

Open Report on behalf of Debbie Barnes, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	20 January 2017
Subject:	Centre for Public Scrutiny's Guide to Scrutinising Children's Safeguarding Arrangements

Summary:

On 9 October 2015 the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider and comment on the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) 21 questions guide for Councillors on Safeguarding Children.

It was agreed following this that Officers would be requested to furnish the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with assurance in respect of the questions set out in the CfPS Guide 2015.

This report sets out the work undertaken across Children's Services in response to the questions 18, 20 and 21.

Actions Required:

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is asked to seek assurance on the contents of the response provided and highlight any recommendations or further actions required.

1. Background

Elected Members need to feel confident that Safeguarding Services in Lincolnshire are effective and sufficiently robust in identifying, responding to and meeting needs, where children are deemed to be at risk of significant harm, or Children in Need.

Previous assurance has been sought through a Frontline Social Worker and Safeguarding Scrutiny Review undertaken in 2013/14 which supported improvements in practice and monitored progress until all recommendations were implemented.

Recent National scandals around Child Sexual Exploitation have called for a renewed and reinvigorated approach to scrutinising the work of Children's Services Safeguarding practices.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has developed 21 key scrutiny questions for Safeguarding. This focused approach enables members to adopt a critical check and challenge of the performance and quality of services provided to children and families within their Council.

It equally provides a mechanism for debate and discussion and seeks to identify areas of good practice and areas of challenge.

In Lincolnshire the improvement and safeguarding outcomes for all children is an explicit objective, which is evidence led, efficient and with resources fit for purpose.

This is evidenced through:

Question 18:

How robust and systematic is the Local Authority's approach to assessments of need?

A social care assessment is completed on every child who has met the threshold of needing assessment and intervention from social care. Social care assessments are completed by qualified social workers.

The assessment covers the domains of the child, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors.

Do assessments routinely meet the quality standards set out by the latest statutory guidance including:

Taking a systematic and evidence based approach?

Signs of Safety is the evidence based approach used. Information is gathered from agencies involved with the family, consent from the parents or carers is requested. The range of agencies this could include are schools, health professionals, nurseries, police, probation, adult mental health services and child mental health services, housing and adult services.

A review of any past history that is held on the child and family is a key aspect of ensuring an evidence based approach and this can include contacting other local authorities.

The information is analysed using Signs of Safety developing danger statements and safety goals.

The Signs of Safety approach considers what the strengths and safety are within a family, what areas of worry there is, both harm and complicating factors, and what needs to happen to mitigate the harm and complicating factors.

Using a child centred approach?

The child's voice is critical in adopting a child centred approach and direct work is undertaken with children through the process of the assessment. Social workers have a range of tools to undertake this with all ages of children from very young children thorough to young people.

In the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), October 2016, inspectors commented "The voice of the child is well represented and where the child is pre-verbal, developmental milestones and attachment are carefully considered through observation and health reports. Direct work with children informs assessments and plans."

Focusing on actions and outcomes for the child?

A plan of intervention is developed, focusing on what needs to happen with an emphasis on what the safety goals are and a safety plan to achieve them.

The inspectors in the JTAI also highlighted how the focus is on the individual needs of children "They use this information (from the child) to better protect children and provide appropriate support for their individual needs."

Taking an integrated approach across a variety of services and areas of need?

The assessment and interventions take a multi-agency approach. The areas of need are identified and the appropriate interventions are determined, utilising both professional services and the family themselves. This is reviewed through multi-agency child in need meetings or core groups if the child is on a child protection plan.

Ensuring that assessments are a continuing process rather than a one-off event?

The child in need plan or child protection plan are regularly reviewed on a multi-agency basis and in the social workers individual supervision to ensure that assessment is a continual process and not a one off event. This ensures that there is no drift and delay.

Focusing on the child's developmental needs and whether they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm?

The focus of the assessment is on the impact of the presenting issues on the developmental needs of the child and how these can be mitigated. The assessment identifies what harm there is and as the inspectors in the JTAI commented "Danger statements are used within assessments, and make the presenting risks, including from domestic abuse, really clear."

If a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, the social worker's supervisor in consultation with the social worker will consider if child protection

procedures should be actioned which could result in a child protection conference to determine if the child should be subject to a child protection plan.

Considering parents and carers capacities?

This is a key element of the Signs of Safety methodology, and any assessment will consider what the child's needs are and the capacity of the parent or carer to meet these needs. The safety plan will look at what needs to happen.

Looking at the impact of wider family, community and environmental circumstances?

An element of the assessment is considering the impact of the wider family, community and environmental factors. The safety plan developed will incorporate wider family and friends to support the parents and carers if there are deficits in their parenting capacity. This can be done through a family network meeting or through the family group conference service depending on the needs of the family.

Question 20:

How effective are local safeguarding services in establishing a partnership approach with parents? How are the needs of vulnerable parents taken into account through services and support to enable them to participate effectively in assessments?

The effectiveness of local safeguarding services in establishing a partnership approach was highlighted in the JTAI, October 2016, although the focus was on domestic abuse in the inspection, the same approach covers all aspects of interventions.

"The LSCB effectively monitors and evaluates the work of the statutory partners, with a range of examples of real impact that is making a difference for children. For example, the approach to preventative work with children in Lincolnshire, managed and promoted through the LSCB, is a particular strength."

The multi-agency approach includes services focused on the needs of parents as well as children, for example, probation, adult mental health services, adult social care.

If a parent has particular needs such as a learning difficulty, the assessment process is adapted using specific tools. If an in depth parenting assessment is required of parents with learning difficulties, social workers have been trained to use PAMS which enables the assessment to take into account their learning needs and how these can be best supported.

The Signs of Safety framework ensures that the parents participate fully as it focuses the assessment and the plans on how the parents will develop their own solutions to the risks identified in the danger statements, though the safety plans, with support from family, friends and agencies.

Question 21:

How well do local services adhere to timelines for assessment and intervention?

What is the local performance data?

The performance data is scrutinised on a monthly basis by the senior management team, and team managers also have mechanisms in place to ensure that assessments are completed in a timely way.

The most up to date information is from the November performance report. The target set for 2016/17 was for 92% of assessments to be completed within the 45 day timescale. This is a challenging target. In 2014/2015, 87.7% of assessments were completed in time and in 2015/2016, 88.3% were completed in time. As of November 2016, 88.85% were completed in the timescale. There can be a number of factors that result in assessments not being completed in timescales, including lack of availability of the worker due to sickness or leave, difficulties getting information from other agencies, or lack of engagement from the family.

Lincolnshire is performing better than both their statistical neighbours and England overall. The England rate in 2015/2016 was 83.4% and our statistical neighbours reported 86.25% in 2015/2016.

Interventions are managed through plans whether they are child in need plans or child protection plans. It is an expectation that every child has a plan and this is monitored through the monthly performance report. The quality of plans and interventions is reviewed in supervision with the social worker and through audit.

2. Conclusion

Strategic Partners demonstrate mature relationships which facilitate effective, constructive challenge to ensure a shared local vision is translated and embedded in operational practice. This creates a culture in which all staff work to ensure every child in every part of the County achieves their potential.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

No

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not Applicable

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 10D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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