

Agenda item:

[No.]

Cabinet

On 17 November 2009

Report Title: Recommendations from the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee.

Report of **Peter Lewis, Director of the Children & Young People's Service**

Signed :

Contact Officer : Mark Gurrey, Interim Assistant Director for Safeguarding

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **[Key / Non-Key Decision]**

1. Purpose of the report (That is, the decision required)

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to receive the recommendations of the Member's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee (SPPAC) and to consider the response to those recommendations from CYPS.

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

- 2.1. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Member Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee for the very valuable work they have done in such a short period of time. The monitoring and challenge they have provided has been extremely helpful for the Service and is already leading to improvements in practice.
- 2.2. The Committee have set out their recommendations in 4 below. Our response to their recommendations is set out in 7 below. As will be clear all recommendations are accepted and being built into practice.

3. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and /or other Strategies:

- 3.1. The SPPAC was set up as a response to the November 2008 JAR report which highlighted the need for members to become more involved in the quality and

nature of the safeguarding services provided by the Council.

3.2. The Committee has been meeting since April 2009 and since August has been tracking a number of cases being dealt with by the First Response part of the Children and Families service. The recommendations that follow below derive from those case analyses.

4. Recommendations

4.1. Recommendations from the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee:

- 1) The Committee has seen case chronologies which indicate that some children whose needs have required a core assessment to be carried out have then had their cases closed by Children's Services without this having been discussed with partner agencies; in one case, a school was very concerned that a case had been closed, and within a few months the case had to be reopened, wasting valuable time. The Committee therefore recommends that:
 - (a) Partner agencies who have involvement with the child are consulted prior to the closure of a case which has involved a core assessment having been carried out;
 - (b) When a case involving a core assessment is closed, at least one agency should be explicitly given the role of monitoring developments within the family, in order that any deterioration in the child's situation is highlighted;
 - (c) When any case is closed, families are always supported in accessing universal services such as children's centres.
- 2) The Committee welcomes the new threshold guidance for referrals that is currently in development, and recommends that the Council ensures that all relevant Haringey staff and staff in partner agencies, particularly frontline workers, are provided with full training in its use as a priority.
- 3) The Committee welcomes attempts by Children's Services to begin to engage with, and hear the views of, children and young people who receive social service care, such as having a Child Protection Plan, but who are not Looked After Children, and the Committee understands that this is currently non-statutory. The Committee recommends that the Council carries out further work to hear the views of such children and young people, and that findings are acted upon as a priority.
- 4) Having discussed children in need in a way which aims to support families in improving the care they can provide for their children, the Committee has become aware of issues surrounding communication with and transition to Adult Services within the Council. The Committee is aware that transition for Looked After Children is seen as a priority, but that there is no supported transition into adulthood for young people who have received services such as Child Protection Plans. In light of evidence that adults who abuse are more likely to have had abusive experiences as a child, as in the case of Baby Peter's mother, the Committee therefore recommends that:

- (a) Communication and multi-agency working between Children's Services and Adult Services is reviewed, particularly in order that children whose carers have mental health problems, learning disabilities, or who suffer from substance misuse, are being supported by a joined-up service which understands the family as a whole rather than individuals within the family;
- (b) Young people in transition to adulthood, who have not been Looked After Children but who are nevertheless deemed by a service as being vulnerable (for example they have recently been in receipt of children's care service such as a Child Protection Plan) are supported and monitored with this transition, for example by ensuring that universal services such as Connexions are being targeted at them.

5) The Committee has seen initial and core assessment forms, and has discussed the practicalities of these with Children's Services. It is felt that initial assessments are not enough focussed on the parenting capacity aspect of the assessment triangle, that the time allowed for initial assessments has in some cases led to incomplete or sub-standard work being carried out, and that core assessments do not offer enough flexibility or scope for full analysis by social workers but are instead primarily 'tickbox' exercises. The Committee welcomes the recently introduced flexibilities within the Integrated Children's System (ICS) and recommends that:

- (a) These flexibilities are used to maximise the ability of social work staff to focus on analytical assessment in both initial and care assessments, and including the assessment of parenting capacity;
- (b) Managers are encouraged to ensure an appropriate balance between the quality and timeliness of assessments;
- (c) Sufficient resources are made available by the Council to enable Children's Services to build on work already undertaken in this area.

5. Reason for recommendation(s)

6. Other options considered

7. Summary

7.1. The panel has been served by an independent social worker, the Assistant Director (Interim) Safeguarding and the Head of Service for First Response. This has allowed for some initial response to the recommendations set out in 4.1 above. Officers have also been able to liaise with colleagues in health to provide more detail about safeguarding in their services especially in relation to GPs which had been a concern of the Committee.

7.2. To summarise the service response:

- **Recommendation 1.** The three recommendations here are accepted and welcomed by the service – they constitute best practice. Details will be passed to social work staff setting out these recommendations as our expectations of service delivery. The current auditing process in train across the service will allow for some checks to ascertain if these recommendations are being followed. Both the DCSF guidance in relation to the Common Assessment Framework and the recently agreed Threshold document encourages children's cases to be passed 'down' the hierarchy of need – so an exit strategy for children who cease being subject to child protection plans is to move to children in need plans, so those who cease being dealt with under CiN plans can move to the CAF and access universal services.
- **Recommendation 2.** The Threshold Document has now been approved by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (and therefore signed off by all partner agencies) and is being disseminated across all agencies. It will form the basis of future training programmes and will be used to guide decision making on work coming into the First Response service.
- **Recommendation 3.** This is accepted and work is underway to explore how we can maximise our ability to hear the views of children and young people especially those subject to child protection plans
- **Recommendation 4.** There are now regular meetings between the two relevant portfolio holders and their senior officers to explore areas of cross over and where there is a need to work more closely together. Underneath this group, the two relevant management teams have met and agreed a series of actions that are designed to provide a more seamless service for young people moving into adult services and to families where there are both adult based and children based needs. These recommendations will be helpful in moving this work forward
- **Recommendation 5.** A substantial amount of work has already gone into redesigning some of the ICS templates using the relatively new Government flexibilities in this area. Thus far we have focussed on that part of ICS which is for the assessment of children at risk and who move to child protection conferences. That work is now complete and staff are currently being trained on the new processes (and are very welcoming of the changes made). The next phase of the project is to address the areas of referrals and initial assessments – and one of the driving forces behind these changes will be to move away from a 'tick box' mentality which the current formats encourage to something which allows social workers to demonstrate professional judgement and analysis. It is worth noting that the Framework for Assessment guidance states "A decision to gather more information constitutes an initial assessment. An initial assessment is defined as a brief assessment of each child referred to social services with a request for services to be provided. This should be undertaken within a maximum of 7 working days but could be very brief depending on the child's circumstances". Again these recommendations will support these changes.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

8.1. Section 4 Paragraph 5 (c) suggests that there may be a need for further resources to 'build on the work undertaken in this area'. The scope of such work and its likely costs will need to be defined and funded from a reprioritisation of existing Children's Services resource.

9. Head of Legal Services Comments

9.1. Comments from Legal have been incorporated into the body of the report and there are no other specific legal comments.

10. Head of Procurement Comments –[Required for Procurement Committee]

10.1. N/a

11. Equalities &Community Cohesion Comments

12. Consultation

12.1. N/a

13. Service Financial Comments

13.1. See 8 above

14. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs

14.1. None

15. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

15.1. None tabled

15.2. N/a