

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

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09 September 2016
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 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 questions 5, 6, and 7.

Actions Required:

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of the response and give consideration to participating in the focus group with staff on 18 October 2016. This will enable triangulation of evidence presented, thus supporting further challenge and assurance.

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 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 5: How are local commissioners considering safeguarding issues in their work across a full range of local services?

Undertaking Procurement Activity (Tenders)- As part of all procurement activities undertaken by the Children's Services Strategic Commissioning Team, knowledge and understanding of safeguarding responsibilities is assessed as part of the first stage of all tender evaluations; the 'Business Information Assessment Criteria' stage. This includes potential bidders confirming that they understand their safeguarding responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004, including safer recruitment, that appropriate DBS checks are undertaken and that all policies are in place and regularly updated in line with legislative changes. Safeguarding questions are then often included in the later stages of tender evaluation as part of the quality questions. This is an example of a question used in a recent tender evaluation for an Early Support and Learning Provision service for Children with disabilities and/or complex needs: *"Please outline your organisations Safeguarding policies and procedures and detail how you will ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are safeguarded throughout the duration of the contract and in particular how you will escalate and manage particular concerns disclosed to you during service delivery?"*

Service Implementation- With every newly commissioned service in Children's Services, an Implementation period is built into the tender process to ensure that all services are supported seamlessly into service delivery from day one of any new contract. As part of the implementation process, safeguarding arrangements are discussed with relevant service areas and contract managers to ensure a seamless approach to safeguarding. If the Supplier is new to the Council, the lead from the service area and lead commissioning officer will ensure that there is a clear understanding of reporting pathways and ensure that the new Supplier has all the relevant contact details.

Contract Management- As part of the Children's Services Strategic Commissioning Team's contract management process, the Joint Evaluation Toolkit contains a section on compliance with Safeguarding Legislation, which will require the Contract Manager to ensure that either an assessment has been completed by the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) (where the Providers are delivering a statutory function) or to collect the completed Safe Network Self-

Assessment document and action plan. Any contracts where this information has not been provided will immediately be rated as an amber risk rating and will therefore be flagged up to the management team. This section is then reviewed on a quarterly basis at contract management meetings. Specific safeguarding arrangements are also discussed for each contract individually as part of the contract management process to ensure that the right procedures are in place for each specific contract. For example, with the Youth Housing contract, the contract manager has worked with the service area and provider to produce a serious incident reporting form, which sets out the actions that need to take place in the event of a serious incident to ensure that it is reported correctly (i.e. to the Customer Service Centre (CSC)) and that it is received into the Youth Housing inbox to ensure that the caseworker is also aware and kept up to date.

In the majority of contract management meetings, a service area representative attends and this allows discussion around any operational safeguarding concerns and gives the service area and provider the opportunity to discuss these and any specific cases that need resolution.

Another part of the contract management process is the contract assurance toolkit which is completed annually and also includes checks that the Provider has the following policies/processes in place and that they are updated on a regular basis to include any legislative changes:

- Safer recruitment policy
- Safeguarding policy
- DBS checks undertaken
- Whistle blowing policy
- Complaints policy
- Anti-bullying policy

For our residential homes and schools placements, we also check all Ofsted ratings on a monthly basis to ensure that no placements are made with inadequate Providers. The monthly Ofsted checking process also allows us to identify Providers that we currently have placements with that have since been deemed inadequate. In these instances, we are able to quickly flag this up to the relevant case worker/ social worker so that the appropriate checks can be made to ensure the safety and the quality of care of our child is in place. We also undertake annual site contract management visits to all residential homes and schools and during these contract visits all aspects of the Providers safeguarding arrangements are discussed including arrangements for the safer recruitment and induction, supervision, appraisal and training of staff.

Question 6: How effective are ‘early help’ strategies in identifying children in need and addressing factors that may lead to concerns about safeguarding?

Multi-agency Early Help in Lincolnshire, Team Around the Child (TAC), is recognised as some of the most successful Early Help in the country. This is evidenced by Ofsted comments from the last inspection (November 2014) and the Local Safeguarding Children Board Report, June 2015.

“Early Help Services for children and families are well targeted and co-ordinated.”

“Practitioners working in universal services receive good advice and support from Early Help Consultants and Early Support Care Co-Ordination. They see supporting families as a shared responsibility and they understand and apply thresholds appropriately.”

“The low rate of repeat referrals shows that support provided through the TAC process is working well. Partners report significant improvement, particularly over the last few months, and access to Early Help Services is simple and straightforward.”

“Early Help Assessments are of good quality. Services and actions are clearly focused on improving and monitoring outcomes for children. The appointment of Early Help Consultants has been a significant development.”

Since this time, the numbers of children and families supported through TAC have continued to increase: 1131 TACs were in place at the end of March 2014; 2704 were in place at the end of June 2016.

Lincolnshire's Early Help strategies are based upon the principle that practitioners who know children well are best placed to identify children and families who need help and play a key role in addressing the needs identified through relationship-based practice. This is particularly evident within schools and academies where we have seen a significant increase in the support offered. Two years ago the schools were leading approximately 600 TACs (50%); at present they are leading approximately 1750 TACs (65%).

Moreover, the schools report more confidence in addressing the concerns with families to prevent escalation to safeguarding concerns:

“we have so much support in Lincolnshire: Early Help Advisers, Early Help Consultants, case supervision. It helps to check things out and know you are doing the right thing.” School-based Professional

In addition to the quantity of children benefitting from Early Help, we have also seen an increase in the quality of the early interventions.

In the last 12 months, in quality audits of TAC, outstanding cases have increased from 8% to 10%; and inadequate cases have reduced from 18% to 2%. This is evidence of quality improvement in the journeys of children and young people through TAC.

For the year 2015-16, 1338 TAC cases were closed during the year. Of these, 76% (compared to 67% last year) had the needs of the child either fully met or reduced so that a single service only could support. This is good evidence of the effectiveness of TAC.

Only 97 cases closed because the family did not fully engage in the process.

In 2015-2016, 901 cases transferred from Social Care into TAC; only 113 cases moved into Social Care from TAC, which is also an illustration of effective early help.

Question 7: What has been learnt from early intervention approaches in the local area? What is effective and what are the resource implications?

The engagement of children and families with Early Help and support is dependent upon how it is explained, and the relationship with the Lead Professional.

Early Help is most effective when the emphasis is on outcomes, not the tasks to get there. Signs of Safety Practice is pivotal.

Early Intervention is not a short term 'fix'. Sustainability in families' everyday lives is key. Help does not need to be service based, but needs to build in ways of coping and responding to life's events.

Resource implications:

- Need to target resources on families who are most in need, and invest in relationship-based practice; which may mean our own staff working with smaller numbers for a longer time.
- Need to continue to invest in work with partners so that they continue to:
 - Identify children earlier before crisis occurs
 - Feel confident to support children and families
 - Are clear about referring the families who need us most
 - Are adept at building resilience, family and community capacity, and achieving sustainable outcomes for children and families.

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) Policy Proofing Actions Required

N/A

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Janice Spencer, Assistant Director Children's Services, who can be contacted on 01522 554476 or janice.spencer@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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