

Annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding children by Southend Council's children's social care services

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council with information in order to give assurance about the functioning and effectiveness of the safeguarding of children and young people by children's social care
- 1.2 To support members to discharge their safeguarding duties in relation to children and young people
- 1.3 This report should be read alongside the annual report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report is noted and the priority areas for improvement for 2015/16, as detailed in section 12, are agreed

3. Background

- 3.1 Children's social care service is the lead service area responsible for discharging the council's duties to assess need and to protect children assessed to be at risk of suffering, or suffering, significant harm. This duty is discharged in partnership with all Departments within the Council and partner agencies such as health, education, police, probation and the third sector.
- 3.2 Our statutory duties are contained within the Children Act 1989, subsequent legislation and statutory guidance such as the Children Act 2004 and Working Together 2013.
- 3.3 The service responds to approximately 2000 referrals a year and as at 31st October 2014 there were 164 subject to a child protection plan, an increase of 56 on 31st October 2013, 525 Children in Need, including 200 allocated within the Children with Disabilities Team (a disabled child is defined by the Children Act as a child in need), a decrease of 112 on 31st October 2013. In addition there were 230 Looked After Children, a decrease of 25 when compared to 31st October 2013.

- 3.4 Case holding Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) registered children's social workers, across 7 teams, are the lead professionals for children in need, children in need of protection, children in care and care leavers from 20 weeks gestation to 25 years of age.
- 3.5 The activity and performance in relation to Looked After Children was reported to Cabinet in September 2014 in the Corporate Parenting Annual Report. The report included information relating to safeguarding such as the quality of placements for Looked After Children and children missing from care.

4. Performance

- 4.1 Performance continues to be good and is stronger than when this report was last presented and stronger than the out turn performance for 2013/14.
- 4.2 The service continues to use a suite of performance information which is monitored by managers across the service including the Department Management Team, Children's Services Management Team and Fieldwork Services Management Team. Key safeguarding indicators are also monitored by the Corporate Management Team and People's Scrutiny Committee. In addition safeguarding performance is regularly reported to our strategic partnership groups; the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Success for All Children Group.
- 4.3 The impact was seen during 2013/14 of the use of interrogating performance data to understand the low numbers of children subject to child protection plans in April 2013. Practice was amended in relation to the use of Child Protection Plans when children was subject to pre-proceedings under the Public Law Outline and this is one reason why we can now see an increase in the numbers of children subject to plans.
- 4.4 Throughout the year we have used our performance data to assist with monitoring to ensure that child protection reports are shared with parents in advance of the conference. In addition, we have monitored the data relating to Looked after Children's Review minutes being circulated in a timely manner.
- 4.5 As reported in 2013; we continue to proactively use our performance data to benchmark our performance against our statistical neighbours, eastern region local authorities and the national average. Our comparative performance continues to be at or above the national and regional average in relation all indicators other than the recording of visits to children subject to child protection plans.

5. Quality Assurance

- 5.1 Quality Assurance within children's social care is an area of strength. The revised quality assurance framework, implemented in April 2013, has been further revised to ensure the framework aligns with the new Ofsted Single Inspection Framework. All managers from team manager to Corporate Director undertake monthly case file audits and they are supported by a team of highly skilled external auditors. The external auditors are experienced social work practitioners many of whom have held senior positions within statutory children's social work. The framework incorporates audits of the files of foster carers, adoptive parents, supervised contact and assessments undertaken at the Marigold Family Resource Centre.
- 5.2 The outcomes of the audit activity is reported on a monthly basis by the Group Manager for Quality Assurance and this is reviewed by Group Managers and the Head of Children's Services. This is reported on a quarterly basis to the Departmental Management Team. It is pleasing to note that the findings of external auditors continue to correlate with those of internal auditors which gives assurance that we know ourselves well.
- 5.3 With a focus on improving practice we have undertaken regular audits of case recording and practice. These audits have involved the case holding social worker meeting with the auditor. This has ensured maximum learning and additionally helps to prepare for inspection.
- 5.4 Audit activity enables us to identify areas of challenge and take action to make improvements. Improvements have been seen in relation to referral and assessment process, child protection cases and child in need cases. Planning and management oversight is stronger. Continued areas of challenge include the recording of supervision, stand alone care plans for Looked After Children and capturing the activity of independent reviewing officers on case files.
- 5.5 The LSCB undertake multi-agency quality assurance activity and this is reported to the LSCB Executive and monitored by the LSCB Monitoring Sub-group. This activity is detailed in the LSCB annual report.

