

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**22 NOVEMBER 2016**

### **CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE: SAFEGUARDING ASSURANCE UPDATE**

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#### **Summary**

1. In August 2016, the Panel received a report from the Chairman of the Worcestershire Children's Safeguarding Board. This report concluded that whilst improvements were being made the Board did not feel able to give assurance that child protection systems were sufficiently robust.
2. Effective and robust child protection and safeguarding practice relies on a range of interrelated activities led by the Local Authority (LA) Children's Social Work service and implemented with the support of partners who have a duty and responsibility to support the LA to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
3. Work has been undertaken under the Service Improvement Plan to address the concerns identified in our Internal Quality Assurance processes and in the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review 2015. Key developments are outlined below in the background section.

#### **Background**

4. Refreshed Thresholds Guidance was re-launched as Levels of Need Guidance on 4 July 2016. In recognition of the difficulties with thresholds as formulaic 'eligibility criteria,' the Levels of Need follow the Munro Review in emphasising the application of professional judgement and of conversations amongst partner agencies involved, including where appropriate the Social Workers in the Family Front Door (FFD). There has been a series of events and communications to partnership agencies between June and October reaching over 400 partners.
5. The new FFD came into effect 4 July 2016 and is currently subject to a three month review of Phase One. Contact with the Children's Services FFD is now made by telephone if concerns require immediate action, or by the online Cause for Concern Notification form.
6. For professionals, we now have a dedicated cause for concern professional portal for them to both register their cause for concerns forms and check details of children open to Children's Social Care.
7. In line with development of the FFD, Phase One of the Locality Safeguarding Teams re-design began with a large scale review of case work to address drift and delay in plans for children. This work is informing our final organisational design.

8. There has been service development in performance information and practice standards for social workers. Standards relating to the process and timeliness of practice have been completed and there is now consistent performance management in place throughout the levels of management.

9. Work is progressing to address the quality of practice and learning and development needs of the organisation.

## **Updated Assurance**

### Effectiveness of Early Help

10. Worcestershire's Early Help offer is subject to review to ensure services are appropriately targeted at the most vulnerable children and hard to reach families. Work on this programme is summarised in Appendix A.

### Family Front Door (FFD)

11. As part of the FFD Phase One evaluation, further developments have taken place to improve information sharing, understanding and application of thresholds:

- Development of the Concern Contact Form to identify concerns for the welfare of children in order that these can be identified without delay and be passed to the qualified Social Workers at the FFD for a decision on the most appropriate level of response.
- Implementation of a Referral Outcome letter to professionals that identifies the rationale and the determined level of need. This will give partners clear understanding of the rationale and promote a focused professional conversation using the level of need where there are any disputes in decision making attached at Appendix B.
- Review of the Domestic Abuse (DA) triage processes to include agreed descriptors of risk and a single record of outcome from triage for each agency attached at Appendix C.
- Apportionment of a dedicated Initial Screening and Contact Officer (ISCO) to manage DA notifications to schools to ensure they receive timely information and outcomes of all notification received and managed through the triage process. These developments have been communicated directly to all schools; a copy of the letter is attached at Appendix D.
- Development of a Single Social Work Assessment as opposed to Brief and Extended Assessments. This will reduce duplication and "stop start" social work.

### Locality Safeguarding Services

12. A whole system approach has been adopted as we progress our back to basics Service Improvement Plan. The attached updated Service Improvement Plan on a page seeks to ensure each priority has a clear link to the Strategic plans of the Council and the priorities for operational delivery attached at Appendix E.

13. A priority in this work is to establish a stable and permanent workforce. A Workforce Strategic Board has been established and a dedicated social work

recruitment service for Children and Adults came into operation on 14 November 2016.

14. We have developed a new process for the authorisation of Legal Planning Meetings (LPM) and Care Proceedings to ensure there is a clear line of accountability for decision making and consistency in good practice processes. This will prevent drift and delays where children are subject to child protection plans are not achieving outcomes and where children in our care under S20 Voluntary Arrangements are not achieving permanency in a timely way.

15. We have developed new processes for the authorisation of children entering and those under s20 leaving the care system to ensure we have a clear evidence of rationale for how decisions have been made in the best interests of children and ensure we have clear accountability at each management level.

## **Conclusion**

16. As a continuous learning organisation, continuous actions are being taken to improve our child protection and safeguarding systems, process and practices.

17. Our aim is to ensure vulnerable children and those at risk of harm, are identified in a timely way and achieve sustainable outcomes following interventions from early help or specialist safeguarding services.

18. Establishing a stable and permanent workforce who work to high standards for practice and clear lines of accountability is a foundation building block in our work to become an outstanding service. We are taking proactive action to address our weaknesses and build on our strengths.

19. We currently have the following in interim arrangements but will appoint to them on a permanent basis in December 2016:

- Principal Social Worker for standards and performance
- Dedicated Quality Assurance and Audit officer
- Legal Case Tracking Officer

20. There is still more to be done to achieve our aim.

21. The further developments will take into account the FFD Phase One evaluation, our service re-design plan and the findings of the Ofsted SIF inspection which took place 24 October 2016 – 17 November 2016.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

22. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information in the report
- determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny, and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children, Families and Communities

## **Supporting Information**

Appendix A - Worcestershire's Early Help Offer

Appendix B - Referral Outcome Notification Letter

Appendix C - EVODA – Responding to Domestic Abuse – Screening Tool

Appendix D - A copy of the letter sent to all schools regarding Apportionment of a dedicated Initial Screening and Contact Officer (ISCO) to manage DA notifications to schools

Appendix E - Updated Service Improvement Plan

## **Contact for the Report**

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 31 August 2016

All council agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website [here](#)