

# MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PRACTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2009

Councillors Jones, Lister, Mallett and Oatway

## LC21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Davies.

## LC22. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

## LC23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Oatway declared that she was involved in the disciplinary Panels with regard to Baby P.

## LC24. MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2009 be agreed as an accurate record.

## LC25. LEARNING FROM SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS

Sarah Peel, Manager of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) gave the presentation that had been previously given to all practitioners regarding the lessons to be learnt from the case of Baby Peter.

The make up of the Local Safeguarding Children Board's was a multi disciplinary one with partners across the voluntary sector. A serious case review (SCR), could be requested by anyone and was carried out when factors such as abuse or neglect were known or suspected or when a child died or was seriously injured. The importance of having an independent Chair of a SCR was explained, and it was noted that the focus was on learning not apportioning blame. Since the case of Baby Peter OFSTED had produced further guidance on SCR's and reviews were now graded. The exercise was a complicated but robust one. They should be self critical with a good action plan.

Good social work was about being clear about the risks, not being uncompassionate but keeping the priority and focus on the child. Child protection work was complex and assessment was a process constantly under review. In Baby Peter's case it was known from the outset that there were indicators of risk and later it became known that every agency had not taken the opportunity to review their assessment. The facts had been reduced in significance in the face of adults' apparent willingness to comply and professionals' willingness to believe. Agencies needed to be authoritative, to create challenge and to share information appropriately. Files across the agencies had to be

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accessed and research into a family's background should be seen as part of a core assessment for a social worker. Good child protection involved all agencies and child protection plans had to be clear about what a task was intended to achieve and who was responsible for what. A background of abuse could suggest vulnerability. It should be accepted that parents told lies, often based on a fear that their children could be taken away, Authorities were told what they wanted to hear. However social workers had to be sceptical of the accounts given and should test thoroughly against the facts. Also they should not confuse an apparent good adult/child interaction with a strong attachment. Nor should willingness to comply be confused with an actual willingness to accept the need for change. A proper assessment of the quality of attachment took time and required expertise. A seen child should not be considered a safe one; the social worker had to have empathy with the child.

The presence of domestic violence in a household was another indicator of risk, and where there was domestic violence in a family with a child under 12 months old (including an unborn child) a single incident of domestic violence should trigger a child protection investigation. In Haringey there were many vulnerable families and it was easy to be too tolerant of levels of neglect and miss the individual risk indicators. The Committee noted that the Council's Domestic Violence Co-ordinator was working on awareness training for all front line staff and a workshop was to be held on the issue. Also there had been a raised level of awareness and around 20% of referrals were related to domestic violence.

Members noted the checklist of expectations for all professionals working in this field.

The Committee were advised that in order for the situation to improve there had to be adequate time, training, and supervision.

RESOLVED:

That the Local Safeguarding Children Board's child protection handbook be given to all Councillors.

**LC26. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED:

- That as the following items contained exempt information (as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government 1972; namely information likely to reveal the identity of an individual, and information relating to any individual) members of the press and public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

**LC27. SERVICE USER FEEDBACK: OCTOBER 2009**

The Committee received feedback from a snapshot survey carried out as part of the ongoing audit of cases referred to the Referral and Assessment Service on 1 July 2009. The survey involved follow up conversations with a sample of 10 service users and referrers.

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The survey had considered a) the timeliness of the response from the Children and Young People's Service b) the extent to which service users and referrers felt listened to and their views respected and c) whether they had received any feedback about what would happen next.

Members noted that any conclusions from the survey had to be seen as tentative and would need to be subject to further investigation. It was accepted that parents whose children had been referred to Children's Services could be hostile and might find communication difficult. Social workers were expected to develop specific skills to overcome these barriers. However it was disappointing that under 50% of the parents felt that they had the chance to say what they wanted to say or felt that they were listened to. It was agreed that parents should feel listened to and respected, although not always agreed with. Members noted that the Service was made aware of conflicts in personality between social workers and parents and further follow up work would take place in around 20 case files per month.

The major issue for referrers was also communication and knowing what happened to their referrals. The three schools involved were keen to work with Children's Services, to build long term relationships with individual workers and to work closely together. Also they were aware of pressures on social workers and constraints of confidentiality, but felt that they should be kept more in the loop when a social worker was involved in one of their families.

Details of the Action Plan prepared in response to the concerns raised in survey were given.

It was noted that it was a huge administrative task to respond to around 350 referrals per week. Upon completion of cases, it was important that closing letters were sent. Since the survey the issues raised had been discussed with managers and social workers via supervision and also at full staff meetings. Additionally all cases interviewed had been audited by a senior manager; individual staff had been spoken to and three were participating in the capability process.

Issues around the facilitation of a private space at the North Middlesex Hospital had been discussed with the social work team based at the hospital.

**RESOLVED:**

That the responses from the service users survey be noted, together with the subsequent Action Plan.

**LC28. UPDATE ON CASE FILE QUALITY AUDITING**

The Committee received an update on the five cases that they were tracking.

**LC29. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING** – Changed to Monday 25 January 2010.

Items for meeting to include:-

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Exploration of Child Protection safeguarding processes, particularly following those children referred on the 1st July who were subject to child protection processes.

Eligibility and thresholds for children's social care

Meeting in April to receive a follow up report on the matters previously referred to Cabinet and in particular on transition arrangements from children's to adult services.

In response to a request from the Chair to focus on Under 5s and the provision of health visitors at a future meeting, Cllr Mallet agreed to seek clarification on the issues to be considered at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this matter.

**MEETING WITH CHAIR OF LSCB**

Cllr Mallet and Ms Corrick agreed to meet with the Chair of the LSCB to discuss and clarify the remit and boundaries of this Committee

**Cllr Emma Jones**

**Chair**