

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

**Also in Attendance:** Penny Cooper, Avril Wilson and Karen Reeve.

## **1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 21 NOVEMBER 2013**

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

## **2. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND QUARTERLY SAFEGUARDING REPORTS**

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, submitted a copy of the Safeguarding Activity Report for the third quarter of 2013/14. This report provided an update of the key activity areas within children's social care between September 2013 and the end of December 2013 using an overview of how social care was performing with regard to its core quality and performance framework.

The service had rated itself as amber across the board against a 'good' benchmark on the key Quality Indicators (QIs) with some areas of continuing improvement. This judgement was reached using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The ratings given against each QI were detailed in a table attached to the report at Appendix A, the External and Internal Case File Audits were attached to the report at Appendix B and C and the Supervision Audit of Service Managers Records was attached to the report at Appendix D.

### **Children's Services Key Quality Indicators**

Children's Social Care now used a set of seven key QIs to complement the performance indicators (PIs) underpinned by the new practice standards that had been introduced to social workers in September 2013. These standards acted as a tool for managers supervising front line social work, a benchmark for practice and focused scrutiny on the child's lived experience and tracked the child's journey through the whole of the children's system.

Quality and Performance meetings (QAPM) were held quarterly and chaired by the Head of Children's Services (HoCS). These meetings scrutinised activity, agreed actions arising from quality assurance with team managers and held managers to account for performance in the previous quarter. The meetings also collated the evidence used to make judgements on the RAG rating given against each of the following indicators:

- QI1 - Timeliness, progression and quality of Child Protection Plans;
- QI2 - Purposeful and timely visits to children allocated to Children's Social Care;
- QI3 - The timeliness, progression and quality of Looked After Children (LAC) Care Plans;
- QI4 - The timeliness and progression of children's Permanency Plans;

- QI5 - Percentage of cases with up to date, good quality assessments completed;
- QI6 - Percentage of cases where the child's lived experience was clearly recorded on the child's Social Care file;
- QI7 - Timeliness and quality of social work supervision.

### **Children's Performance Indicators**

The report stated that 168 children had been the subject of a Child Protection Plan at the end of December 2013. Work continued to ensure that thresholds remained consistent and that partner agencies completed work at the earliest stage to prevent escalation of issues into child protection concerns.

There had been 213 Looked After Children (LAC) at the end of December 2013, including five unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This continued the reducing trend from a total of 226 LAC at the end of March 2013.

The number of LAC who had experienced more than one social worker within 6 months had increased from 25.5% to 31.1%. This was an area of focus for the Recruitment and Retention strategy to ensure that children were able to form trusting working relationships with their named social worker.

### **Peer Safeguarding Review**

A Peer Safeguarding Review had been undertaken in December 2013 by four peers from outside the authority. They had scrutinised a number of safeguarding cases and the feedback had been positive, especially in relation to the staff. The review concluded that the Service was clear about what needed to be done to ensure consistent improvement in front line practice and their recommendations would be incorporated into the Service Plan.

### **Principal Social Worker Project**

The purpose of this project was to ensure that the voice of frontline social workers was channelled to Senior Managers and to the Government. It had been decided that it would be more effective to have a group of social workers rather than just one principal social worker as this would access a broader view across the service.

### **Service User Evaluation**

A pilot of planned straw polls had been carried out in January 2014 with three parents of children with Child Protection Plans and three foster carers. The pilot had given valuable insight into the methodology and plans were underway to carry out 18 straw polls each month across the Service.

### **Audits**

Regular case file audits were carried out by an external auditor and by managers. Some were chosen at random and others were thematic reviews. Work was

underway on benchmarking to ensure consistency of assessments across the management team.

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

### **3. FAMILY PLACEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Jean Ash, Service Manager - Family Placement, submitted a report providing the Panel with information regarding the performance of the Council's Fostering and Adoption Services.

The report stated that at the end of November 2013, 79% of LAC were in family based placements, which was high when benchmarked with statistical neighbours. Close liaison between the Fostering duty service, Children's Social Work teams and the Commissioning section had enabled 71.4% of LAC to be placed within 20 miles of their home address. The number of children in long term care had fallen from 69.7% in April 2013 to 53.3% in December 2013, but the number of children having had more than three placements in the current reporting year had been 10 in December 2013, compared to a monthly average of 7.9.

#### The Fostering Service Performance

The age profile for LAC within the Council had changed so that there were fewer children under the age of 5 and more children aged 16 and over. The numbers of children aged 5-15 had remained constant. The increase in older children had not been matched by the profile of foster carers and so resources had been transferred within the Fostering Service to add another dedicated worker to the expansion and re-launch of the Supported Lodgings Scheme for these children. A review of the Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme was looking at how best to support more foster carers, particularly those offering placements to teenagers.

