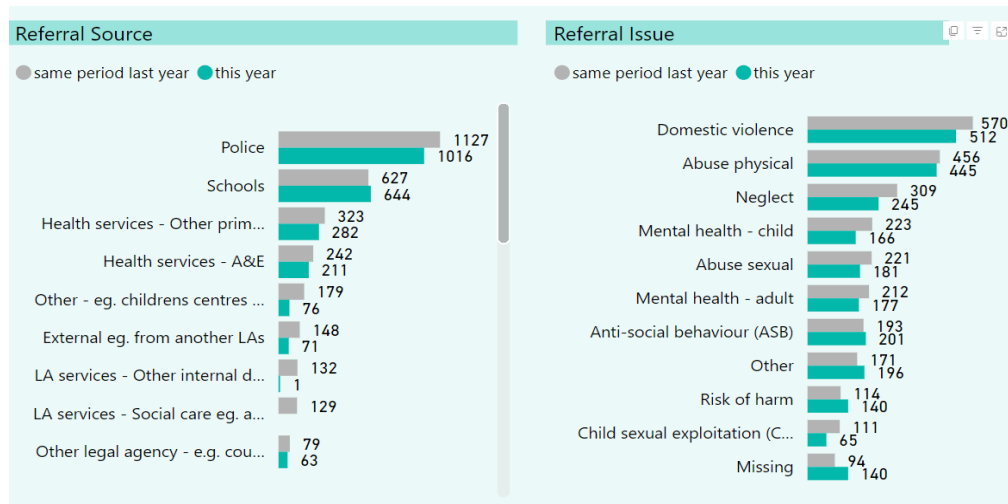
KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Ofsted inspection of the help and protection of children in the borough

7. It may be helpful for the work of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission to take advantage of the Ofsted inspection of the help and protection of children in the borough through the council's Children's Services, as a starting point to inform itself about these arrangements. The executive summary of its findings is as follows:
8. *Children in the London Borough of Southwark who need help, protection and care continue to receive good services. Frontline staff, leaders and managers work effectively to safeguard and support children and to improve services provided to them. As a result, children's lives are improved.*
9. *Children and their families benefit from strong political and corporate commitment across all areas of the council. Political leaders and the recently appointed chief executive bring significant expertise and determination to provide the best possible support for children and their families. They have a tangible and positive impact on the services and are impressive champions for children. They know their children well and they make a difference.*
10. *Children are at the heart of practice in Southwark. Social workers think about what is important for individual children and act without delay. In a challenging context, leaders have enabled significant investment to ensure that frontline staff have low enough caseloads. As a result, they have time to work intensively with families when needed, and to reflect and consider ways to improve children's lives. Social workers also have access to therapeutic practitioners and specialists, and they receive good quality supervision. This adds significant value to the service children receive.*
11. Ofsted identified the private fostering as the single area that needed to improve in relation to the help and protection of children. It judged intervention and oversight in this area as not sufficiently robust or consistent with the legal framework. Ofsted acknowledged leaders took immediate action to address the shortfall.
12. The report can be read in full on this [link](#). Paragraphs 1-18 relate directly to the help and protection of children in the borough. Paragraphs 36 to 41 relates to the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.

Safeguarding activity in the borough

13. The bar chart below shows all **safeguarding referral activity** via the children's multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH) for the last 24 months.



14. Ofsted's inspection highlighted:

The MASH provides a timely and proportionate service for children and their families.

Management oversight is a strength and is effective. Effective decisions in response to presenting risks lead to appropriate next steps.

MASH partner agencies ensure swift sharing of relevant information.

Children who need help and protection are seen quickly. Visits to children are regular and meaningful.

Social workers develop strong assessments that demonstrate a good understanding of children's needs, strengths and risks.

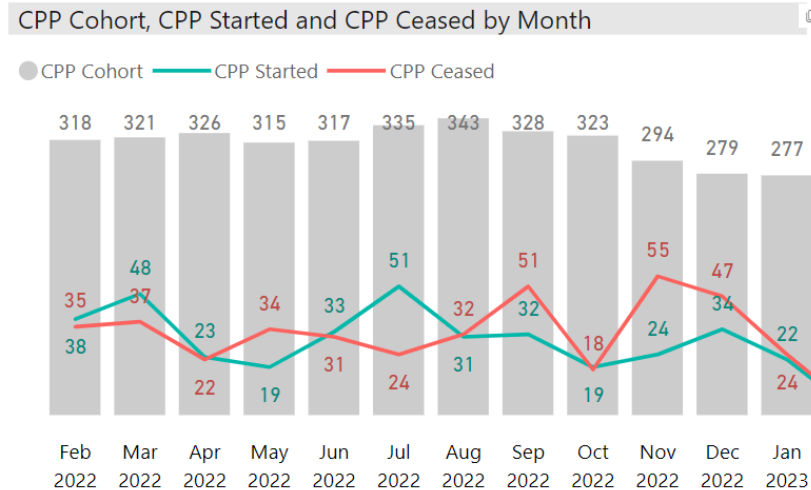
Support services are put in place while assessments are ongoing.

