

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

**THURSDAY, 21 MARCH 2013**

Councillors Stewart(Chair), Adamou, Bull, Scott, Allison, Hilary Corrick

Apologies Councillor Bull, Councillor Scott.

Also Present: Councillor Waters, Libby Blake, Marion Wheeler, Lisa Blundell, Chrissy Austin, Arantza Faiges

<b>MINUTE NO.</b>	<b>SUBJECT/DECISION</b>	<b>ACTON BY</b>
<b>CSPAPC 122</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bull and Councillor Scott.	Clerk
<b>CSPAPC 123</b>	<b>URGENT BUSINESS</b> There were no items of urgent business put forward.	
<b>CSPAPC 124</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> There were no declarations put forward.	
<b>CSPAPC 125</b>	<b>MINUTES</b> The minutes of the meeting held on the 28 <sup>th</sup> January were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.	
<b>CSPAPC 126</b>	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b> Noted.	
<b>CSPAPC 127</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE</b> The Assistant Director for Children's Services reported on the positive highlights of the performance report. January saw a decrease in the number of children in care. However, there had been an increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan which was not in line with statistical neighbours and the service were completing additional work to try and combat this increasing performance rate. There was good performance for visiting children on child protection plans. Special guardianship orders had gone up to 27, a marked increase in comparison to the same period last year.  The number of children missing from care is reviewed on a weekly basis by the Director and Cabinet Member for Children and details of each case discussed with full understanding sought of the action being taken to locate them. It was noted that the Police were reviewing the thresholds in place that instigate a search for a young person that is missing from care as it is often the case that there is an understanding of where the young person is. It was noted that this review would not have a detrimental impact on the investigations being taken forward but rather that policy thresholds will become more in line with how Children's	

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Services assess that a young person is missing and when there is cause for concern.

**HY 59(Percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out within 10 working days of referral)** - In relation to this performance figure, the cause of the delay had been identified by the service and this was a particular capability issue with two social workers, one of whom had resigned and the other was on capability measures. It was anticipated that the target would improve in the next quarter.

**OP411/OP413 (Children becoming subject to a child protection plan in the period, Children ceasing to become subject to a child protection plan in the period)** - The variation in the figures for each month was attributed to the in frequency of children coming onto protection plans and separately, children coming off plans .It was further explained that if there was a large sibling group involved, this could lead to significant variations in the figures from month to month. There had been close analysis of the numbers of children on child protection plans to understand if there were any issues of 'drift' or if the social worker not escalating issues quickly enough. The analysis had led to a key change that, once the First Response team has established that an initial assessment is required, it will now be passed to directly to the Safeguarding and Support team .This will allow the case to be taken forward by one social worker from the start and limit delays that are being caused at the moment by the later transfer, after the initial assessment has been completed.

In terms of tackling 'drift', there were already established warning mechanisms in place and the Head of Safeguarding and Support was meeting with Child Conference chairs, who had an independent role at conference meetings, to look at child protection plans and ensure there was no 'drift' and decisions were being made expediently

**OP367 (Percentage of child protection cases which were reviewed within timescales)** - This was a cut and paste error and correct comments would be circulated after the meeting.*[Completed]*

The Committee were provided with a wider understanding for the types of reasons for delaying a strategy conference. One reason could be due to the social worker being called away to court. This had happened recently and due to the crucial role that the social worker would play in the conference meeting, it had been agreed to delay this.

The Safeguarding and Support service, following an audit by the independent member of the Committee, were currently considering the thresholds for putting a child onto a plan together with the thresholds for taking a child off a plan as they seemed unequal. For example once on a plan, if a child missed appointments at a dentist or nurse this could be used as reason to keep them on a plan. This type of situation showed a need for Safeguarding and Support to work with the independent child protection advisors .Of course, there was anxiety about taking a child off a plan in case they were re – referred. Therefore, tackling anxiety and

