

**REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PRACTICE
COMMITTEE No. 01/2013
COUNCIL 18 March 2013**

Chair:
Councillor James Stewart

INTRODUCTION

This report, to full Council, is required under the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee's terms of reference and provides all members of the council with an understanding of how the committee have worked towards their remit in 2012/13. The report also highlights the issues raised by the committee in relation to safeguarding matters and describes how they have been taken forward.

SUMMARY

Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee

The Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee is an advisory committee of the Cabinet and was established in 2009 in response to the JAR Action Plan. It is a cross party committee, chaired by the Majority group which undertakes detailed case scrutiny into chosen day to day safeguarding practices. Members receive key safeguarding data on: contacts made to the Safeguarding service; referrals and child protection to scrutinize. Training sessions on safeguarding processes are also maintained to ensure that the committee are fully aware of safeguarding practices being followed by the Council.

The Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee works in parallel to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee which is responsible for looked after children. This Cabinet Advisory Committee is focussed on children that come into contact with safeguarding policies. Both these committees have joint meetings twice a year to share information and discuss areas where their responsibilities overlap.

The Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee meets 6 times a year and the agenda and minutes are available on the council's website. Councillors are welcome to attend meetings of the committee to gain assurance about how safeguarding matters are taken forward and with the permission of the chair can participate in the exempt part of the agenda where case studies are considered.

The work plan of the committee is compiled before start of the municipal year by the chair and independent member in consultation with the Assistant Director of Children's services and committee members.

The LSCB (Local Children's Safeguarding Board) also receive papers of each meeting. The business manager of the LSCB has in the past attended meetings and provided comments on the work plan.

To examine and consider the effectiveness of the Council's policies and practice, relating to the safeguarding of children.

Over the year the committee have considered policies on domestic violence, care of disabled children, early help, safeguarding support from children's centres. They have looked at the practices relating to children on long term child protection plans, initial and core assessment completion, and visits to children on child protection plans.

The number of children that had been subject to child protection planning for a continued period.

The committee particularly have wanted assurance that children subject to child protection over a year had a robust plan and were not allowed to 'drift'. The independent member conducted a qualitative audit on a sample of cases to provide assurance in this area. The cases examined were rightly found to require being subject to a protection plan after 18 months as there were longer term issues involved and the safety of the structure that a child protection plan provided was warranted. The committee recommended a need to find alternative solutions to helping families on long term plans and providing structure to their lives in a different way. They also asked the Head of Early Years to attend a meeting to discuss how children's centres are helping support children in need by getting places at Children's Centres. The discussion on getting early help to families and preventing the need for long term intervention continued, later in the year, at a joint meeting with Corporate Parenting in which the Children's Service set out the policy shift, of the service, from intervention to prevention.

Domestic Violence

Currently domestic violence is a factor (not necessarily the overriding issue) in 70% to 80% of child protection cases. The committee considered a presentation in September on how awareness of domestic violence is being increased within the Safeguarding service and across the partnership. They considered sample referrals where domestic violence was a factor to understand how social workers were taking these particular cases forward.

Completion rates of Initial and Core Assessments-

Although the performance on the completion of Initial Assessments and Core Assessments has been below the set target, there has been a significant improvement in the completion rate of Core Assessments in October to bring the figure up from 58% to 80%.

In September, the committee asked the independent member to undertake an audit which would explore the length of the delays, reason for delays and if there was any impact on the vulnerable child's wellbeing and safety. A sample of cases was audited and these were spread across a number of Children's service teams. The committee were given assurance by the independent member that there were no cases seen where a delay in the Initial Assessment completion caused concern for the safety or wellbeing of the child. Essentially, children were seen in an appropriate timescale even though the assessment was not completed within timescale. Also the independent member had seen evidence of good management oversight and supervision in this sample of cases. Overall, the independent member had found that it was mainly system and process errors that contributed to the Initial

Assessment targets not being met. The committee were asked, by the independent member, to support the proactive implementation of MOSAIC and the single assessment process, with continuing focus on good practice of systems instead of systems and reporting led solutions.

The committee also agreed to monitor MOSAIC programme implementation in 2013 so that the required change process does not unduly impact on the performance of the Safeguarding service and its social care of children and young people.