6. Summary of strengths of strengths and challenge

- 6.1 Based on performance monitoring and quality assurance the table below details out identified strengths and areas for improvement.

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thresholds are well understood and consistently applied ▪ Conversion rate of referral to assessment ▪ Management Decisions on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistent recording of statutory visits to children in line with their child protection plan ▪ Sharing of reports with families in good time for

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> referrals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment timescales ▪ Reduction in re-referral rate ▪ Timeliness of Child Protection Case Conferences ▪ Timeliness of Initial Core Groups ▪ Reported increased confidence of practitioners in reporting CSE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistency in the quality of assessments ▪ Maintain improvements in the recording of core group meetings ▪ Develop use of consistent set of assessment tools
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7. Voice of the child

- 7.1 Children's social care actively work to ensure children and young people are able to influence service delivery both in relation to their individual cases and overarching themes. We are able to capture this work through a number of methods.
- 7.2 Audit activity shows the views of children and young people is an area of strength in case work conducted by social workers.
- 7.3 We have continued to send questionnaires to a selection of children about their social workers twice a year. The responses are incorporated into social workers continued professional development (CPD) supervision and overarching themes are pulled into a report which is shared with the service and with individual workers.
- 7.4 The strong areas coming through the feedback is that children and young people continue to feel that their social worker takes them seriously, they can get hold of them and that they see them alone. Children and young people have continued to report they would like to see their social worker being better at keeping to agreed appointments and being on time.
- 7.5 A social work workshop is being held in November 2014, and a second in February 2015, to share the findings from the questionnaires sent to children, the 'Are we Keeping our Pledge' survey sent to Looked After Children, outcomes from audits relating to the voice of the child and learning from complaints and comments. This will support practitioners to change their practice in direct response to feedback from children and young people.
- 7.6 Work continues to support more young people to attend, where appropriate, their Child in Need meetings and Child Protection Conferences. We are contributing to work being undertaken across the Eastern Region in relation to this.

8. Workforce

- 8.1 As reported in 2013; the recruitment of experienced social workers is a challenge being experienced on a national basis.
- 8.2 We currently have a small number of social work vacancies which are being recruited to within children's social care. In 2013/14 the vacancy rate reduced to 10.1% against a vacancy rate of 12.5% in 2012/13. We currently have 11 vacancies filled by appropriate agency social workers. This equates to 10% of the social work establishment. This is higher than we would wish however it compares well both regionally and nationally. In an attempt to work more collaboratively across the eastern region all directors of children's services have signed a memorandum of cooperation to manage issues such as costs and retention of agency social workers
- 8.3 Over the past year recruitment activity has continued to include speaking at national conferences and regular recruitment activity. It is hoped that the contract with a new recruitment provider will lead to a reduction in the use of agency social workers.
- 8.4 We no longer sponsor staff to complete the degree or masters level qualification required in order that they may practice as a social worker. This is due to the fact we experience no challenge in recruiting newly qualified social workers and there is no longer a business case for sponsoring employees.
- 8.5 We continue to support and develop skilled practitioners and this is an area of strength. This activity is underpinned by the 'Workforce for Excellence' Strategy. The impact of training is assessed by practitioners and their line managers 3 months and 6 months after the training has taken place. This enables us to refine and amend the training on offer. In September 2014 88.2% of qualified social workers held a Post-qualifying award or were undertaking a course at a Higher Education Institution to obtain one. Post-qualifying awards build towards Masters level qualifications.
- 8.6 We commission training based on identified need. Need is identified from learning from case reviews and areas identified regionally and nationally. Training to be commissioned in 2015 will include the impact of neglect, chairing meetings and assessing risk where suicidal ideation is present.
- 8.7 Practitioners continue to report they feel well supported and that managers are accessible to them. The impact of the changes to the Public Law Outline and increased numbers of children subject to child protection plans upon practitioners has been identified as resulting in an increased workload for social workers and ways of offering additional support are being explored.

