

CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PANEL - 10 SEPTEMBER 2013

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

Also in Attendance: Sally Murray (Items 1 & 2) and Karen Reeve.

Apologies: Fiona Slevin-Brown; Avril Wilson.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 5 JUNE 2013

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

2. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - HEALTH UPDATE

Sally Murray, Head of Commissioning - Children and Young People BHFT, submitted a report on behalf of Fiona Slevin-Brown, Director for Reading Locality, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT), providing the Panel with an update on the Health of Looked After Children (LAC) in the Borough.

The team had recruited another Specialist Nurse and this additional capacity would enable the service to improve the turnaround times for health plans following initial and review health assessments and to provide further support to children and young people placed out of area (OOA).

There had been 24 initial assessments across Berkshire West requested and completed in Quarter 1, and those not completed within the 28 days timescale were due to issues in accessing timely appointments with the GPs and delays in the process of referral between the local authority and the health service.

There had been 112 review assessments of Berkshire West LAC due to be completed in Quarter 1, and of those 17% were for children placed outside the 20 mile boundary, which would be completed by external health practitioners. Of the remaining 93 children under the direct responsibility of the Berkshire West LAC health team, 10 children had not received their assessment before their due date. The main reasons had been delayed communication with partners and challenges with capacity. The health team were working with the leadership of the health visiting and school nursing teams to ensure that any issues which might impact on timescales of reviews were escalated as a matter of urgency so an alternative arrangement could be put in place to ensure a child or young person always received their review assessment on time.

The start of the Paediatric led service had been delayed as new guidance required the provision of chaperones. This had now been resolved with two surgeries, in Lower Early and Whitley, being able to provide someone to chaperone children.

Fortnightly health drop-in zones had been developed in the three Unitary Authorities (UA) areas to ensure continued support for children and young people. Alongside this the team were able to offer additional hours in the drop-in sites to allow social workers and foster carers access to the service as needed. This activity would be monitored throughout the year to ensure that it met young people's needs and was the best use of resources.

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A care leaver's health passport had been developed and implemented in the last year with the intention of empowering young people to take responsibility for their own health.

Sally Murray reported on how children placed more than 20 miles out of the Borough were supported in respect of their health. The Panel had raised concerns as to how the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT), as lead commissioners for LAC health services, were able to monitor the quality of services provided out of Borough and what steps could be taken to address any concerns.

She explained that following the initial health assessment a report was sent to the Berkshire Health Team who would then write the child's Health Care Plan. If there were any health concerns the LAC Nurse would assess need and organise onward referrals. As commissioners, the BHFT maintained responsibility for monitoring and authorising payments for treatment out of Borough.

Previously the service had been variable, but had improved following the introduction of new national guidelines that included standardised paperwork and maximum tariffs and so there were no longer concerns with regard to quality. The main issue was the delays in accessing treatment in some areas, especially those that did not prioritise Looked After Children.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That further information with regard to the use of the health drop-in zones be provided by Fiona Slevin-Brown;
- (3) That a report be produced that clearly demonstrated outcomes of commissioned health care for LAC.

3. COUNCILLOR TRAINING

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, reported on the progress made in respect of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) action to review Councillors' awareness of child protection.

Following an audit of training attended by Councillors, a one-day training session had been arranged for 10 October 2013, which would include an introduction to Children's Social Care and Level 1 Safeguarding training on the same day. All Councillors would be encouraged to attend although priority would be given to those on the Panel, Parenting Panel and the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE) Committee. A further session would be run if required.

A workshop session on 'skills for scrutiny' had also been organised in December 2013 for Lead Councillors and their Advisors cross party. This would be led by the Office for Public Scrutiny with a remit to develop the skills that Councillors needed for scrutiny of child safeguarding/child protection in particular.

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Further training would also be provided for Panel members on Corporate Parenting, although the date for the session had not yet been confirmed. Karen Reeve suggested that a date allocated for a future Children's Safeguarding Panel meeting could be used for this.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted;
- (2) That dates for Councillor training be circulated.

4. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, submitted copies of the Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework and the Good Practice Standards for Children's Social Care. These had been produced following recognition that the Council were good at producing quantitative data, such as the Purple Book, but needed to further improve qualitative and consultative data.

The Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework set out proposals for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of practice, policies, and procedures, with the aim of improving services to achieve better outcomes for children and their families. These had been based on best practice and the work of three other local authorities that had been rated as excellent by Ofsted.

Quality assurance would help the Council to ensure and evidence that children were being kept safe from harm and were protected. It would help to improve outcomes for children and families by identifying gaps and problems within practice and services offered, by demonstrating what interventions worked for children and families and by highlighting good practice. It would also assist the service in ensuring that staff were supported in carrying out their jobs both safely and effectively.

Underpinning the Quality Assurance Framework was an understanding that continual improvement depended on a culture of reflection in action and reflection following action. This was then fed into the double learning loop for the practitioner, service and organisation so that they could re-think, plan appropriately and improve outcomes.

The scope of the framework covered quality assurance activity in the Multi-agency safeguarding Hub, the Access and Assessment Team, Locality Teams (including Leaving Care), looked after children, child protection and child in need cases including social work cases held within the Disability Team and cases held in the Edge of Care Service.

The framework would be supported by gathering the views and feedback from service users and practitioners, quantitative data from the Purple Book and service team data and qualitative data from audits, reviews and evaluations.

The framework would be implemented by a programme of activities and processes and would be regularly reviewed by the management team. Three forums would

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drive continual improvement and the embedding of the double learning loop in practice: monthly Audit Feedback and Moderation meetings, quarterly Performance and Quality meetings and twice yearly Performance and Quality workshops.

The Good Practice Standards for Children's Social Care document set out the standards of service that would be worked to and against which the Service would be measured in the quality assurance and performance framework. These standards were detailed as follows:

1. In all our activities, the child's best interests will come first.
2. In our assessments and work we aim to understand and improve the child's lived experience.
3. Work is carried out in partnership with parents and carers to enable them to meet their responsibilities and achieve the best outcomes.
4. Children have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.
5. In all our work, we will maintain an awareness of equal opportunities and the impact of discrimination.
6. We will work closely with other agencies to improve support that is offered to children, young people and families.
7. Work with children and families is undertaken within the legislative framework and makes use of best practice guidance.
8. Our records are accurate, complete and demonstrate the child's story.
9. Work with children is managed and supervised to achieve the best possible outcomes.
10. We treat children, families and our working partners with courtesy and respect.

This had been designed as a tool for social work managers to measure the quality of a child's engagement, rather than just the quantity, but it was acknowledged that further work was needed to ensure this was measured consistently.

Future reports to the Panel would contain less information in the Purple Book (although this data would still be monitored elsewhere) and be more focussed on the Quality Indicators than the Performance Indicators (see Item 6).

AGREED: That the report be noted.

5. AUDIT OF CHILDREN SUBJECT TO A SECOND CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services submitted a copy of a report on the quality audit of child protection conference decision making regarding children subject to Child Protection Plans for a second or subsequent time.

The average number of children subject to Child Protection Plans between 1 January 2013 and 31 May 2013 had been 166. Of those, 28 children (17%) had been made subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time, although due to sibling groups this represented 11 families. As the target for Reading was 14%, this audit had been commissioned as a result of the target being exceeded. In particular the audit had been tasked with checking:

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- If Child Protection Plans had been discontinued appropriately;
- If the thresholds for significant harm had been reliably met when children were made subject to Child Protection Plans for a second or subsequent time;
- The nature of work undertaken between periods of being subject to Child Protection Plans;
- If any key themes emerged from the audit including whether or not time between discontinuation and new Child Protection Plans was a factor.

Generally the audit found the reasons for making a child the subject of a subsequent child protection plan had been sound. There were no overarching themes or trends that had emerged from the cases audited, although in four cases there were lessons to feedback to the staff concerned; these focused on over optimism by the core groups about evidence of sustainability of the perceived progress.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

6. SAFEGUARDING ACTIVITY REPORT

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Social Care, submitted a copy of the Safeguarding Activity Report that presented an update of the key activity areas within children's social care and related services between April and the end of June 2013.

