

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Bi-Annual Safeguarding Update

Summary

1. At a meeting of the Committee in June 2012 Members agreed to receive a six monthly update on children's safeguarding issues. This sixth report updates the Committee on key local and national safeguarding developments since July 2014.
2. This report will address those issues that directly concern or relate to the delivery of the children's safeguarding arrangements by the Council. A report providing a wider multi agency safeguarding update is separately presented by Mr Simon Westwood, Independent Chair of York's Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Mr Westwood's next report to this committee is scheduled for the next Committee meeting.

Update

City of York – Children's Safeguarding Developments

3. Peer Challenge
As notified in the July 2014 update, a Peer Challenge by senior officers from other local authority children's services was conducted between the 14th and 17th of July 2014. The Peer Challenge in York was led by Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, Sheffield City Council; Dorne Collinson, Director of Children's and Families, Sheffield City Council and Clair Pyper, Interim Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families, Rotherham Borough Council. The process was managed and coordinated by Rob Mayall, Sector Led Improvement Manager, Yorkshire and the Humber.

4. The Peer Challenge process, developed for Children's Services across Yorkshire and the Humber region, was based on a peer review model designed by the Local Government Association (LGA). All 15 Local Authorities in the region are engaged in this peer challenge process. Across the region, two key areas of focus have emerged: Local Authority arrangements to safeguard and look after children and Local Authority processes for securing school improvement.
5. The Process
In York the team of 3 peer challengers spent a total of 9 person days examining the effectiveness of the children's Front Door (Referral and Assessment) arrangements.
6. The Peer Challenge process included: desk based analysis of documentation, interviews with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Chief Executive, the Local Safeguarding Children Board Chair and the Director for Children's Services, members of his senior team and an external consultant who had recently completed an audit of case files. Focus group activity took place with Heads of Service, the Duty Team, partners, Safeguarding Managers, Social Workers and colleagues representing children's voice, a number of case files were reviewed, alongside the respective responsible social worker.
7. The Findings
The peer challenge findings presented an overall encouraging picture of robust arrangements. Helpfully this exercise also served to highlight and confirm some areas for ongoing development. A summary of the strengths and areas for development includes;
8. Strengths
 - a ***strong shared strategic vision*** for the development and delivery of children's services is evident
 - there is a ***demonstrable commitment at all levels to continuous improvement***
 - there are ***strong and positive relationships with partners***, which have both longevity and substance
 - there is clear evidence of ***excellent practice to secure the voice of the child*** in casework and planning

- the team were ***impressed with the quality and range of information available*** for partners and families regarding available support and services.

9. Areas for Development

- need to ***further embed the recently revised performance management arrangements*** at the Front Door
- some ***excellent practice identified but not consistent across every case*** observed
- ***further investment needed in front line management*** of the referral and assessment service
- ***apply more rigorous monitoring of referral and assessment caseloads*** as some were observed to be too high.

10. It is right to recognize here also a specific comment made by the peer team in their feedback about the work of front line social workers:

“In our focus group activity and one to one conversations we saw many professional, committed and enthusiastic social workers willing to go that ‘extra mile’ to help children have better outcomes.”

11. The Response

This exercise and the very detailed feedback received confirmed the strengths of our local arrangements and also helped to further inform a continuous improvement plan [attached at Annex 1]

12. Progress against this continuous improvement plan is monitored by senior managers on a six weekly basis. As almost six months have now elapsed since the challenge event it is possible to report very significant progress against all of those areas identified for further development.

Developments in Children’s Social Care

13. The developments set out below relate to work undertaken to address the recommendations from the Peer Challenge and to the ongoing programme of work to further strengthen the City’s children’s safeguarding arrangements.

14. Referral and Assessment Arrangements

The July 2014 update to this committee described a heightened national focus on local authority arrangements to receive and respond to concerns for children and young people. These arrangements continue to be the subject of rigorous scrutiny by Ofsted through their new inspection framework.

15. In this context, in light of the Peer Challenge feedback 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 continued to review and strengthen our local referral and assessment arrangements. Since the July 2014 update the service has seen the introduction of a third referral and assessment team.

