

Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee **22 July 2014**
Report of the Assistant Director for Children's Specialist Services

Bi-Annual Safeguarding Update

Introduction

1. At a meeting of the Committee in June 2012 Members agreed to receive a six monthly update on key children's safeguarding issues. This fifth report updates the Committee on key local and national safeguarding developments since January 2014.
2. The January 2014 report described some significant changes to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) arrangements for the city. This report also introduced Simon Westwood as the Board's new Independent Chair. Since then and as part of the revised and strengthened governance arrangements for the LSCB, it was agreed that separate LSCB and City of York Children's Safeguarding Service update reports would be presented to the Committee (previously these were presented as a combined report).
3. In these circumstances, this report will only address those issues that directly concern or relate to the delivery of the children's safeguarding arrangements by the Council. A separate report is presented by Mr Westwood providing a wider multi agency safeguarding update to the Committee.

City of York – Children's Safeguarding Developments

Thematic Inspection of York's Early Help Offer – Update

4. York received an Ofsted thematic inspection of its Early Help arrangements on 21st and 22nd of January. This inspection, which was carried out by two HMIs, reviewed the quality and effectiveness of our local early help offer. Ofsted will undertake twelve such inspections nationally and the findings from all will inform an Ofsted annual report for publication in late July 2014. These inspections carry no formal judgement; however the inspectors do offer verbal feedback on strengths

and areas for development. Any areas of best practice that the inspectors identify are also considered for inclusion in the annual report.

York's Inspection

5. In the course of the two day inspection here in York, inspectors reviewed 15 early help cases and they spoke to the professionals and families involved. In addition, there were three multi agency focus groups looking at:
 - local quality assurance arrangements for early help
 - commissioning arrangements for early help
 - local safeguarding children board engagement and oversight of early help
6. Each of these focus groups included up to 18 colleagues from across the children's services community and was challenged by inspectors with a series of questions about the effectiveness of local arrangements.

The Feedback

7. Overall the inspectors found many strengths in our local arrangements, highlighting confidence in the Front Door and Children's Social Care response to contacts and referrals. The inspectors pointed to strong commissioning arrangements and very good multi agency working relationships. There are a wide range of agencies engaged in or instigating early help and a good understanding of risk (including a good general awareness about lessons from serious case reviews).
8. Of course, there were also some areas for further development. These included;
 - the voice of the child is not consistently reflected in plans
 - some assessments tended to be parent focussed
 - practitioners are not systematically benefitting from learning arising from the quality assurance process
 - early help plans reviewed were not sufficiently SMART or outcome focussed

Areas of Good Practice

9. The inspection team identified five areas of good practice that they are considering for inclusion in the annual report. These are:
- Etrak – York’s local single view solution for the Front Door
 - Emotional Literacy Support Assistants – York’s ELSA Scheme
 - CAB debt advice in schools
 - Nurture Groups
 - Family Support Plans

Conclusion

10. This feedback provided some reassurance that we are on the right track with our early help arrangements. Very helpfully, this process shone a spotlight on those areas where there is work to do. The feedback has informed the final version of York’s refreshed Early Help strategy and an associated action plan.

Developments in Children’s Social Care

Referral and Assessment Arrangements

11. Nationally, local authority arrangements to receive and respond to concerns about children and young people continue to be the subject of rigorous scrutiny and debate. The new Ofsted inspection framework for Safeguarding and Looked after Children [discussed later in this paper] places a very significant spotlight on the effectiveness of these arrangements. In this context and in order to ensure that no child slips through the net at this point in the process, senior managers in children’s social care have been reviewing and strengthening our local arrangements. A summary of this activity includes:
- Introduction of new telephony to ensure that any caller can speak directly to a qualified social worker.
 - The development and launch of a new referral form for professionals to make sure that all of the information needed to make an informed and proportionate response is captured.
 - The establishment of a second referral and assessment team to facilitate an ‘off duty’ week for the workers in these teams

- Strengthened caseload reporting to senior managers and elected members
 - The introduction of a single assessment process to streamline the process and make it more child / family friendly
12. An ongoing review of these new arrangements has helped to improve the service however; these developments have not been without some challenge and have served to bring into sharp relief some further issues to be tackled. These include:

Insufficient social work capacity at the front door

13. Monthly monitoring of case loads in these teams has quickly flagged a shortfall in capacity. Over the past six months caseloads have increased and there is insufficient capacity to sustain a safe and effective service. Triggered by a rigorous monthly monitoring process some immediate action to remedy this issue has been taken. A more in-depth analysis of this issue has helped to confirm that the model is sound but under resourced. In these circumstances, arrangements to increase referral and assessment service from two to three teams, through the reconfiguration of other services, is underway.

Improving practice / supporting staff

14. There is good evidence of strong professional practice across the existing teams. However, there remains a relentless drive to ensure that such practice is constantly improving further and consistent across all teams. This drive coupled with the inevitable pressures of operating at the frontline place workers under significant pressure. Arrangements to further support the professional development and welfare of these teams remains a key priority.

Consistent Thresholds

15. There is evidence that partner agencies better understand the thresholds for intervention that operate at the front door. Six monthly briefings to all head teachers, termly case information sharing with schools and wider partnership briefings have helped to establish a better shared understanding about thresholds. This remains an issue that requires constant attention and monitoring.