Practitioners work creatively to engage parents, particularly fathers meaning parents engage quickly, and children's outcomes are improved.

Strategy meetings are held appropriately in response to escalating or emerging risk, and most are well attended. Any disagreements about initiating child protection enquiries are acknowledged and addressed, strengthening decisions by allowing for professional challenge.

Children's views, wishes and feelings are at the heart of social work practice.

15. The bar chart below shows all **children subject to child protection plans (CPP)** over the last 12 months.



16. Ofsted's inspection highlighted:

When child protection investigations are required, they are robust and focus on presenting risks as well risks to other children in the community.

Good partner attendance and engagement in meetings supports effective decision-making. Collaborative work reduces risks for children.

Managers have close oversight and grip of this part of the service.

Effective audit and quality assurance work has helped improve the focus, quality and quantity of investigations. As a result, practice is stronger and fewer children and their families experience these statutory processes.

Children are supported with the right level of intervention.

Children's plans are regularly reviewed, with good multi-agency contributions helping to gauge progress against identified outcomes.

Pre court proceedings work is effective. When children's circumstances do not improve, appropriate consultation underpins decisions to escalate interventions using legal frameworks.

Families are given clear information about concerns and what is expected of them. Children's progress is closely monitored by managers, who prevent delay and ensure that care proceedings are initiated promptly when children's needs are not being met.

The local judiciary and Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service told inspectors that they see strong assessments and plans in respect of children, and well-managed court work that ensures that children achieve permanency without undue delay.

Changes to the SSCP

17. In May 2021, Sir Alan Wood published a [report on the national implementation of new multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children](#). The report set out recommendations for making multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for local areas more effective. The SSCP has since this review sought to evolve its arrangements in response to this to continually strengthen its functioning.

18. Since April 2022 arrangements for the SSCP Executive have changed. The Executive is the name given for the three statutory partners who are responsible for coordinating and overseeing the work of the whole partnership.

Alasdair Smith became the statutory Director of Children's Services and formally became a member of the SSCP Executive.

Martin Wilkinson as the Chief Operating Officer of Partnership Southwark became the ICB representative on the SSCP Executive. The CCG had ceased to exist, being replaced by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) as the accountable health body.

Clair Kelland, Detective Superintendent, Head of Public Protection, Central South Basic Command Unit continued as the Metropolitan Police representative on the SSCP Executive.

19. Since the new membership formed as a new SSCP Executive group, it initiated a process of further developing the safeguarding arrangements, building on the already strong foundations. The terms of reference were reviewed to give a stronger connection between the work of the Executive and the sub groups who undertake much of the detailed partnership work. It sought to give greater clarity and purpose to the wider partnership meetings, and has begun to consider how schools and public health can become stronger partners within the work of the SSCP.

20. The current chair of the SSCP Executive is Martin Wilkinson, Chief Operating Officer of Partnership Southwark. Anna Berry was formerly the independent chair of the SSCP has remained as an important member of the Executive in an independent capacity to provide ongoing scrutiny and challenge.

21. The Executive meets monthly and a refreshed document to fully describe the arrangements is due to be published in April 2023.