- 8.8 The quality assurance framework has identified that the quality of the recording and frequency of case work supervision continues to be inconsistent. Additional administrative support has been put in place and a recently recruited Practice Manager will focus on delivering CPD supervision to the Care Management part of Fieldwork Services.
- 8.9 Our continued investment in our staff continues to assist in succession planning and internal promotions, following competitive interview, have been made to an interim Service Manager, Service Manager and 4 Senior Practitioner posts during the last year. We do however recognise the benefit of recruiting externally to bring new skills, experience and ideas to the council.
- 8.10 In September 2014, Sue Hadley retired as Head of Children's Services and we are extremely grateful for her significant contribution to improving Children's social care. John O'Loughlin has replaced Sue as Head of Children's Services.

9. Local Authority Designated Officer

- 9.1 The Local Authority Designated Officer, LADO, is a statutory position within each local authority. The LADO manages allegations made against adults working or volunteering with children. The threshold was amended in Working Together 2013 and the criteria now includes adults who 'behave towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk to children' replacing the criteria 'behaved towards a child in a way which indicates that s/he is unsuitable to work with children.'
- 9.2 In 2013/14 40 allegations were made requiring 79 management planning meetings and 2 formal consultations. This is a reduction of 2 allegations from 2012/13 but a reduction of management planning meetings of 17. The LADO has identified that the second half of 2012/13 had a broadly equivalent level of activity as the first half of 2013/14. Activity is reported to, and monitored by, both Children's Services Management Team and the LSCB.
- 9.3 As with 2012/13, the majority of referrals were made by children's social care followed by the Police and then education.
- 9.4 Timeliness of the completion of investigations reduced during 2013/14 with 41% being resolved within 1 month in comparison with 67% in 2012/13 and 69% being completed within 3 months compared with 93%. The main reasons behind the reduction in performance were beyond the control of the service; an increase in complexity of investigation and ongoing criminal investigations with consideration being given to prosecution.
- 9.5 51% of cases were found to be unsubstantiated and 49% were substantiated. This is broadly comparable to the outcomes in 2012/13.

9.6 The work of the LADO is reported twice a year to the Departmental Management Team.

10. National and Local Issues

10.1 Inspection Framework

- 10.1.1 There has been no change to the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework since the last annual report
- 10.1.2 We continue to have an inspection planning group which meets regularly and is chaired by the Corporate Director of the Department for People (DCS). Since the last annual report the self-assessment against the inspection framework has been completed and updated.
- 10.1.3 Some inspections will take place at the same time as inspections undertaken by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Probation and Prisons. These will be aligned inspections rather than joint inspections.
- 10.1.4 In December 2013 Ofsted conducted their first thematic inspection of early help in Southend. The report from the thematic inspections, conducted in 12 Local Authorities, has not yet been published. The feedback from inspectors at the end of the inspection included that they were confident that threshold for social care intervention was applied consistently and was well understood, that decision making at point of referral was robust and that children are safeguarded.

10.2 Domestic Abuse

- 10.2.1 Domestic Abuse continues to be a priority for the Council and the LSCB.
- 10.2.2 The multi-agency Joint Abuse Domestic Abuse Triage Team, JDATT, remains based within the First Contact Service. It has expanded since the last annual report and the team now comprises of children's social care, police and probation and supports improved decision making when notifications are received of incidents of domestic abuse where children are present or may be at risk.
- 10.2.3 We have commissioned Nigel Boulton, who developed and implemented Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs across London and in many other Local Authorities to undertake a scoping exercise to support a decision as to whether Southend Council should develop a MASH. This work is being overseen by the Department for People

major project board, the domestic abuse strategic group and the LSCB.

- 10.2.4 Discussions have taken place in relation to expanding the JDATT further however no action is being taken until a decision has been made about implementing a MASH
- 10.2.5 The LSCB undertook an audit of domestic abuse and identified a small number of concerns with the process of recording information relating to domestic abuse notifications. These issues have been addressed and are monitored by the LSCB.
- 10.2.6 Refreshed training in relation to Domestic Abuse, including joint training with adult services, is to be commissioned which will incorporate learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews and Serious Case Reviews where appropriate.