Quality assurance and performance management framework

In addition to the new quality assurance framework (QAF), the service had also developed a set of Quality Indicators (QIs), attached as Appendix A, to complement the Performance Indicators (PIs) that would help focus front line staff and managers to the quality issues that mattered most. The following two QIs would also be the corporate quality key indicators as they underpinned Ofsted expectations:

- The timeliness, progression and quality of LAC Care Plans;
- Percentage of cases where the child's lived experience was clearly recorded on the child's social care file.

External Case File Audits

Following the external case file audit, three cases had been graded as good and another three cases as adequate. No cases were graded as excellent or inadequate. It was noted that the LAC case had been graded as a low end adequate with areas of inadequate. The more recent work had brought it into the adequate range.

As planned, the way in which the overall experience of the child could be captured by the audits had been reviewed by the external auditor and the service manager in consultation with the Head of Service to develop a revised audit tool. This had also incorporated feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection and actions to address themes that had been identified as a result of the audits were underway.

Performance Update

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The headlines for the first quarter of 2013/14 in relation to child protection and looked after children related matters were as follows:

- The number of children subject to child protection plans fell to 153 in June 2013; although fluctuating slightly there was a downward trend. It was thought that this was largely down to the work to ensure more rigorous challenge of conference members as to the need for child protection plans as opposed to child in need plans;
- The numbers of Looked After Children at the end of June 2013 was 228 (including 4 unaccompanied asylum seeking children). This was a slight increase in the number at end of last financial year (226) but belied the fact that the numbers of new children was very high in June 2013;
- The numbers of LAC had fallen to 218 in July 2013, which was the lowest for four years;
- Sixteen children had entered care in June 2013, the second highest for June 2013 in eight years. However February to May 2013 had been quiet in comparison and the underlying trend was still a gradual underlying reduction in LAC numbers;
- The critical issue remained finding placements for around 60 children for whom adoption was still needed or about to be needed;
- The numbers of Initial and Core Assessments had also shown a slight increase in Quarter 1, compared to the previous Quarter. Timeliness of assessments had fallen over this Quarter and was being addressed as a matter of urgency. Contributing factors were staff shortages and an increase in Child Protection enquiries.

Team Updates

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had now been confirmed as a permanent team and work was underway to make permanent staffing appointments. Thames Valley Police had expressed a willingness to be actively engaged in the aspect of MASH that dealt with domestic abuse. They had also created a specific post within the TVP for domestic abuse assessments. Karen Reeve had received a request from West Berkshire Council to join the MASH, and hoped that Wokingham Borough Council would now also engage as it was more efficient for all agencies to work through a single hub.

The Access and Assessment Team (A&A) continued to experience staffing difficulties, at both the Assistant Team Manager and Social Work levels, although two new Social Work appointments had been made.

Family Placement services (Fostering & Adoption) update:

- Overall the percentage of looked after children placed in family based placements had remained high, at 80%, when benchmarked with statistical neighbours;
- Placement stability had been good, with only 1.3% of children having had more than three moves in the first quarter;

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- There had been a dip in the overall percentage of children in long term stable placements in March and May, though this had increased again to 68.8% in June 2013;
- Work was being done currently to identify those who had left long term Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster placements, those leaving Council carers and the reasons. This would enable any themes to be pursued;
- Due to sustained close liaison between the fostering duty service, children's social work teams and commissioning, 72.4% of LAC had been placed within 20 miles of their home address as of the end of June 2013;
- A new target had been established to concentrate activity on increasing the numbers of Council foster carers offering "main" placements by 10 or more in the current financial year. Previously the numbers included respite, short break and day carers which did remain an important resource, but their numbers did not impact on those children who required Council rather than IFA "main" placements;
- The overall timeliness of assessments of new carers had been sustained this quarter;
- There had been a sustained high level of recruitment activity represented by the 65 initial enquiries received since the beginning of April 2013 but the significant fall out rate at each stage identified the need to maintain a high level of initial contact to generate actual approvals. The Council's conversion rate was 18:1, whereby 18 enquiries produced one approved new carer, which was in line with comparators;
- Staff recruitment and retention in the fostering service remained an ongoing challenge.