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	<p>keeping up with the continual review and analysis of cases was crucial part of the Safeguarding and Support team ensuring that work with a family on a plan is proactive and moves at a quicker pace.</p>	
<p><b>CSPAPC 128</b></p>	<p><b>MASH (MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB)PRESENTATION</b>  Following the outcome of the recent judicial review, made publicly known on, Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> March, one day after the agenda pack for this meeting had been published, the director for Children's Services had withdrawn the presentation about the work of the MASH and information sharing .The judgement had implications for the operation of the MASH and some of its procedures were likely to be subject to change. The Director of the Children's Service set out the details of the case set out the reasons for the judicial review being pursued against the council and provided the details of the final judgement against the council. Essentially, the judge had found that the section 47 investigation had not been correctly pursued by the Children's Service.The initial assessment and strategy meeting had only been completed after the section 47 investigation had been instigated. The judge had felt that, before deciding that there should be section 47 investigations, there had not been proper contact with the parents to authorise information being gathered. Information about the wellbeing of the child had been sought from the school and GP which showed no reason for investigation. This unauthorised use of information gathering now raised questions for the information sharing protocols in use by the MASH and replicated by other local authorities with a MASH. However, the MASH is all about partners sharing information in a working environment and the benefits of this still outweigh the drawbacks. The presentation had advised of the benefits of information sharing and how this was done but now there were legal questions to answer which would have a fundamental impact on how the MASH operated and shared information.</p> <p>The criticism of the judge about the completion of the initial assessment, and standards in reporting would be resolved. The initial assessment and core assessment were being replaced by the single assessment and this would greatly help with how assessments are completed and taken forward. Children's Services were now looking at how they can create space for staff in First Response to write fuller reports. Council Legal advice and advice from a QC would be sought on the collation of data by the MASH and whether they are meeting legal standards. The outcome of this discussion would be shared with the Committee at their next meeting.</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee sought clarification on whether it was only the initial decision to go ahead with a Section 47, without enough consultation that was flawed, or were there other issues as well? It was noted that the comments on the completion of initial assessments and core assessments were not good and this was specific to Haringey. In terms of the initial assessment as previously reported at Committee an initial assessment is opened on the Framework I system to allow</p>	<p>Dir CS</p>

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	<p>information gathering to start.</p> <p>The decision to go ahead with a section 47 was not properly constituted and the action taken was not proportional to the evidence in hand about the case to justify this.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the predicament of the social workers, as on one hand it could be interpreted that the action taken was overzealous but this could be attributed to the recent history of the council .They agreed that, in this case, and with hindsight the decision to precede with a section 47 investigation was not the right one. The Committee agreed that information sharing was vital part of the safeguarding process as it was necessary to identify a child and build up an understanding of the risks that the child could be subject to as this would inform the level of action to be taken by partners. It was noted that all Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs will need to collate and share information but now it was about establishing the right thresholds to determine the level of action to be taken in relation to a referral. In taking forward the findings of the judgement, the service need to ensure that this does not lead to a significant behaviour change of social workers i.e. to less cautious, to ensure vulnerable children are protected.</p> <p>Subsequent to the meeting, the Independent Member of the Committee would take forward an independent qualitative audit on the screening team and report findings to the next Committee meeting.</p>	<p>HC</p>
<p><b>CSPAPC 128</b></p>	<p><b>WORK WITH FAMILIES WHO HAVE NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS</b></p> <p>The council are currently supporting 92 families (one of the highest across London and the UK) who have no recourse to public funds. This equates to around 6 to 10 referrals a month and does not account for the 300 per year enquiries for support that are screened out as the families do not meet the criteria for support. The budget set for this support for £2012/13 was £900k but at the end of year is projected to overspend up to £1,285,000 (£385k over).</p> <p>The No Recourse to Public Funds team are based in the First Response team and comprise of a manager, 2.7 social workers and an immigration /Human Rights Advisor. The team will undertake assessments with families who may or may not have a pending immigration application with the Home Office. It was very important to note that the council do not receive any funding from the government to support these families and therefore there is criteria compiled which the families have to meet in order to gain any support from the council. The requirement to provide support to these families comes from the scope of the Children's act 1989, Humans Rights Act 1998, and National Assistance Legislation, and the eligibility criteria is compiled according to these acts together with requiring a family connection to the borough, and following assessment of the Home Office application.</p> <p>The Committee learnt that a majority of clients come from Jamaica and Ghana and will seek to obtain status in the country through a difficult</p>	

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	<p>immigration process and not the Asylum process which they will not be eligible for.</p> <p>These families will be subject to tight immigration control, often be destitute and experience mental health problems, have high mobility, have no domestic support from the father for children, be vulnerable to involvement in crimes due to their severe circumstances and also prone to experiencing domestic violence.</p> <p>The Committee learnt that the families who are eligible for support will be provided with subsistence in line with NASS guidelines, accommodation and support on immigration issues. Accommodation may not necessarily be in the borough as there is limited accommodation left but the team will visit the family if they are living outside London to ensure they have got basic needs, access to services and children are enrolled in schools.</p> <p>The families are very reliant on the efficiency of the UKBA (UK border agency) to make decisions on their immigration status and lead them to a stable future. However, the Committee heard that decisions on immigration cases have reduced drastically in the past year with, currently, about one decision a month being made. The council has offered to provide funding for a case worker in the UKBA to take forward these cases more expediently but this has not be taken up.</p> <p>It was noted that families who have no recourse to public funds are becoming part of a second tier welfare system and because of the detrimental impact this has on children the council will continue to lobby central government to expedite cases and enable the families to gain a decision on their immigration application.</p> <p>The Committee thanked Arantza Faiges for a very insightful presentation.</p>	
<p><b>CSPAPC 129</b></p>	<p><b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b></p> <p>None</p>	
<p><b>CSPAPC 130</b></p>	<p><b>EXEMPT ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS</b></p> <p>None.</p>	
<p><b>CSPAPC 131</b></p>	<p><b>TO AGREE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013 7.30pm</p>	

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Cllr James Stewart

Chair