

Children and Education Select Committee
28 November 2013

Safeguarding Unit Report

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services and Budgets/Performance Management/Policy Development and Review

To provide the Select Committee with an Overview of the work of the Safeguarding Unit for 2012/13, with specific emphasis upon the work of the Child Protection Conference Service and Quality Assurance (QA) Service

Two Appendices are provided to this report to provide greater detail of the work carried out by the Unit

Introduction:

1. The Children's Services Safeguarding Unit is one of the eight arms of Children's Services. Its role is not operational, but provides a quality assurance role for the work carried out by the operational teams in the areas and in countywide services. It does this partly, through the monitoring function it has in scrutinising Care Plans for children in care in Looked After Children reviews and through the independent chairing of Child Protection Conferences: and partly through its dedicated quality assurance programme. The Safeguarding Unit comprises of 5 teams:
 - The Child Protection Conference Service – this offers independent chairs to monitor and review children that have been made the subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP)
 - The Independent Reviewing Service – this offers independent reviewing and monitoring of the care planning for all Looked After Children
 - Quality Assurance Team – this undertakes to scrutinise the work of the area social work teams, evaluating the effectiveness of intervention with children and families in producing positive outcomes. It provides advice on how this can be improved and monitors the implementation of changes.

- Social Work Reform – a manager has been appointed to lead on the Learning and Development Agenda to improve the skills and quality of social work performance
- Child Employment Team – this deals with the provision of licences to employers wanting to offer opportunities to young people in employment and the licensing of venues for entertainment involving children and young people.

Child Protection Conference Service
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2. The Child Protection Conference Service organises and chairs Child Protection Conferences for all children subject to a CPP. Currently, there are 900 children subject to CPP in Surrey. Although, there has been a marked increase since June 2013, when the number subject to a CPP was 844.
3. A Child Protection Conference is held when Children's Services have received a referral expressing concern that a child, or young person is being significantly harmed; whether physically, sexually, or through their basic needs are being neglected. If upon investigation, these concerns are confirmed, then all the professionals involved with the child will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the concerns and agree a plan to address the safety and wellbeing of that child. This would be the Initial Child Protection Conference. Subsequently, the agreed plan will be reviewed by the same professionals at a Review Child Protection Conference
4. The Annual Child Protection Conference Service's Report outlines the major issues that confronted the service over the past year, since the September 2012 Ofsted Inspection. (Annex 1)
5. The Safeguarding Unit have been able to make progress on a number of these issues and address the key targets for improvement identified in the Ofsted report:
 - The concern regarding the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences has been addressed with performance raised from 45% at the end of the reporting year for 2012/13 to the current performance of 77%. This not only reaches the performance target, but is above the average for our statistical neighbours.
 - The quality of care planning in CP cases has improved as a result of the changes made; firstly to the format of the plan, the clarification on the appropriate use of Child Protection category and the guidance and training provided to chairs. Children can be made the subject of a CP Plan under four categories:
 - Physical Abuse – where a child has suffered a physical injury and there is a significant risk that they may do so again

- Sexual Abuse – where a child is known, or suspected to have been sexually abused and there is a significant risk of further abuse.
 - Neglect – where a child’s basic needs of for a safe and healthy environment are not being met through the parenting that they are receiving
 - Emotional Abuse – where a child’s emotional and mental wellbeing are affected by their living environment, such as witnessing parental domestic abuse, lack of parental emotional warmth, or scapegoating
- There has been progress in the greater involvement by partner agencies in Child Protection Plans. The attendance by certain groups of professionals has been consistently high and reports are regularly received for conferences. The area for concern is the involvement of GPs in the process. The Head of Safeguarding is aware of this and a series of meetings have been organised with the child protection GP lead and the CCG lead for Safeguarding.
6. There remain a number of challenges facing the CP Conference Service:
- To prepare the CP Conference Chairs for the challenges posed by the Family Justice Review (FJR), specifically in respect of court timescales. The FJR is a response to the lengthy court proceedings and the negative impact that this is having upon finding permanent care solutions for children. The Family Justice Review requires all court proceedings to take no longer than 26 weeks; that all the necessary investigations and assessments are carried out by Children’s Services prior to issuing proceedings as far as this is possible, and a reduction in the numbers of expert assessments to be carried out during proceedings. The FJR will come into effect on the 1st April 2014. CP Chairs will have a crucial role in monitoring the effectiveness in progressing cases at the appropriate pace to the child and family
 - Develop close working relationships with partner agencies working with adults. In order to impact upon the high prevalence of domestic abuse and substance misuse in CP cases, there is a need to work closely with those services working with adults to involve them in developing early help services and integrating them further into CPP. In particular there is a need to build on the work carried out with Adult Mental Health Services, Drug and Alcohol services and Probation.
 - Provide a response to Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013, so that the service is fully integrated into the Early Help and Safeguarding system.