10.3 Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children

- 10.3.1 Increased focus has been given to service delivery for missing children and children at risk of, or being, sexually exploited over the last 12 months and it remains a priority for the Department and the LSCB.
- 10.3.2 The Group Manager for Quality Assurance attends the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Strategic Group for CSE which develops the overall plan for CSE across the area and monitors its implementation. He also chairs the LSCB CSE and Missing Group which implements the strategic plan in Southend.
- 10.3.3 A dedicated worker, based within Integrated Youth Support Services but matrix managed by the child protection and safeguarding co-ordinator, completes return home interviews for all missing children including Looked After Children other than those children placed at a significant distance from Southend. For those children who are placed a significant distance from Southend the allocated Social Worker undertakes return home interviews. Following the implementation of these arrangements performance on the completion of return home interviews has greatly improved.
- 10.3.4 Southend social workers worked in cooperation with Essex Police on Operation Dartford. This was the first CSE trial in Essex. A successful outcome was achieved with two men being convicted and receiving substantial custody sentences. The Court and Police publicly acknowledged the professional support the young victims received from our staff.

10.3.5 An additional significant investigation, involving an escort service based in Southend, is currently on-going. The investigation is called Operation Cobham and it is being progressed under the SET Complex and Organised Abuse procedures.

11. Challenges to the Service

- 11.1 The recruitment of social workers with more than 2 years' experience of frontline statutory children's social work remains a challenge. We continue to use experienced agency social workers to mitigate against this this is an expensive option.
- 11.2 We currently have one Team Manager post and two independent reviewing officer posts covered by agency workers. These posts are extremely difficult to recruit to.
- 11.3 The age profile of team managers and reviewing officers, where 50% are over 50 years of age will be a challenge in relation to succession planning however our 'Workforce for Excellence' strategy will assist with this.
- 11.4 The increase in numbers of children subject to child protection plans, an increase which has occurred in all but one of the 11 Local Authorities that make up the Eastern Region, places additional workload pressures on Fieldwork Services.
- 11.5 The impact of the increase in numbers of children subject to child protection plans is compounded by the increase in workload due to the revised Public Law Outline. Public Law cases are now being listed by the Courts to conclude within 20 – 26 weeks which gives the social work teams little capacity to respond to unexpected events and emergencies on cases.
- 11.6 Changes to the commissioning of health services for children are not yet embedded and there is not yet a children's commissioner in post in the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 11.7 The increased understanding of how to identify and respond to young people who are at risk of, or are being, sexually exploited has identified the potential need for additional resource in this area. The work is demanding and resource intensive. This is currently being explored.
- 11.8 We are aware that the bar has been raised in relation to achieving Good or better for safeguarding children under the Single Inspection Framework. Additionally the 33 inspections where the inspection reports have been published indicate that large shire counties are more likely to achieve a grading of Good than other types of Local Authorities.

12. Overall summary

- 12.1 Performance in the service continues to be strong and, supported by the robustness of the LSCB, we continue to deliver an effective safeguarding service. This was externally validated by Ofsted in December 2013 during the thematic inspection of early help.
- 12.2 We know the areas in which we need to focus effort to make improvements. Identification of these areas is supported by the strength of our quality assurance framework which results in both early identification and rapid action. The priority areas for 2015 are summarised in the table below

Priority Improvement	Action
Sharing of reports in good time for meetings	Monthly reporting (new report) by worker and team Changes to be made to Looked After Child care plan form to capture the activity Further training for social workers
Improved recording to capture the quality of supervision	Dedicated administrative support to be embedded Audit of CPD supervision Manager workshop to be held
Improve consistency of the quality of assessment	Suite of assessment tools to be developed for practitioners Training on use of new tools in assessment and evidence (Court work)
Consistently timely recording of statutory visits to children	Consideration to continuing with additional administrative capacity. Continued monitoring by worker and team To continue to be included in all social worker's PMR
Recruitment of experienced staff and managers	Continue to implement the workforce strategy Continue to explore solutions at Eastern Region children and young people group Use contract monitoring of new recruitment contract as a lever
Development of the MASH	Hold stakeholder event following receipt of the report from Nigel Boulton Next steps to then be agreed
Respond to the impact of the revised Public Law Outline and increase in numbers of children subject to child protection plans	Fieldwork Services to explore alternative delivery models, to include thinking in relation to early help

Missing children and Child Sexual Exploitation	Further explore model of delivery including the development of a specific manager for missing children and CSE
Support cultural competence in safeguarding	LSCB cultural competence guidance to be shared with social work teams and to be incorporated in to assessment and evidence guidance.

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