Safeguarding Support to Disabled children

This year the committee have continued to focus on examining the care of disabled children and considered the findings of two audits concerning the care of disabled children. The first of the audits focussed on a specific child and involved six agencies reviewing their files in the same environment and discussing learning points about the care provided to the child. The second audit was completed in partnership with the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and looked at recent cases, referred to the Disabled Children's team and the First Response service, where the family of the child was known to both teams. This is a previously unexplored area and the committee learnt that there was no existing research to call upon relating to Domestic Violence and disabled children. The learning from this audit was also being considered by the LSCB. Although there were only a small number of cases identified where domestic violence was a factor, the service agreed to keep this issue under review because the experiences of DV would have a detrimental impact on the emotional wellbeing and safety of a disabled child. The committee will next look at the work to identify children who are known to Social Care but not subject to child protection plans, but who have an additional need such as speech and language therapy and the support they receive.

To consider the Council's policies and performance relating to safeguarding through observing practice in Haringey and obtaining the views of key stakeholders (staff, families and children /young people) to attain a qualitative understanding of safeguarding practice.

In July 2012 the committee considered responses to questionnaires and interviews, from families who had attended a child protection conference from October 2011; 35 responses had been received from a mixture of parents and other family members, and from a diverse range of backgrounds. It was reported that the findings of this study reflected national research findings, and that the responses had acknowledged positive aspects as well as areas for improvement. The findings will be used to feed into service delivery, and this process has already started

In July, the independent member also revisited an earlier qualitative audit concerning child protection planning. The independent member was able to get in contact with 2 parents and reported back their views of the process. The committee felt that getting people's personal views on what was a difficult process helped to bring the issues to life.

To examine and consider the effectiveness of the arrangements for co-operation on child protection matters between partner agencies.

The committee will be looking at the interface between safeguarding and other key partner agencies and seeking an understanding of their communication lines by looking at the operation of the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) in March 2013.

The committee will also consider, at this meeting, the results of a case audit completed by Adults services. The independent member has agreed with Adults service that there will be questions in the audit exploring the interface between safeguarding and adult services.

To make recommendations on these matters to the Cabinet or Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Director of Children and Young People's Service in taking forward improvements to safeguarding of children.

The Cabinet Member for Children felt there was a need to understand how far out of timescale assessments were being completed and the factors contributing to this. The Chair agreed with the Cabinet Member and asked the independent member of the committee to undertake a qualitative audit on a sample of assessments. The details are listed in the section above on *Completion of Initial and Core Assessments*.

The Chair will determine the Committee's procedures and the means for conveying the Committee's views to the Cabinet

A report to Cabinet and Full council

How matters raised by the Committee have been taken forward:

Recording of Child Protection Visits

The Committee had previously expressed concern about the recording of visits made to children on child protection plans and the Head of Quality Assurance had undertaken an internal audit to provide further assurance about the frequency of visits and to check that recording was to the appropriate standard. One of the findings of the audit was to revise the template in use to record visits and make it useable to both experienced and less experienced social workers. The adoption of the new MOSAIC IT programme will allow Social Workers to complete family records and complete single assessments. The audit recommended that further thought should be given to how individual children in a family are seen alone so that the voice of all the children can be heard. This would be taken forward in the compilation of the template and single assessment.

Examining the application of the threshold of need when a referral is made to safeguarding services

In Haringey more children will go on to receive an Initial Assessment, following referral to social care, than statistical neighbouring boroughs. The Committee questioned the number of Initial Assessments requiring completion and want to understand further whether the Children's service are working to a lower threshold of

need, when assessing referrals, compared to other local authorities. The committee have asked the independent member to examine the application of the threshold of need specifically when auditing a sample of new referrals to Safeguarding services.

How the needs of younger siblings were assessed and addressed, when the presenting issue is the behaviour of an older young person

When considering protocols about how social workers deal with domestic violence between young people, the committee wanted to make sure the needs of all the children in a family are assessed. The Committee had asked for an audit to be completed to find out how the needs of younger siblings were assessed and addressed, when the presenting issue is the behaviour of an older young person in the family. 14% of contacts received by First Response relate to young people aged between 14-17 and are received from a number of sources including police, schools, and the Youth Offending service. The learning from this audit, was obtaining support for the older sibling including finding an advocate which the young person was able to communicate with such as a youth worker as this will limit the disruption caused to younger siblings. Also the shift to early intervention, by the Children's service, will in future, help younger siblings in the family as they will get support from a young age.

Taking a closer look at the number of Section 47's completed and how this compares to other local authorities.

Where a child is suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, the local authority is required under s47 of the Children Act 1989 to make enquiries, to enable it to decide whether it should take any action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The council usually undertake this investigation with the consent and co-operation of the Police but can begin investigations without this if necessary. Local authorities are not required to track this performance indicator but the committee have requested further information on the actual number of section 47's (child protection investigations) completed in comparison to statistical neighbouring boroughs to get a further understanding of the time spent on these types of investigation and further aid their understanding of the workload of the safeguarding service.

WE RECOMMEND

- i) The work of the Committee be noted