

## CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PANEL - 5 JUNE 2013

**Present:** Councillor Gavin (Chair)  
Councillors Ballsdon, D Edwards, Ennis, O'Connell,  
Ralph and Rynn.

**Also in Attendance:** Fiona Slevin-Brown and Karen Reeve.

**Apologies:** Councillor Lovelock; Avril Wilson.

### 1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 12 MARCH 2013

The Minutes of the meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

### 2. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - ANNUAL REPORT

Fiona Slevin-Brown, Locality Director Reading, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT), submitted a copy of the Looked After Children (LAC), Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire, Annual Report 2012/2013.

The report had been compiled on behalf of Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT) for presentation to the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) as the lead commissioners for LAC health services, local authority Parenting Panels and Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). The report would be submitted to the BHFT Quality Executive in accordance with statutory guidance that had been issued by the Department of Health. The report highlighted the health needs and issues for LAC, the responsibilities of BHFT in responding to these needs as the provider of the LAC Health team in line with statutory guidance and the service improvements which had taken place over the previous year.

The 2011/2012 report had set out the results of the integrated Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)/Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in Reading and the recommendations for the LAC service. The inspection plus the subsequent West Berkshire inspection in July 2012 had necessitated the immediate development of a LAC service improvement action plan for 2012/2013 which had since been monitored and shared monthly both internally within BHFT and externally with commissioners, local authorities and LSCBs.

The report stated that key service achievements during 2012/2013 included the following:

- Recruitment of an additional LAC nurse, increasing capacity of the LAC team;
- Development of drop-in sessions in collaboration with the sexual health outreach team;
- Development of age appropriate health promotion packs for children in their health assessment;
- Development, with the engagement of the Children in Care Councils, of a health passport which would be implemented in quarter one of 2013/2014;
- Improved communication and information sharing with all three local authorities in Berkshire West.

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The report stated that the service being offered to LAC and young people had changed significantly and had the potential to continue to improve. The work plan for the service for 2013/2014 would include the following:

- The further development of the child's voice in the delivery of the service and engagement with children and young people in care about how focus could be on health services to better meet their needs;
- Improvement in the times taken to develop the health plan following the initial assessment for children placed in care;
- Recruitment of an additional nurse post;
- Agreement with commissioners on the service specifications for 2013/2014;
- Evaluation of the quarterly record keeping audits and implementation of recommended service improvements;
- Reporting of key performance indicators for commissioners and stakeholders;
- Implementation of the Pan Berkshire Health of LAC Strategy.

In respect of the work plan Fiona explained that discussions were taking place between the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) and CCGs around the planning of initial health assessments being coordinated through the RBH, the assessments would also be carried out in a variety of settings which it was hoped would tackle the issues around the timeliness of assessments. Funding had also been agreed for an additional post which would help with the prioritisation of health plans and therefore address the delay between the initial health assessment being carried out and the production of the health plan; the aim was to have the health plan completed within 15 working days. Finally, Fiona told the Panel that she would be attending a meeting of the Children in Care Council in July 2013 to see how they could work better with them.

Fiona told the Panel that at the request of the LSCB a Reading specific summary would be produced and added to the front of the report; in fact a summary would be produced for each local authority.

The Panel discussed the report and a number of points were made including the following:

- The Panel expressed concern about the service children who were placed more than 20 miles out of the Borough were receiving in respect of initial health assessments and it was suggested that Sally Murray, Head of Commissioning - Children and Young People BHFT, should be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to explain how children placed out of the Borough were being supported;
- The Panel requested that the Action Plan that had been drawn up following the Ofsted inspection in May 2013 should include time frames and should identify the challenges faced by the service;
- Fiona told the Panel that going forward decisions would need to be made about the focus and themes of future reports and this could include health plans and the service provided for children placed out of the Borough.

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### AGREED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That Sally Murray, Head of Commissioning - Children and Young People BHFT, be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to explain how children placed more than 20 miles out of the Borough were supported in respect of their health;
- (3) That the Action Plan drawn up following the Ofsted inspection in May 2013 be amended to include time frames and identify the challenges faced by the service.