A new target had been established to produce a net increase, over the financial year, of 10 more foster carers offering main placements. This had been supported by intensive recruitment activity during Fostering Fortnight in May 2013 and Black History month in October 2013 and by sustained timeliness of assessments of new carers. This target would not be met this year as although carers had been recruited, they could not be approved until after April 2014.

The significant fall out rate of potential foster carers at each stage identified the need to maintain a high level of initial contact to generate actual approvals, which had been difficult with four staff vacancies within the team. Recruitment in both Fostering and Adoption Services had continued to be challenging, especially with neighbouring authorities offering more competitive salaries.

#### The Adoption Service Performance

The team were fully staffed for the first time in two years and so retention was a key priority. There had been a 30% increase in the numbers of adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) since December 2012, but timeliness of adoptive placements had increased with a higher percentage taking more than eight months to be placed. This reflected the history of the children, many of

whom had been 'hard to place' and the fact that most children required adoptive placements out of the Borough.

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

#### **4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - HEALTH UPDATE**

Penny Cooper, Head of Children and Families - Reading, Berkshire Health Care Foundation Trust, submitted a report on the health component of the LAC service for the period from October to December 2013, Quarter Three.

The report gave an overview of the staffing, roles and responsibilities of the LAC Health Team. The main objective for the service continued to be to complete 100% of all Initial Health Assessment (IHA) and Health Care Plans within 20 days of the child or young person coming into care. 100% of the IHAs had been completed within the 28 day timescale, but only 74% of Review Health Assessments. The latter figure had been affected by delayed assessments for children placed out of the area (OOA) as removing these children from the figures increased this statistic to 92%.

The report detailed a number of key highlights for the period including the following:

**Care Leavers** - The LAC Health Team had established 'Health Drop-in' sessions fortnightly at Hamilton Road Children's Centre, where the Leaving Care Team was based. These sessions enabled young people and their carers to see the specialist nurses for information and resources to promote healthy lifestyles and also actively supported young people who were reluctant to access health services.

**Engagement with Foster Carers** - The team had provided five training sessions for foster carers in Reading and had been invited to the induction of new foster carers. They continued to actively promote access to the LAC Health Team for foster carers to feel appropriately supported in being able to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

**Professional Collaboration** - The LAC health team had been proactive in establishing and building good working relationships with a variety of professionals to support shared knowledge and skills and also shared experiences.

**Participation** - Wherever possible the LAC health team ensured that they had a presence at all the local celebration events for LAC and at the National Care Leavers week.

**Audit** - The service was to audit Health Assessments and Health Care Plans on a six monthly basis to ensure they continued to improve and achieve the standard in line with national guidance. The audit for the third quarter of the current year had been completed and had evidenced improvements with regards to the way in which documentation and information gathered at the Initial Health Assessments was used to inform the Health Care Plan.

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

## 5. ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE - EFFECTIVE SCRUTINY AND GOVERNANCE

Avril Wilson, Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services, submitted a report that proposed changes to the future role of the Children's Safeguarding Panel and the Adult's Safeguarding Panel.

The Children's Safeguarding Panel was a body that had been established as part of the overall improvement plan following the Joint Area Review in 2009. Its purpose had changed so that it now focussed on building backbench expertise in children's safeguarding, developing a cross-party consensus on 'difficult' issues and as a scrutiny mechanism that held the lead Councillor and Director to account.

The Adult Safeguarding Panel had been developed in 2012 to mirror the functions of the Children's Safeguarding Panel, but it was anticipated that the new Care Bill would lead to guidance or regulation on accountability at both member and officer level.

Feedback from both the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) Inspection of February 2013 and the Local Assurance Test of March 2013 had advised that the Council moved to a system of public scrutiny of children's safeguarding functions, which could be provided within the current Committee system that had been implemented in May 2013.

It was proposed to retain the two safeguarding panels and call meetings as required for the purposes of discussing serious case reviews or scrutinising internal or external providers where complex whole systems issues arose. The Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE) Committee would receive performance information and reports on safeguarding issues, some of which might be Part II agenda items, and as a decision making body would be able to hold the lead Councillor and Director to public account for the robustness of local child protection systems.

The Panel discussed the report and expressed their concern that safeguarding would not be given sufficient consideration with the ACE Committee only meeting three times during the Municipal Year and whether the Committee had the capacity to deal with the additional responsibility. Councillor Gavin agreed to consider the issues raised.

### AGREED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That Councillor Gavin consider the issues raised.

(The meeting started at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.10pm)

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