

Roundtable Event with Director of Children's Services – Melissa Caslake



Date: **Wednesday 27th September 2023**

Time: **13:30 – 16:00**

Venue: **Salford Lads and Girls Club, 1 Ignatious walk, Salford, M5 3RX**

Setting the Scene

Michelle Warburton from Salford CVS presented to the room on the broader picture for the VCSE sector in Salford, taking headlines from the 2021 State of the Sector. These included:

- 1,665 voluntary organisations, community groups, charities, social enterprises in Salford
- 68% are micro community groups (<£10k)
- 17% identify as social enterprises
- £149.2m - income of the sector (2019/20) 68,356 volunteers, giving 232,608 hours of labour per week



Critically, 22% of the sector in Salford are working with Children, Young People and Families.

The key messages regarding the VCSE sector in Salford are:

- We are many and our reach is great
- We are anchor organisations within communities
- We work with the most vulnerable
- We contribute to the local economy
- We generate social and added value
- We are innovative and agile

Presentation from Melissa

Melissa Caslake then gave a presentation to the room, beginning with an outline of her desire for Salford to become a ‘Child Friendly City’ – a “UNICEF initiative that supports municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation.”



The principles that underpin a Child Friendly city are as follows:

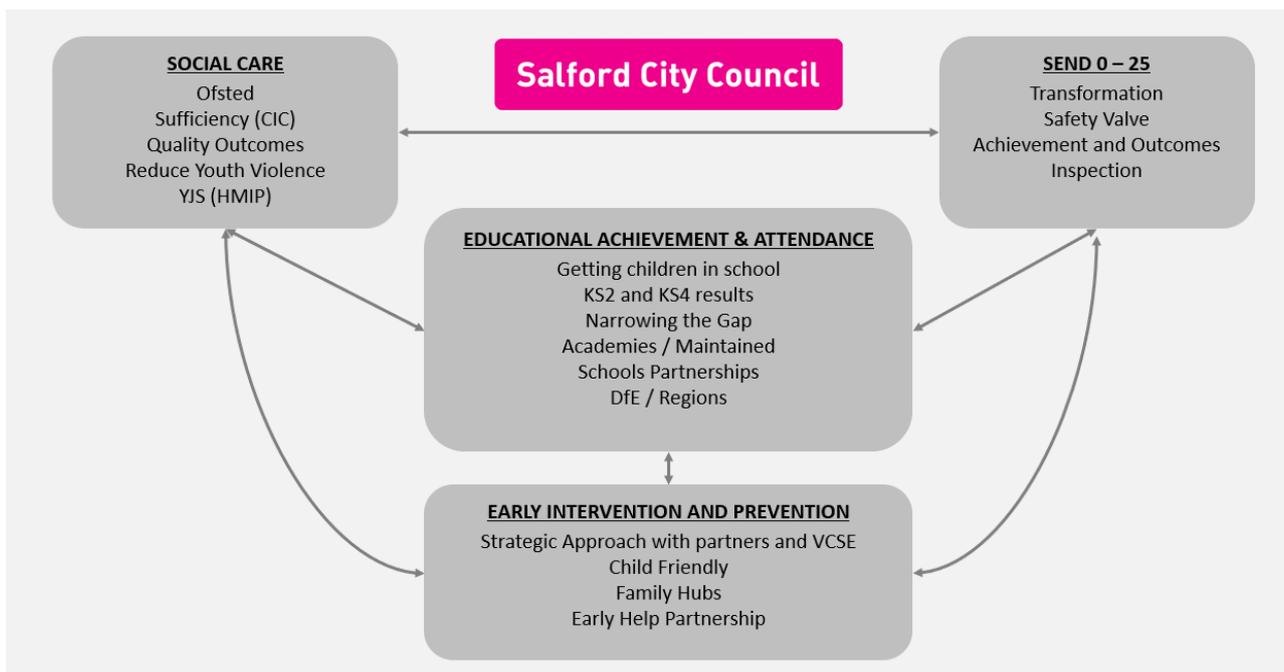
- Are safe and protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
- Have a good start in life and grow up healthy and cared for;
- Have access to essential services;
- Experience quality, inclusive and participatory education and skills development;
- Express their opinions and influence decisions that affect them;
- Participate in family, cultural, city/community and social life;
- Live in a clean, unpolluted and safe environment with access to green spaces;
- Meet friends and have places to play and enjoy themselves;
- Have a fair chance at life regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or ability

It was noted by Melissa that the process of working towards these principles, was, *in itself a goal* for Salford. Clearly, holding Salford strenuously to these principles is not within the gift of the council, however they represent work that *can* be worked towards.