Peer Challenge

16. In light of the above activity York has invited a peer challenge of its referral and assessment arrangements. This process, established by the Yorkshire and Humberside ADCS, will review the effectiveness and safety of the current arrangements. The learning from this external scrutiny will further inform the developments described above.

Preparation for Inspection

17. Ofsted introduced a new inspection framework in December 2013. This new framework introduces a much sharper focus on the outcomes achieved for the most vulnerable children and young people in our community. The City of York and its partners will be inspected under this new framework within the next 12 months.
18. Preparations for this inspection are overseen by a multi agency inspection reference group chaired by the Director of Children Services. Over the past three months this group has monitored and reviewed the outcomes of those areas already inspected to identify the key learning and emerging messages. A high level summary from this exercise includes:
 - The inspection is casework based and this forms the basis for the judgement on “effectiveness”.
 - Can the voice of the child be heard in case work and documentation, and do all staff have the same view of the child?
 - Are decisions made by appropriate senior managers in a timely way?
 - Do colleagues involved with the child tell the same story? Do colleagues know why services are involved, what they are trying to achieve and the desired outcome?
 - Are colleagues clear about the governance arrangements for CAF/CIN and CP?
19. There is also a sharp focus on looked after children, both within York and those placed out of the City. Listening to the views of Looked After Children and ensuring that these views influence service delivery is a key line of enquiry under the new inspection framework. The authority is also responsible for looked after children placed in York from other authorities.

20. A detailed review of lessons and recommendations from previous York inspections and other external reviews have been completed to inform the preparations for the next inspection.
21. A summary of the outcomes and key messages from a variety of external scrutiny processes during the review period is presented at Annex 1.

Analysis

22. The outcomes and recommendations from each scrutiny process during the review period are collated and used to inform an overall improvement plan.
23. The picture described at **Annex 1** reassures that overall services in York are well managed and overall 'Good'. The multi agency feedback about the confidence in the social work response at the front door is particularly reassuring. However, there is no complacency and some important areas for further development include:
 - i. Greater attention to the journey and voice of the child
 - ii. A sharper focus on the quality of early help plans
 - iii. Better health data to inform the targeting of Childrens Centres services
 - iv. Keeping the child's needs in sharp focus
 - v. Better co-ordination of multi agency early help activity
 - vi. Further develop strategies for the management and inclusion of children and young people with behavioural issues.
 - vii. Embed an 'our child' mentality across the multi agency partnership

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

24. An annual review of the completed clearance checks for all social care staff was completed in March 2014. This review has confirmed that every member of Children's Social Care staff has an up to date DBS clearance check.

Looked After Children

25. The review period has continued to see a slight reduction in the number of Looked After Children in line with the Keeping Families Together strategy previously presented to this Committee.

26. On 1st January 2014 there were 215 children looked after by the local authority. On 1st July 2014 this number had remained fairly consistent at 213 looked after children.
27. A brief analysis of this cohort of children and young people highlights:
- There are 7 children placed for adoption who are likely to leave care in the 2014-15 year before 31 March 2015
 - The number of children placed in external independent foster placements (IFA) (with an average annual cost of £55k) has increased from 8 on the 1st January 2014 to 15 on the 1st July 2014. These placements were required because the needs of the looked after children concerned could not be met within the York foster carer community. These new placements have been commissioned under a new White Rose multi local authority framework with reduced and set weekly rates, which are less expensive than previously spot purchased placements. Many of these placements are within York's boundaries, therefore minimising disruption for the young people in relation to their school placements.
 - The number of young people placed in external residential placements (with an average annual cost of £162k) went from 11 at 31st December 2013 to 10 on 1st July 2014.
28. These figures broadly reflect a stabilising looked after children population over a 6 month period, in which the overall numbers have remained constant with planned care leavers equalling the number of new entrants. The largest cohort remains 16-18 year olds with 52 looked after young people, who will all leave care in 2014-16, many of them staying put with their former foster carers, in preparation for future education training and employment and independent living at a later age.
29. It could be estimated that the looked after population may reduce to below 200 during the next 6-12 months, if the number of new entrants remains constant with recent trends.
30. The overall City of York strategy for Looked After Children will be reviewed and refreshed in the autumn of 2014.
31. The progress of our Looked After Children is routinely reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Recommendations

32. The Committee is invited to note:

- The outcome and recommendations of the Ofsted thematic inspection of Early Help
- The plans for a Peer Challenge of the referral and assessment arrangements and to receive a further update, including feedback from this process, in the December report.
- The work underway to prepare for the forthcoming Ofsted inspection.
- The outcome of the most recent DBS audit and to receive future updates on this position as part of the six monthly reporting cycle.
- The continued progress of the Keeping Families Together strategy and to receive further updates on the progress towards developing a refreshed strategy for 2015/18

Reason: To allow Members to be fully informed on key children's safeguarding issues in York and to support Member challenge in this area.

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Report Approved



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Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Overview of External Scrutiny of Services for the Review Period

Report Abbreviations:

LSCB - Local Safeguarding Children Board

OFSTED - The Office for Standards in Education

ADCS - Association of Directors of Children's Services

DBS - Disclosure and Barring Service

IFA - Independent Fostering Agency

HMIs - Her Majesty's Inspectors

CAF – Common Assessment Framework

CIN - Child in Need CP – Child Protection