### 3. OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUMMARY

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, submitted a copy of the Ofsted Inspection Report of local authority arrangements for the protection of children in respect of the inspection that had taken place between 11 March and 20 March 2013. A copy of the Child Protection Ofsted Action Plan as at May 2013 was attached to the report at Appendix I.

Karen explained that the inspection that had taken place in March 2013 had been an unexpected and unannounced inspection and that the Council had been rated as adequate which meant that the service was doing what was required to keep children and young people safe. However, inspectors reported very clearly that they were pleased with the progress since the last inspection, noted how far the bar for 'good' had moved up since the last inspection and said that they saw evidence of innovation. The inspection had focused on front-line services with the inspectors shadowing social workers, health workers and the Children's Action Teams. No immediate actions had been required following the inspection and a number of the recommendations, that had to be completed within three months, had been assigned to the LSCB to address with other agencies, most notably Thames Valley Police, and included issues around the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the application of threshold criteria.

The Panel discussed the report and a number of points were made including the following:

- The inspection had considered that member scrutiny arrangements of children's safeguarding provision were weak but recognised that the introduction of the committee system of governance from the beginning of the 2013/2014 Municipal Year would address this by allowing detailed public scrutiny by committees comprising of members from all political groups;
- It was acknowledged that the regular inspection of the service although challenging was at the same time unsettling and detracted staff from the real purpose of their roles; an issue that had been recognised nationally;
- One of the challenges going forward would be measuring the quality of the services provided for children, ensuring that good practice became common

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practice and identifying what the service would look like to be judged as good;

- Overall, the Panel recognised that considering the impact on the child and the child's experience was the major concern.

### AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted;
- (2) That Children's Social Care staff be thanked for their continued hard work.

## 4. PERFORMANCE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INDICATORS

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, submitted a report setting out Management Information on Children's Social Care Services.

Karen highlighted a number of points in the report including the following:

- The report showed that the number of LAC at the end of April 2013 was 225;
- The percentage of children looked after on a care order was the lowest it had ever been;
- The percentage of LAC with an up to date care plan was 60.5% compared to a target of 100%, this was due to a combination of system problems and practice issues and would be addressed with the introduction of a new system in the coming months;
- The percentage of children that had been adopted from the authority was 17.09% in quarter four of 2012/2013 compared to a target of 12% although the timeliness of placements was 55% against a target of 80%;
- The number of children on Child Protection Plans had fallen from 205 in August 2012 to 165 in April 2013 although the percentage of children subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time stood at 38.1% compared to a target of 15%. However, a recent quality check had shown that in all cases children had been put back on plans for the right reasons.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

## 5. SAFEGUARDING ACTIVITY REPORT

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, submitted a copy of the Safeguarding Activity Report presenting an update of the key activity areas within children's social care and related services between January and the end of March 2013. A copy of the Social Work Taskforce Health Check as at April 2013 was attached to the report at Appendix I.

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### Performance Update

The headlines for the last quarter of 2012/2013 in relation to Child Protection matters were as follows:

- The number of children subject to child protection plans fell to 157 in March 2013, of note when compared with statistical neighbour averages although the neglect category in Reading was disproportionately higher;
- Work had been carried out to simplify and double check the visiting frequency for children subject to child protection plans and as a result the performance on social care indicators had been adapted to show the data in a more simplistic and understandable way. The three locality teams had also worked hard to address what was showing up as 'missed' visits, ie not done within ten days of the last, and had been able to find solutions to a number of issues which meant the percentage of 'good' visits had increased in February 2013 with only 2% of visits missed and in March 2013 only 1% had been missed.

The headlines for LAC indicated that the number of children looked after at the end of April 2013 was 225 a reduction from 234 at the end of the previous quarter. The last quarter had remained relatively stable, but the number of underlying new starting LAC was now showing a reduction. March 2012 had seen an annual cumulative total of 123 new entrants into care as opposed to only 85 by March 2013. Legal planning meetings had been robust and preventative services such as the Edge of Care initiative had been helpful in achieving this reducing trend.