16. Through the wider reconfiguration of children's social care service it has been possible to establish a third referral and assessment team.

17. The rationale for this development included to:

- further reduce to appropriate levels individual social work caseloads
- increase to two weeks, the 'off duty' period for each team (this allows them to follow up and focus on those cases they received during their 'on duty' week)
- strengthen the management capacity to three service managers at the front door (providing critical overview and support of the activity at the front door)
- ensure that good practice is consistent across the service
- ensure that **only qualified social workers** receive and respond to calls where there are concerns for the safety or welfare of a child / young person (this arrangement is at the heart of our approach to making sure that every safeguarding referral receives an appropriate response)

18. The introduction of this third team supported by the work previously described in the July 2014 update;

- new telephony to ensure that any caller can speak directly to a qualified social worker.
- 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.
- introduction of a single assessment process to streamline the process and make it more child / family friendly

- has delivered a more robust and safer front door service for the City.

19. Improved Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Children's Social Care has established and embedded three 'Scorecards' relating to key safeguarding activity by its management group - these relate to the equitable and safe **allocation of case work**, the **supervision of staff** and the **quality assurance of work** for which they are responsible. The Scorecards do not provide case-level detail, but act as a flag to issues of concern. Accordingly, Red, Amber and Green markers are used to provide a visual overview to the limited data that they contain.

20. The **caseload scorecard** disaggregates by case type the average caseload of a Worker within a particular Team. Caseloads above 20 allocated children are flagged for risk. Directions of travel indicators act as a useful visual overview for month-by-month comparison. This Scorecard has prompted remedial action by Senior Leaders when caseloads have been of concern and is also a metric by which the outcome of a management intervention can be seen.

21. The **supervision scorecard** provides a comparison between required and actual supervision activity within each Team. Risk flagging has been set at a realistic level given the vagaries of sickness absence, leave and other mitigating factors. However, where the activity falls below what is required, the manager is expected to give a brief narrative account to explain the variance. As a result, the scorecard acts as a driver toward compliance with professional and employer supervision expectations. Poor performance can be promptly and robustly addressed.

22. Finally, the **audit scorecard**, records vital quality assurance activity within the Management Group. The scorecard ensures that this Group engages in some systematised quality assurance, with any variance in performance promptly and robustly challenged.

23. The use of the Ofsted SIF grades provides a useful indicator of the quality of casework activity, with case-level feedback provided to allocated Workers and their Managers and 'lessons learnt' to the wider Management Group"

24. Each of these scorecards is presented to the Cabinet Member for Children, the Independent Chair of the LSCB and the Director of Children's services on a monthly basis. A copy of the December scorecard pack is attached at Annex 2.
25. Senior Manager Observation of frontline Supervision
Professional social work supervision is the first line of quality assurance in children's social work practice. Beyond ensuring that such supervision takes place regularly (through the scorecard arrangements described above), it is essential that supervision provided is both compliant with our local policy and of a high quality.
26. A programme of annual direct observation of supervisions by senior managers was introduced in November 2014 and the findings from this activity will be reported to the LSCB.
27. Early indications are that these observations have found strong and compliant practice by safeguarding service managers. A further more detailed update will be included in the July 2015 briefing.
28. Establishment of Child in Need Teams
In January 2014 a new Child in Need service was established. Comprising three locality based teams this service is led by an experienced social work manager. The service has a very specific remit to lead, coordinate and deliver robust locality based support to:
- York children and young people who are assessed as children 'in need' under Section 17 Children Act 1989.

At present this amounts to 255 children and this makes up 80% of children known to the service.
 - Children subject to Child Protection Plans where it has been identified that a Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Time limited [SMART] intervention is required to improve outcomes.

At present this amounts to 59 children and 20% of the children known to the service.
 - Offering a SMART intervention to children who are at risk of being accommodated by Children's Social Care. This maximum 45 day intervention is offered whilst the Referral and Assessment Team complete the child's Single Assessment.

Since January 2014 this service has been offered to twenty families.

