

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

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| Report to: | Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee |
| Date: | 25 November 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 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 questions 8, 9, 13 and 14.

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 8: Does the local area have a range of effective and evidence based services in place to assess and meet the needs of local children and their families?

Our overriding philosophy is that children should be supported using a range of interventions within a child centred approach.

From 2013 onwards Lincolnshire is using “Signs of Safety” methodology in assessment and intervention looking at strengths and difficulties when working with children and families. This helps to better understand what needs to change, how this can be done and who needs to do what to reduce risk and improve the lives of children.

Services are in place to meet the diverse needs of children and families. Due to the large geographical area and some differences in need, services are commissioned to meet local need and on a county basis to ensure that there is equality of service provision, across the county. For example the services in place in children's centres, are commissioned on a county basis, however each locality holds a budget to commission some bespoke services for the needs of their specific locality.

The Evidenced Based Programmes used within Children's centres and Early Help have a proven track record and sound evidence base (Triple P, Solihull Approach, SPOT- Support for parents of teenagers, PEEP- Parent Early Education Programme) which are broadly and effectively utilised providing the methodology for children's services assessments and interventions.

The Solihull Approach provides a framework for thinking about and working with the relationship between the parent and child; containment and reciprocity are the nuts and bolts underpinning attachment, which give a theoretical focus for practical interventions.

Triple P draws on social learning, cognitive-behavioural and developmental theory, as well as research into risk and protective factors associated with the development of social and behavioural problems in children. The program's multi-level framework aims to tailor information, advice and professional support to the

needs of individual families. It recognises that parents have differing needs and desires regarding the type, intensity and mode of assistance they may require.

SPOT - Support for parents of teenagers is an invaluable course for all parents of pre-teens and teenagers. It covers development in puberty and adolescence, behavioural strategies and the importance of 'Me' time for parents.

PEEP is an evidenced based programme delivered as part of our core offer for children's centres to support parents to enhance their babies' and children's learning and development and improve their life chances. This programme helps parents to create the best start for their children by making the most of everyday learning opportunities at home – listening, talking, playing, singing and sharing stories and books.

The Troubled Families programme is fully integrated into the Early Help Service, providing effective support for families with good tracking systems in place to monitor and evidence improved outcomes.

Through partnership arrangements services are provided for specific need, for example domestic abuse programmes and support by commissioned services, (ELDAS (East Lindsey Domestic Abuse Service), WLDAS (West Lindsey Domestic Abuse Service)) as well as by Early Help who put on programmes to support victims in their understanding of domestic abuse cycle.

Lincolnshire is continuously learning from and adopting current research and is committed to developing a well-trained, highly skilled workforce.

Question 9: Are local assessments of need effective in ensuring children and their families are able access early support and services to reduce risk and meet needs?

How effective is access to these services in preventing potential safeguarding interventions?

The document "Meeting the Needs of Children" sets out clearly the thresholds for services and this is used as guidance by local authority staff and partner agencies.

When a potential need for support is identified, a rigorous assessment of the child's needs is completed (whether an Early Help Assessment or a Social Care Assessment) and this involves the child and family as well as all the professionals who are working with them. Every assessment is focused on best outcomes for the child and through a clear and realistic plan support is provided appropriately to improve the life prospects and experience of the child.

It is the aim of Children's Services to support families to care safely and effectively for their children. Multi-agency Early Help in Lincolnshire provided under Team Around the Child (TAC) constitutes the most important aspect of early intervention and this has been recognised as one of the most successful Early Help in the country. This is evidenced by Ofsted comments from the last inspection (November 2014); and 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.”

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.

In turn, when the needs of the families are escalating, Child in Need arrangements provide support for children with a more extensive set of needs, and this support is led by a social worker.

The TAC arrangements and child-in-need multi-agency planning form the foundation of early and effective intervention.

At the same time when children are clearly at risk of ongoing significant harm, the child protection planning is used appropriately. At the end of September 2016 there were 2632 Child in Need cases held in FAST (Family Assessment Support Team).

Equally plans to remove a child from his or her family are used when there is no realistic and viable family placement and only where the authority is satisfied that every aspect of support has been fully utilised. On these occasions the wider family is always fully consulted with and supported in providing the child with an alternative place to live, should this be a possibility. At the end of September 2016 there were 668 looked after children.

Support Panels that are chaired by senior managers independent of the line management of the case authority are utilised for all cases at the edge of care or proceedings to take a wide look at what can assist the child and his or her family and to ensure that all possible services have been utilised.

In support of this activity, the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service has seen a greater usage, and is a key aspect of service delivery. This service works directly with family members, who are encouraged to understand the difficulties for a specific child and it is family members at the conference who are encouraged to formulate a workable and safe plan for the child. The use of FGC has also been expanded to children who are vulnerable to permanent exclusion from school as an

integral part of the Behavioural Outreach Support Services available to schools, and restorative practice approaches are being developed in a pilot group of schools. The use of FGC is also being developed in the delivery of SEND services.

Question 13: What evidence is there that the child is at the centre of local safeguarding arrangements?

At all levels of service provision the needs of the child/young person are assessed with the full participation of the child/young person, as appropriate, and the family. In our practice we aim to evidence the child's voice through all assessments, planning, delivery and review of services.

The child's plan is subject to regular inter-agency review in partnership with the child (if old enough) and the family. The plan must outline what needs to change for the child to achieve his/her potential and what the agencies and the family will do to help the child achieve this.

The implementation of the solution-focused Signs of Safety model has changed thinking and practice, particularly in the prevalence of the voice of the child in assessments and interventions.

In the Joint Targeted Area Inspection on Domestic Abuse in October 2016 the Inspectors commented on the excellent work they have seen where we undertake direct work with children. They have noted the quality of direct work and how the child's voice is heard throughout the work undertaken.

Question 14: Who are the most vulnerable children in the local area? What are their needs and how well are they met?

Early Years/Early Help support services make good use of data relating to Lower Super Output Areas more specifically in terms of multiple indicators of deprivation. Participation and Engagement activity is focussed using this data so that we can enable vulnerable families to access services locally through our Children's Centres.

Resources are aligned to areas of greatest need and this is analysed using data from the referrals into children's services and reviewed on a regular basis.

Local geographical differences are taken into account to ensure services meet the needs of local areas. For example, social workers have been recruited from some Eastern European countries and are working in teams who have vulnerable children where English is not their first language.

The multi-agency safe hub analyses data and intelligence with regard to children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation to ensure multi-agency services and interventions are in place to support and safeguard them.

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.