Melissa continued by describing some of the priorities for Young People in Salford, which is particularly important with Salford having a population which is getting *younger* rather than older as per the rest of the country.

- Anti-hate crime
- Obesity
- SEND accessibility – Members of Youth Parliament and SEND forum
- Knife crime and street safety
- Domestic violence
- Poverty
- Good homes
- Mental Wellbeing
- Jobs and opportunities

Melissa then described in detail the key Children’s Services Priorities for 2023-2024 for Salford City Council.



This included the core thematic areas and context that the council was working within, including developing and utilising partnership with the VCSE to co-design and co-produce solutions to the ongoing challenges that are brought with a reduction in the financial envelope.

In terms of progress so far, Melissa described how Children are a clear priority within the Council’s draft Corporate plan (Great 8) and that there has been a formal recognition established within the council to ensure that all decisions that are made and in all of the policies that are set, the specific needs and impacts on care experienced children and young people are considered.

Further to this, there has been progress made on:

- An Attendance Alliance established in partnership with schools and VCSE to improve children attending school consistently – attainment strategy in development.
- Early Help Partnership Strategy refreshed and launched, building on existing partnership with VCSE.
- Work and Skills draft strategy identifies young people as a priority.
- LGA Peer Review of Community Parenting partnership undertaken in July.

Question and Answer Session

Theme	Question	By Whom
Educational Attainment Digital Exclusion	In view of the GMCA Poverty Monitor 2022 report which highlights the high rates of educational under-achievement in Salford, and with the high levels of digital poverty being experienced by children and households in this area, what is your vision regarding digital poverty and digital inclusion to bridge the gap for the children in Salford?	Andy Mossop on behalf of Irene Lockett, <i>Sovereign House GM</i>
<p>The pandemic clearly showed how children without access to digital equipment are disproportionately affected in terms of educational attainment and socialisation. Although educational attainment for disadvantaged children is better in Salford than other parts of the country, the vision for Salford is that all children would have access to equipment that enables digital education.</p> <p>There are plenty of examples of schools giving out equipment for pupils to use, however much more still needs to be done, and it remains a priority in order to ensure the gap does not widen.</p>		
VCSE / Local Authority Partnerships	How can commissioners and (Salford based) VCSE providers move from what is often a power imbalanced relationship to begin really working together to shape / co design future services that Salford young people want and need?	Lisa Dickinson, <i>Aspire</i>
<p>Without doubt there needs more work to be done to include the voice of the VCSE sector in co-designing services for Salford's young people. There needs to be a mechanism for VCSE groups, who work at a community level to tell the council what problems they are being told about and the council responding in a 'we can do it' way.</p>		

This, however, requires significant understanding of the financial picture for the Council and sustained energy to try and work in a different way.

It is true that there is appetite to work in a preventative way as we are pushed to deliver services which undoubtedly will necessitate further working with the VCSE.

<p>Service User Voice</p> <p>Transition</p>	<p>Northwest ADASS suggests that disabled people are looking for greater choice and variety in what they're able to access with their social care budgets, but a limited local market often doesn't allow this. This is of particular concern for many young disabled people coming up to transition into adult services as they leave educational provision.</p> <p>How will Children's Services listen to local young disabled people and their parents about what they want from local social care services for young people going through transition to adulthood, and how will they work to implement this in communities?</p>	<p>Bruce Poole, <i>Salford CVS</i></p>
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When disabled people turn 18, they do stay in education, however we still need to do a lot of work with colleges to support disabled people to continue their education.