The number of referrals had continued to show a slight decrease during January and February 2013 but had increased again in March 2013. The LSCB had challenged partner agencies to monitor the quality and appropriateness of their referrals to Children's Social Care. The numbers of both Initial and Core Assessments had continued to decrease throughout quarter four, compared to the previous quarter and the same quarter for the last year. This was due to the team applying the threshold criteria more robustly rather than partners reducing what they sent. Consistently good performance on the timeliness of assessments had continued to be a challenge and the annual target for Initial Assessments had been missed by 5.8% and for Core Assessments by 5.7%. However, performance on both was an improvement on the previous year.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had continued to be the main focus of activity for the 'Front Door' throughout quarter four. The service was becoming more embedded and had continued to have a positive impact in terms of building relationships with partner agencies, improved information sharing and fewer Initial Assessments in Access and Assessment which resulted in no further action. The lack of a Police presence continued to limit the effectiveness and scope of the MASH, and had been confirmed by the Ofsted inspection (see Minute 3 above).

### Team Updates

The Access and Assessment Team had continued to focus on the consolidation of the MASH and in the Fostering Team the overall percentage of LAC placed in family based placements had remained high when bench marked with statistical

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neighbours. For those children requiring foster placements this had still meant heavy dependence on Independent Fostering Agency providers but due to close liaison between the fostering duty service, children's social work teams and commissioning 74.8% had been placed within 20 miles of their home address. Work in the Adoption Team was focusing on staff retention and finding adoptive parents for children. The Edge of Care Service was settling into its new role within the department and the management team were actively supporting and motivating staff to work intensively with families.

### External Case File Audits

The fourth quarter saw the external case file audit take place as planned and the themes identified in the audit were already being addressed in the service.

### Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team

A key focus had been on reducing the high number of children that were subject to Child Protection Plans and there had been a reduction from 184 at the end of March 2012 to 157 at the end of March 2013. However, there still existed a higher number on plans than for statistical neighbours and a key focus for the next quarter would be reducing the number further, this would be achieved by the Child Protection Chairs being more robust in focusing on the thresholds for significant harm. An evaluation of the Signs of Safety approach to Child Protection conferencing was being carried out and the learning from the evaluation would be used to develop further the Signs of Safety model.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) had carried out 655 LAC reviews in the year April 2012 to March 2013 and a key focus had continued to be developing more direct involvement of children and young people in their own review meetings and to continue to build on the numbers of young people who chaired their own LAC reviews.

### Ofsted Inspection

March 2013 saw an unannounced inspection carried out by Ofsted into child protection and early help services provided in the Reading area (see Minute 3 above). This inspection was conducted just over a year after the last inspection and lasted for two weeks. The overall conclusion and report was published in April 2013 and the overall grade had been 'adequate'. However, inspectors reported very clearly that they were pleased with the progress since the last inspection, noted how far the bar for 'good' had moved up since the last inspection and said that they saw evidence of innovation.

Finally, the report stated that the workload of the service remained high and the pace of change continued at a sprint. However, there were definite signs of a possible slow down on LAC numbers and social work teams continued to manage the overall pressures well whilst endeavouring to reduce demand where it was able. Critical to the success of the service remained the need to reduce unwarranted referrals to the service.

**AGREED:** That the report be noted.

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### 6. OTHER BUSINESS

In response to a discussion on the need for training for Panel members to help them in their role as members of the Panel and to address an action raised by Ofsted following its inspection in March 2013 (see Minute 3 above), where an action had been set for the council to review member's awareness of child protection. Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, suggested that training could be arranged for members of the Panel and members of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee to cover areas such as how to make a referral, keeping yourself safe and the role of scrutiny with the aim of ensuring that the members of the Panel were effective in their role.

**AGREED:** That Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, arrange training on child protection for the members of the Panel and the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee.

(The meeting started at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.20 pm).

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