The work of the SSCP

22. The SSCP is yet to finalise and published its report for 2021/22. Its work is undertaken primarily through four subgroups described below.
23. The **Learning Network** subgroup is a joint subgroup of the SSCP and Southwark Safeguarding Adult Board. The partnerships are committed to promoting a culture which values and facilitates learning, and in which the lesson learned are used to improve future practice and partnership working. This approach has facilitated robust mechanisms to review, analyse and develop practice as well as drive improvements in the wider safeguarding system. Traditionally there has been an emphasis on “training” and although uptake of training programmes can be measured, there is a need for further assurance as to the impact this has on practice. It is planned to transition the partnerships to a strengthened approach where learning is embedded in the culture of all safeguarding practice.
24. The **Adolescent Risk Strategic** subgroup is jointly chaired by the police and children’s social care. It oversees the multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) arrangements and is currently reviewing these arrangements in response to learning from a London wide review published in July 2022. It is notable that the Ofsted inspection commented as follows: *“Vulnerable adolescents are well supported by workers who are alert to the risks that children face in the community. Social workers have access to thorough and detailed consultations with the specialist missing and extra familial harm team. The intelligence and resource information provided helps workers put plans in place that are effective in reducing risks for adolescents. The specialist team co-works with social workers for children at the highest risk, and skilfully identifies cohorts of young people, to focus disruption work with police and other partners. As a result, agencies are aware of key and emerging risks for children, and they respond accordingly.”*
25. The **Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup** builds and maintains an accurate picture across the partnership: the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; areas of strength and good practice; areas of risk and vulnerability; and actions related to improve outcomes for children. The subgroup works to strengthen the partnership’s assurance process by: developing and ratifying borough-wide strategies, policies and guidance; monitoring and analysing safeguarding indicators across the partnership to identify whether safeguarding practice and arrangements have led to improved outcomes for children and young people. Its role is also to identify and commissioning multi-agency audits to evaluate safeguarding practice and its impact on children, young people and families. It monitors the progress of action plans arising from any local or national reviews. It demonstrates that the voice of the child has been heard and using this information to improve services and the effectiveness of professional practice.

26. The **Child Safeguarding Practice Review** subgroup has responsibility for how lessons are learned locally from serious child safeguarding incidents. It identifies cases which meet the criteria for a Child Safeguarding Practice Review. For cases that fall below the threshold the group determines if there is relevant possible learning from the case, and recommends the process and methodology for understanding the learning. The group also identifies any themes or trends within local referrals and national reviews that may further improve the quality and impact of safeguarding in Southwark. Once a review has been completed, the implementation and impact of any multi-agency lessons to be learned are monitored to ensure that the learning from all case reviewing activity is embedded in practice. The CSPR subgroup also reviews Youth Offending Service Community Safety and Public Protection Incident reports (CSPPIs). Work is ongoing to establish best practice for quality assuring these reviews and sharing any learning across the partnership.

Policy framework implications

27. There are no policy conflicts raised by this report and it supports the Borough Plan policy commitment of a great start in life.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

28. There are no impacts specific to particular communities. It should be recognised however that research shows that children and families who are more likely to become involved in the child safeguarding and protection system are more likely to come from communities who experience poverty and deprivation. Thus it is imperative that our arrangements for the help and protection of children in the borough are as good and fair as possible.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

29. As stated above, research shows that children and families who are more likely to become involved in the child safeguarding and protection system are more likely to come from communities who experience poverty and deprivation. Thus it is imperative that our arrangements for the help and protection of children in the borough are as good and fair as possible.

Health impact statement

30. The outcomes for children who become involved with the safeguarding and child protection system are more likely to be detrimental to their mental and emotional wellbeing. This is supported by the research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their links to multiple health and social disadvantage through the life course.

Climate change implications

31. There is no impact on the climate through the subject matter of this report.

Resource implications

32. Special care should be taken if the report recommendations fall outside the budget framework.

33.

Note: Legal/Financial implications (and when to seek supplementary advice)

34. Report authors are expected to cover key issues; however, where there are significant legal or financial implications, it is the report author's responsibility to obtain relevant advice from the director of law and governance and/or strategic director of finance and governance and include it in the final report in the section titled 'Supplemental advice from other officers' (see below) and clearly attributed.

35. Whether or not advice has been sought from the director of law and governance and/or strategic director of finance and governance should be clearly indicated in the audit trail.

Consultation

36. No consultation we undertaken or required in the formation of this report.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

37. No advice from other officers is required.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

38. This report is late due to changes in the SSCP Executive arrangements such that the previous independent chair no longer undertakes such a role. She was thus not best suited to write the required report and attend and the statutory Director of Children's Services undertook the task at late notice to ensure the commission had an opportunity as planned to scrutinised child safeguarding arrangements.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers | Held At | Contact |
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APPENDICES

| No. | Title |
|------------|---|
| Appendix 1 | Inspection of Southwark local authority children's services |

AUDIT TRAIL

This section must be included in all reports.

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| Lead Officer | Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services | |
| Report Author | Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services | |
| Version | Final | |
| Dated | 6 February 2023 | |
| Key Decision? | No | |
| CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER | | |
| Officer Title | Comments Sought | Comments Included |
| Director of Law and Governance | No | No |
| Strategic Director of Finance and Governance | No | No |
| List other officers here | | |
| Cabinet Member | No | No |
| Date final report sent to Constitutional Team / Scrutiny Team | 6 February 2023 | |