It is fair to say that the local authority needs to do more in capturing the voice young disabled people and use that engagement to inform practical changes to social care services.

Agreed to go away to discuss with Maggie Kufeldt.

<p>Service Provision</p>	<p>How can we avoid outside placements and opportunistic development from large and sometimes profit-making organisations who target Salford simply because we have gaps in provision that with planning could be delivered locally?</p>	<p>Scott Darraugh <i>Social adVentures</i></p>
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Salford City Council are looking at in-house provision and the amount of contracts being given to opportunistic developers. It is very positive to hear that VCSE organisations are planning to open places that provide care in the short-to-long term. The potential for the sector to play a leading role in responding to increased demand is welcomed and promoted by the council.

<p>Children's Social Care</p>	<p>It's common knowledge that Salford's record of offering personal budgets to parents and carers is low in comparison to most other authorities, how</p>	<p>Simone Spray, <i>42nd Street</i></p>
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Budgetary Provision	can we improve this situation to offer a wider range of services with choice and flexibility?	
<p>Salford has a problem insofar that the uptake of these personal budgets is low. There definitely needs to be work done to ensure that parents and carers are aware of the offer and understand how to access the budget.</p>		
Scrutiny	<p>Why isn't the council proportional in its level of scrutiny for VCSE contracts?</p> <p>There are a lot of examples of LA commissioners asking for extra requirements from VCSE providers but providing no support to alleviate the challenges.</p>	<p>Lisa Dickinson, <i>Aspire</i></p>
<p>Melissa agreed to return to colleagues to have these discussions.</p>		
VCSE / Local Authority Partnerships	<p>As a local charity we deliver our model of Children and Families provision in Lower Kersal. How can we ensure better connection with the city-wide model of Children and Families Hubs and ensure any delivery by SCC compliments and works with us?</p>	<p>Carol Hyde, <i>Inspiring Communities Together</i></p>
<p>It remains a priority for children's services that family hubs are connected into the city-wide model, however agreed to return to colleagues to see how this can be improved.</p>		
Investments	<p>Are there any plans in Salford to sustain the Best Beginnings (Family Hub) investment beyond the 2 years?</p>	<p>Kathryn Eckersley, <i>Home Start Trafford, Salford and Wigan</i></p>
<p>It is not a positive outlook if central government pulls funding after 2 years as the Council does not have the money to sustain the Family hubs.</p> <p>Family hubs are a clear example of where financial decisions will act against the interests of the community. However, this is not something within the gift of the council to fight against. These are financial limitations put on them by central government.</p>		
Sustainability	<p>The VCSE youth sector provides significant investment into targeted services working alongside leaving care teams / cared for children's teams.</p>	<p>Adam Webster,</p>

	What will be your approach to understanding who those VCSE organisations are and enabling the sustainability of this provision?	<i>Greater Manchester Youth Network</i>
Suggested that the Community Parenting Board would be a good place to float ideas around sustainability of provision.		
Equality and Inclusion	<p>In Salford, we have examples of disabled children being refused access to mainstream youth provision and being referred to more specialist youth provision as their only option.</p> <p>Not all disabled children want to go to specialist provision, nor should this be their only option. This ultimately segregates young disabled people from accessing what they have a right to access, limiting their opportunities and contributing to a lack of awareness, understanding and cohesion between disabled and non-disabled people, in both early and later life.</p> <p>What plans are in place to enable the integration of disabled young people within mainstream youth provision?</p>	Ben Andrews, <i>Beyond Empower</i>
<p>The linkages between services are not strong enough at the moment.</p> <p>Agreed to go away to have discussions with colleagues around this topic specifically.</p> <p>There is a gap in training and confidence across the system in dealing with SEND and Disabled people. This is something that is being looked at.</p>		
Contracting	<p>We have seen examples of VCSE children's services being insourced into the council.</p> <p>What are the future plans for insourcing within Children's services?</p>	Michelle Warburton, <i>Salford CVS</i>
Currently there are no plans for further insourcing of VCSE Children's services.		

Appendix



Roundtable with
Melissa Caslake Atte