Quality Assurance Team

7. The Quality Assurance Team (QA Team) comprises a Team Manager, (also responsible for the Child Employment Team) and four Quality Assurance Officers.

8. The Quality Assurance Officers work with the Area Teams and undertakes specific audits on themes identified through Inspections, Learning from Serious Case Reviews and through Service User Feedback. In the past year, the QA Team have concentrated on carrying out audits into Child in Need Plans, quality of supervision, the quality of Core Groups in progressing Child Protection Plans and in engaging Partner agencies and the implementation of changes in the way that we use Family Support Workers in Care Planning, as recommended by a recent Case Review.
9. Annex 2 outlines the elements of good practice identified through audit. In the past year, a six monthly audit of supervision has shown improvement in the quality of provision, with staff receiving clear guidance on the management of cases. In Child Protection Cases, there has been significant progress in the quality of Care Plans and in the attendance and involvement of professionals from Health and Early Years. Audit has shown that plans are focused on improving outcomes for children, identify specific tasks and actions for professionals working with children and closer scrutiny in review of the progress against targets.
10. Nevertheless there remain challenges for the service in ensuring that improvements are maintained and built upon:
 - The service needs to build upon the successes of the past year in improving the quality of work in the service, by working with the areas to spread good practice in assessment, care planning and user involvement consistently throughout all teams and all areas.
 - Support the work of the Looked After Children and Adoption teams in achieving permanence for children through Adoption, or Special Guardianship Orders.
 - Work with the teams and the SSCB to help develop the understanding of Neglect by professionals and the effectiveness of intervention in such cases. It is important that professionals working with families are able to understand the long-term effects of neglect in children and be able to recognise these early, so that children are not left in situations that will cause long-term harm to their health and wellbeing. They need to be able to identify when this is due to poor parenting at an early stage and intervene with preventative action and support swiftly and in a timely fashion.

Social Work Reform

11. Surrey Children's Services have invested significantly in workforce development. This has led to:
 - The establishment of a Children's Social Work Reform Board with the brief to drive forward strategic priorities for professional learning

- The recruitment of a dedicated Social Work Reform Manager with responsibility for reviewing the training offer, learning and development pathways for all staff, and supervision of managers in the NE Social Work Academy
 - Creation of Four Consultant Senior Practitioners who will lead the areas in improving skills and social work practice in the operational teams.
12. The Social Work Reform Board has met and established clear priorities for future commissioning of training of Children's Services staff. These are:
- Review and revision of the preparation, induction and training of front-line managers
 - Alignment of the Learning and Development Programme with the Professional Capabilities Framework
 - Commissioning of specialist training for staff in critical areas of work: planning for permanency; implementation of the single assessment; the training for managers in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for newly qualified social workers, and preparation of social workers for implementation of the Family Justice Review.

Conclusion:

13. The past year has seen progress in the unit in improving performance in line with the issues identified by Ofsted.
14. In conjunction with the Area Teams the service has made significant progress in responding to the Agenda set by the Munro Report in developing social worker skills and learning; with a particular emphasis on that of newly qualified social workers.
15. The unit has reviewed its approach to Quality Assurance and introduced a programme of audit that is linked closely to the priorities of the service identified through inspection.

Recommendations:

15. The Committee is respectfully asked to endorse the proposals:
- Develop working protocols and agreements with the adult services regarding their role in Child Protection Planning: this to be measured by increasing attendance at Child Protection Conferences.
 - As part of the work being carried out on raising understanding of neglect, the Quality Assurance audit to focus over the next year on cases subject to CP Plans for 18 months plus, many of whom are subject to plans under the category of Neglect. The purpose will be to identify the

services and approaches required by professionals to improve the timeliness achieving change.

- The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB), in conjunction with the Social Work Reform Project, to have in place by April 2014 a Learning and Development Pathway for staff integrated with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), and a robust programme for the development of Assistant Team Managers.
- The Child Protection Conference Service will increase its efforts in engaging the CCGs in improving the involvement of GPs in Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Plans.

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Next steps:

16. The service has recently agreed joint working protocols with Adult services and Mental Health services. The Safeguarding Unit to set up joint training events to raise awareness of the process.
17. The PCF/Learning and Development Pathway will be completed by December Meeting of the SWRB and the review of the training for first line managers will be completed by the end of January 2014.

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Sources/background papers:

Annex 1 – Annual Child Protection Conference Service Report

Annex 2 – Quality Assurance Manager's Report