

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 11 MAY 2016

UPDATE ON BACK TO BASICS SAFEGUARDING IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Summary

1. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding has been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on progress of the Back to Basics Safeguarding Improvement Plan since the Local Government Association (LGA) Safeguarding Peer Review in April 2015.

Background

2. In November 2014, Worcestershire County Council - as part of its desire to be a learning organisation - invited the LGA to help facilitate a Peer Review on its approach to safeguarding children. The Peer Review took place in April 2015.

3. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel ('the Scrutiny Panel') considered the outcomes of the Peer Review at its meeting on 25 June 2015 and was informed that the LGA team had identified the following four priorities:

- A 'back to basics' Safeguarding Improvement Plan
- Resolving the future direction for the 'Front Door'
- Implementing a detailed financial recovery plan
- Review and defining the role of Early Help

4. Panel Members agreed that they would wish to undertake further scrutiny work to consider the Directorate's response to these priorities and met with the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services and Strategic Lead Quality and Improvement on 5 August 2015.

5. Panel Members recognised that much of the ongoing improvement work and work initiated in response to the Peer Review was still at an early stage and that it would take time before improvements would be seen. Therefore, the Scrutiny Panel asked to receive an update in six months' time on progress against the four priorities identified in the Peer Review. This update focuses on progress against the Safeguarding Improvement Plan.

Progress Report

Overview

6. The Safeguarding Improvement Plan was written and implemented in May 2015 and Safeguarding Improvement Board has met monthly and monitored progress of the

Safeguarding Improvement Plan since this date. The Safeguarding Improvement Plan was subsequently refreshed in January 2016 (attached as Appendix 1) and was considered by the Safeguarding Improvement Board in February 2016. The Plan was refreshed to take account of the progress achieved thus far and to ensure that it was aligned to the three strategic priorities for Children's Social Care:

- Getting the 'gateway' into Children's Social Care right;
- Securing safety and permanence for children at the earliest opportunity;
- Building a confident and capable workforce.

7. As a result, the performance indicators that accompany the Safeguarding Improvement Plan have been revised so that they were directly relevant to the plan and were signed off in March 2016 by the Children, Families and Communities' Directorate Leadership Team and Safeguarding Improvement Board. Progress on performance is monitored through monthly corrective action reports which are compiled monthly by the Team and Group Managers for performance clinics that are held in each of the locality safeguarding areas. These are then reported to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and on to Safeguarding Improvement Board.

Practice Standards

8. Evidence from other local authorities who have embarked on improvement journeys similar to ours (e.g. Walsall and Herefordshire) suggests that improvement begins with compliance. We have therefore, as agreed by Improvement Board, focused on the compliance-based practice standards:

- Assessments in timescale
- Timeliness of visits
- Timeliness of Section 47 Enquiries
- Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)
- Timeliness of response to complaints

9. In May 2015, a baseline position was taken against each of the key performance indicators used to measure progress on the compliance-based standards. An update on performance can be found in Appendix 2 which evidences the improvements made.

10. There is positive improvement in performance evidenced by the March 2016 data except for the percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences completed in timescale. Performance for this indicator has fluctuated between May 2015 and March 2016 between c. 40% and 75%. We are currently trying to understand the reasons for this through the corrective action reporting process in order to ensure long term and sustained improvement. As a result of the fluctuating performance, we have issued a management instruction to all Team Managers that the decision as to whether an Initial Child Protection Conference is required must be made no later than day five of a Section 47 Enquiry and we have revised Framework workflow to support this in practice. This is being monitored closely by Team and Group Managers. Furthermore we have invested in information technology solutions to maximise participation and combat venue pressures.

11. Our hypothesis is that our improvement to date is as a direct result of relentless direct management oversight and scrutiny. Further improvement can only be achieved by creating the right conditions within which social workers can practice effectively. This means that we will have to reduce caseloads further through:

- effective management of the Family Front Door and demand (this is being realised through the Family Front Door project);
- workforce stability and development (this is being addressed by a major recruitment campaign that goes live later this month);
- ensuring that financial resources are refocused on the right part of the system (i.e. prevention and aligned to the key priority of reducing spend on LAC placements).

12. From January 2016, we rebalanced our focus to quality of practice through case file auditing and a series of mock inspections. Further work to improve quality of practice will include ongoing robust auditing of cases, further mock inspections, safeguarding alerts and learning from complaints.

Purpose of the Meeting

13. 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 1: Back to Basics Safeguarding Improvement Plan (refreshed January 2016)
Appendix 2: Back to Basics Performance Indicators

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report: Worcestershire Safeguarding Peer Review, 26 June 2016