Safeguarding Children

City of York Council

Internal Audit Memo

Service Area: Children's Services, Education and Skills
Responsible Officer: Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services
Service Manager: Head of Service, Safeguarding
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Introduction and Objectives

1.0   The statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people is set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is the responsibility of the local authority, in partnership with other public bodies, the voluntary sector, children and young people, parents, carers and the wider community.

1.1   As part of the 2014/15 audit plan we agreed to look at the processes around Safeguarding Children to ensure that:

- Policies and procedures match legislation and best practice
- Practice relating to children's safeguarding referrals are efficient and supported by the LSCB
- Business Support is used efficiently to support the service

1.2   As assessment of the process in these areas is set out below

Findings

RAISE

2.0   Information relating to children's safeguarding is recorded on the RAISE system. There is currently a procurement exercise in progress to replace the RAISE system.

Policies and procedures match legislation and best practice

2.1   The manner in which Local Authorities (LAs) and other bodies should discharge their safeguarding responsibilities is set out in the Children's Act 2004. The Act places on the LA the duty to have clear lines of responsibility in relation to safeguarding work, and to work with other organisations in order to safeguard the wellbeing of children referred to them.

2.2   There are three teams working on safeguarding referrals on a rota basis within specified working hours. Outside of these working hours there is Emergency Duty Team cover. Social workers take the initial referrals and pass to the Team Leader for management approval of how to proceed with the referral. Within 24 hours of a referral being received there should be a management decision over how to proceed. Monitoring of the 24 hours deadline requires manual monitoring of cases, as there are no system generated flags or reports to highlight cases outside of the 24 hours, or to support the manual monitoring. While there is a system of staff based processes in place to monitor cases, RAISE does not support these processes well.

2.3   Referrals from professionals should be followed up within 24 hours with a completed safeguarding referral form, available online. As with the above, the system does not allow for any monitoring of this or any other data quality issue to support the department in ensuring that they have the correct information available to them when they need it. The service have identified themselves that sometimes there is a problem with information coming in from partner organisations and have undertaken some work with those that send in the referrals to try to improve communication and data quality.

2.4   As part of the Act the staff have a requirement to work with other agencies, including the police, in relation to safeguarding. The office arrangements at West Offices allow quick access to the police to discuss cases, particularly when a response is urgent.

2.5   Information is available for staff, members of the public and professionals on the CYC website, Family Information Service website and particularly on the City of York Safeguarding Children Board. This includes contact information, the forms for completion by professionals, information relating to specific topics such as safer recruitment and safeguarding policies.

2.6   On the council website, on the front page of the Children and Young People section there is contact information for Safeguarding, but, while there is information about the Family Information Service, there are no contact details on that page. While it is important that contact information for safeguarding issues to be prominent this may encourage members of the public to contact Children's Front Door when their queries or request may be more appropriate for the Family Information Service (FIS). RAISE does not have the facility to monitor the amount of queries more suited to the FIS so there are no statistics regarding the number or misdirected queries.

2.7   Part of the Board's role is to be responsive to changes in legislation and working practices. The website has current information, news, it highlights when documents become out of date, issues quarterly newsletters, and the Board discusses current issues and changes, and develops joint working procedures. The council has a statutory requirement to be part of the Board.

Business Support is used efficiently to support the service

2.8   Business Support are used to support that Safeguarding function, particularly by entering safeguarding referral information taken and recorded in hard copy onto RAISE. This allows for Social Workers to maximise their time processing the referrals and the paper provides a physical reminder of a referral that needs action taken.

2.9   There is however the potential for inefficiency by using paper forms to record referrals as it requires another step for the referral to be taken on one form and then entered onto the system. There is the possibility that the process itself could be streamlined with a new system, such as with greater use of e-forms or other directly importable record taking formats.

Conclusions

3.0   The policies and procedures covered by the audit were in line with the requirements of the Children's Act 2004. The current process relies heavily on staff actions to ensure that cases are actioned with in required timescales and that all necessary information has been received and in a suitable format. When the new system is being put in place thought should be given to how the system can be configured to support those actions, such as being able to filter current cases in the management view that are approaching the 24 hour deadline for initial decision, or where there is an issue with the information on the system.

3.1   The service use the resources provided by the LSCB to support their working practices, and it is one of the sources of information available to the public and professionals from other organisations to promote the methods by which the council can be contacted with safeguarding concerns. Information regarding safeguarding contact details is also easily available on the council website, and the FIS website. There is however the potential that other sources of information, such as the FIS, can be used for enquires that do not need to be processed as a safeguarding concern. If customers are not directed to the correct service

at the correct time then the time available to devote to safeguarding processes may not be maximised.

Consideration should therefore be given to increasing the profile of the Family Information Service contact details on the council website to help ensure that people pick the right service to contact for their particular circumstance.

3.2 As part of the current system Business Support are effectively used to maximise the time that the social workers have to assess information that comes into them for safeguarding by assigning the job of entering information onto RAISE and cross matching against any prior records. There is however the potential that the system of recording information in one form and then manually entering the information onto the system could be less efficient than is possible. Attention should therefore be given to configuring the system for easy data input, such as e-forms or direct email imports while maintaining the process of checking for prior information on the system and minimisation of duplicate accounts.