

Service Teams

Speaker key

SP Rory Patterson – Assistant Director, Specialist Services and Safeguarding

SP I've been with Southwark about 18 months now, slightly longer, and the first thing that struck me about the place when I came here was just how exciting and vibrant it was; it was totally different to anywhere else I'd worked in London. I was struck by the skill, expertise, quality and experience of the management team I was going to be part of and working with, but also the quality of people right throughout the organisation - so it was clear, from a very early stage, that this borough attracted good people.

And gradually, over time, I realised why that was, and why it attracted me in the first place; the excitement; diversity; the challenge of working in a London authority; the many complexities of the work. If you want to develop, if you want to further yourself as a social worker, you need look no further than Southwark because there are many, many opportunities here to get a range of different skills and experience.

I was also struck by the sense that the council is right behind the service, fully supporting children's services in a very practical way in terms of the resources and facilities that it provides right across the borough; that's not only in terms of the practical resources that are available to people, but the fact that there's a very, very strong system of support, supervision and care for the social work staff and for the staff right across the council. There's regular supervision that never gets missed, there are significant levels of management support at an operational level, and the senior management team is right behind the service. So there's a real drive and commitment in the borough, and a vision that wants Southwark to be the very best in probably some of the most challenging circumstances in London. So it's not good enough for us to be, we're good in difficult circumstances, we want to be absolutely as good as we can be - and for that reason we want to have the very best people working in the borough.

My section, Specialist Children's Services, is unique within Southwark in that it's an integrated service; by that I mean the social care provision is integrated with health provision and that's exemplified by the wonderful provision we have at Sunshine House, which is a fully integrated service for children with disabilities and that includes specialist personnel from paediatricians, health visitors, speech and language therapists and social care. That unit is taking the lead for us in developing the model of the team around the child, and developing best practice from working with children, ensuring that services are geared up to meet the needs of children and families and not to meet the needs of the organisation itself.

We also have what in old money was the children's social services, so it's the children's social care service and the youth offending service, and again we felt that it's important that these services come together, because we recognise that young people who are involved in crime are also vulnerable young people, and they also need to have access to wider services and provision - that's why it's important that there's a very powerful and strong link with children's social care.

So there's a recognition generally that all of the specialist provisions are grouped together within one unit, and we can maximise the benefits of integrating and joining up that provision so that young people, and their families, get a unified response to their needs. It also ensures we have a very powerful drive on ensuring quality across that provision, and we take the lead

in quality assurance across the children's service and that will mean undertaking audits and leading on audits and improving and driving up quality, not only in children's social care but right across health, education and the voluntary sector.

We've also got one of the biggest referral rates to children's social care in London - a tremendous challenge - but we've put all the resources we need to put in place to deal with that high level of demand, and our performance shows that we're also one of the most effective services in dealing with that demand. So I think that demonstrates Southwark's commitment to not only dealing with the significant challenges that there are in the borough, but putting the resources behind that and the support for the social workers to take on those challenges.

Our performance is second to none, and our referral and assessment services are some of the best in London - and probably the country - and that's been evidenced by external validation and inspection.