29. This service was reviewed and its impact evaluated in October 2014. The key findings confirmed that the service has:

- made a significant contribution to the continued reduction in the number of children becoming looked after
- significantly improved the quality and timeliness of support available to those children who reach a statutory threshold for social work services under Section 17 arrangements
- supported the sustained reduction in the caseloads of safeguarding social workers
- delivered outcomes that demonstrate more sustained improvements for the children and young people supported
- made a significant contribution Troubled Families Payment By Results targets
- consistently received positive feedback from services users and partner agencies during its first year of operation

30. The success of this model has been recognised regionally and other Local Authorities are seeking to replicate this approach. Although the model in York has now been confirmed as part of the newly configured Children's Social Care offer, a further evaluation is planned for summer 2015 and the outcome of this review will be included in the December 2015 update.

Looked After Children

31. The review period has continued to see progress against the Keeping Families Together strategy (previously presented to this Committee) with a continued overall reduction in the number of Looked After Children.

32. On 1st January 2014 there were 215 children looked after by the local authority. On 1st January 2015 this number had reduced to 199 looked after children.

33. A brief analysis of this cohort of children and young people highlights:

- 12 children placed for adoption who are likely to leave public care during 2015
- The number of children placed in external independent foster agency placements [IFA] (with an average annual cost of £48k) has increased from 8 on the 1st January 2014 to 18 on the 1st January 2015.
- These placements were required because the needs of the looked after children concerned could not be met within the York foster carer community. A review of our local fostering strategy is underway to develop a wider more resilient local fostering offer.
- Helpfully, all new IFA placements have been commissioned under a new regional White Rose local authority framework with reduced and set weekly rates. These placements are less expensive than those previously spot purchased. Many of these placements are within York's boundaries, therefore minimising disruption for the young people in relation to their school placements and their contact with family members.
- The number of young people placed in external residential placements (with an average annual cost of £166k) went from 11 at 1 January 2014 to 16 on 1st January 2015.

34. These figures broadly reflect a stabilising looked after children population over a 12 month period, in which the overall numbers have reduced. The number of planned care leavers equalling the number of new entrants.

35. The largest cohort remains 16-18 year olds with 44 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.

36. The next large cohort are young people aged 14-15 with 43 young people. This means that 14-17 year olds account for 43.7% of all looked after children and young people.

37. It is estimated that the looked after population may stabilise around the 190 - 210 during the next 6-12 months, if the number of new entrants remains constant with recent trends.
38. The overall City of York strategy for Looked After Children will be reviewed and refreshed in 2015. This strategy will be informed by extensive consultation with Looked After Children, their parents, local foster carers and all of those professionals who work with and support this group of children and young people.
39. The overall progress of our Looked After Children continues to be routinely reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Disclosure and Barring Service [DBS] Checks – Children’s Social Care

40. During 2014 the service introduced a new embedded process of regular review and scrutiny, ensuring safe recruitment and retention of staff. This process includes prompts to individual staff and robust management oversight to ensure every member of Children’s Social Care staff provides evidence that they have an up-to-date DBS clearance check on a three year cycle.
41. An audit undertaken in November 2014 confirmed that every member of Childrens Social Care staff has an up to date DBS clearance check.
42. These six monthly briefings will continue to include an update on this activity.

Recommendations

43. The Committee is invited to note:
 - i. The Peer Challenge outcomes and comment on the Local Authority’s response
 - ii. The Continuous Improvement Plan and receive further progress updates on this work
 - iii. The Improved Performance Monitoring and Reporting arrangements and receive a detailed analysis of this work in the July 2015 update
 - iv. The progress of the Child in Need service and receive a further evaluation report in the July 2015 update
 - v. The outcome of the most recent DBS audit and to receive future updates on this position as part of the six monthly reporting cycle.

- vi. 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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For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Continuous Improvement and Development Plan
Annexes 2a-2c - December Scorecard Pack

Abbreviations:

LGA - Local Government Association
OFSTED - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
SIF - Single Inspection Framework
SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time
LSCB - Local Safeguarding Children Boards
IFA - Independent Foster Agency
DBS - Disclosure and Barring Service