Adoption:

- Staff appointments to vacant posts meant that the team was at full establishment for the first time in at least two years. Retention was therefore a key objective;
- The Adoption Team performance compared well in most respects to the national averages and was currently on target to equal or exceed the performance of the previous year by achieving 18 adoptions. However, family finding remained a substantial challenge in the Borough;
- Seventy three children had a plan for adoption;
- Fourteen new adopters were approved in the last year, although the timeliness of these assessments was not good with only six achieved within the regulatory eight months;
- To date this year four new adopters had been approved, which meant that the Council was on target to equal or exceed last year's performance. Timeliness of these assessments remained an issue and would require substantial improvement to meet the six month timescale set out in the 2013 Regulations.

The draft report from the Ofsted inspection of the Fostering and Adoption Teams should be published by the middle of September 2013 and so a report would be prepared for the ACE Committee.

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Update from the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team

- Staffing remained stable with a full compliment of staff to chair Child Protection Conferences, LAC Reviews, Foster Carers annual reviews and undertake Regulation 33 visits;
- A key focus had been on reducing the high number of children that were subject to Child Protection plans with quality audit activity and Chairs having a more explicit focus on the thresholds for significant harm;
- An evaluation of the Signs of Safety approach to Child Protection conferencing had been undertaken throughout April 2013 and the feedback from family members had been very positive.

Ofsted Inspection

Work had continued on the Ofsted action plan and good progress had been made including the development of the aforementioned quality framework. Training would be offered to every Councillor (see Item 3).

AGREED: That the report be noted.

7. EDGE OF CARE SERVICE UPDATE

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, submitted a copy of a report that outlined the development and progress of the Edge of Care Service, based on the objectives set within the Edge of Care Strategy and highlighted future aims.

The Edge of Care strategy had a specific focus on minimising the need for children to become looked after by supporting families to stay together where it was in the child's best interests and wherever it was safe to do so.

The delivery of this strategy was predicated on effective joint working across team and service boundaries and the understanding that individual teams and practitioners must work in co-operation with each other to provide a seamless service to the family.

The Edge of Care team had been developed out of the Family Intervention Project (FIP) and, following careful recruitment, the team now had family workers with a range of additional skills and practice influences. In light of this clear multi discipline benefit, the team would share knowledge across the service and would be expected to support colleagues as advisors.

A targeted and assertive approach meant that families would be asked to meet and work with team members on three to four sessions per week. This was more intensive than the old FIP, but results were expected over a shorter period of time. Families worked through an agreed plan which had clear expectations and realistic targets. This, and a system of planning work allocations within two days of referral, meant that the activity of engaging the family could start sooner and that decisions on child safeguarding could be more timely.

The development of the Family Enablement Panel (FEP) to assist in progressing complex and stuck cases had already proved effective in helping agencies and

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practitioners come together to assist children and families. The terms of reference for this panel were appended to this report. The panel met fortnightly and, combined with the Turnaround Families agenda, encouraged agencies to work closely to reduce risk and stabilise children's circumstances - so as to prevent cases moving towards higher tier services and care.

Targeting neglect would be a focus over the coming months as Reading had higher numbers of children subject to Child protection plans under this category than both nationally and compared to statistical neighbours. Assertive and early outreach could improve children's circumstances and the Edge of Care team would then be able to develop steps to sustainability with their partners.

Edge of Care had taken on managing and developing the Council's Family Group Conference (FGC) service and had set out a new Service Level Agreement with West Berkshire Council to share this resource. There was an immediate referral pathway to FGC coordinators, which could be used consistently when supporting children towards higher tier services, or towards the child protection or Court planning process.

To assist in the development of sustainability programmes it was intended to work with the voluntary sector to assess where they might be able to further assist in supporting families during and beyond child protection planning.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

8. OFSTED ACTION PLAN

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, submitted a copy of the Child Protection Ofsted Action Plan as at 9 August 2013. This report included the Ofsted recommendations, the proposed actions and the RAG rating. All actions were either Green (completed) or Amber (on track for completion) except for one that required action from Thames Valley Police, which might be attributed to a change of staff at TVP. A further update would be provided for the ACE Committee.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Karen Reeve reported that HMI and Ofsted were currently undertaking a joint Thematic Inspection of Child Protection and Safeguarding that included the Youth Offending Service. The Inspection included inspections of six local authorities and would be looking for examples of good practice to report nationally. Feedback would be provided if there were any areas of concern, otherwise the report would be published during summer 2014.

(The meeting started at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.00 pm).

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