

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Special Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 21 November 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Potts (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Bainbridge, D Bell, J Blakey, P Brookes, J Considine, R Crute, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, L Kennedy, M Simmons and A Willis

Faith Community Representative:

Mrs A Swift and Mrs C Craig

Also Present:

Councillors M McKeon and L Maddison

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Smith, J Charlton, S Durham, N Grayson, L Mavin, A Patterson, A Reed, M Wilson, Miss K Ashcroft, Mr J Conlon and Mr R Patel

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Maddison for Councillor N Grayson

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review Process

The Committee received a report of the Independent Chair Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board that provided information on the processes involved in the Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review (SCR) (for copy see file of Minutes).

The LSCB Business Manager gave a presentation that highlighted the following:-

- Serious Case Review Criteria
- Additional Criteria
- Who can refer a case
- Notifications to Government and Regulatory Bodies
- Aims of a Serious Case Review

- Learning and Improvement
- How reviews are conducted
- Published Findings
- Monitoring and Learning
- Current Published SCR
- Learning from published SCR
- What happens next
- Actions Taken by the LSCB
- Additional Actions Taken by the LSCB

Councillor Maddison referred to the last slide of the presentation regarding working together and asked the LSCB Business Manager to expand on the barriers. She advised that the main barriers were about people understanding the thresholds, for example the health professionals giving a level 2 or 3 for a case in terms of need but that another professional would give a different level. A Task and Finish Group had been set up to address that. She also advised that there was a communication and information sharing barrier when the practitioner was not known or there were no contact numbers. A third barrier was systems as all services used different systems and the board was looking at how to reduce this barrier.

Referring to an outcome where a child was not brought to an appointment, Councillor Brookes asked if the LSCB had the authority to ensure that this was followed up. The LSCB Business Manager said that the NHS had an action for that and that work was ongoing with GPs and dental practitioners to identify the people involved. She added that the LSCB could escalate a case higher if it was not being addressed locally. The LSCB Business Manager in response to a further question from Councillor Brookes in relation to organisations implementing recommendations advised that the LSCB in terms of working together can escalate if no action against recommendations.

Councillor Brookes went on to ask if the figures for serious case reviews were published. He was interested in benchmark data suggesting serious case reviews per 1,000 population might be a useful measure for comparing with other local authorities. He was informed that they would be included in the published annual report.

Councillor Kennedy was concerned when the whole family was not looked at when a problem with an elder sibling was known. The LSCB Business Manager said that risks to a baby were not always assessed when looking at another child in the family but due to the findings of the serious case review this learning was being shared that families as a whole should be assessed..

With reference to the Adoption Panel, Councillor Jewell pointed out that problems were identified pre-birth and flagged up quickly through a very rigorous process. The LSCB Business Manager said that in adoption cases there was involvement from the local authority but in this situation where the family was not known to statutory services issues were identified.

Councillor Blakey picked up on the point that communication was a barrier and said that over the last nine years of being on this committee the non-communication or lack of communication between all agencies was still being reported as a problem. She was informed that this was a national issue but would improve with sharing protocols in place.

The Strategic Manager Children's Services explained that the service carry out a large assessment of cases and that information sharing comes up as an issue time and time again. The service were getting things right for so many people and families. She added that in future even when no previous involvement with the family was known a team around the family would look at all aspects of family life. For example, when a child had poor school attendance a health visitor and midwife would be involved. The SCR allowed the service to revisit the findings with all of the practitioners.

The LSCB Business Manager explained that there were flags used on systems where one practitioner had safeguarding concerns, further to a question from Councillor Bainbridge. She added that the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) worked with a number of agencies in the same office with access to the same information.

Councillor Maddison referred to access to information and asked if there was a limit to those people who had authorised access. With early intervention she asked if a midwife would be able to access any flags on the system about safeguarding concerns with a family. The LSCB Business Manager explained that all individual agencies had their own systems and that it did become more difficult when sharing information across all agencies. This was now being addressed and each partner was looking into it. She added that the LSCB had promoted clearer information sharing and further guidance from the Government for 2018 was currently being consulted upon.

The Chairman thanked the LSCB Business Manager for her presentation.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

5 Case File Audit

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided an overview of the Audit Programme being delivered in Children's Services (for copy see file of Minutes). Members were advised that following the Ofsted Inspection in 2016 Ofsted had recommended the improvements were required in case file auditing and that a quality improvement framework had been established which aimed for excellence with high expectations, high challenge and high support. The improvement framework had drawn on research from Ofsted and reports from other local authorities that were judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.

The revised audit programme would bring a culture of quality where only good was good enough. Random audits and moderation would be carried out and clear feedback would be given, there would be escalation for inadequate and requires improvement cases. The group auditing process would be led by senior managers to calibrate standards. However the case file audit was not a standalone tool and part of a much larger quality improvement activity.

Members were advised of the quality improvement activity, which included quality improvement champions, training and development workshops and Head of Service quality clinics. Members learned that each quarter 5% of open cases were audited which included case file audits and moderation and thematic audits. Members were given performance information for audits on Early Help cases, which had seen 65% of good or

better cases in quarter 2, however, statutory services cases that were good or better had fallen to 43%.

The Children's Services Strategic Manager gave a presentation that highlighted:-

- Audit Programme
- Quality Improvement Framework
- Ofsted Recommendation
- Revised Audit Programme
- Audit Tool & Practice Standards
- Quality Improvement Activity
- Annual Audit Programme
- Outcomes to Date – Early Help
- Outcomes to Date – Statutory Services
- By Service
- External Validation
- Next Steps
- Additional Factors

Referring to the Implication Appendix of the report Councillor Blakey noted that there were no disability issues and was advised that this area was supported by the disability team and was dealt with.

Councillor Brookes was advised that the previous LAC service had one assessment tool and a progress record. When audited previously the assessment and record were looked at and the service had taken the decision to remove the assessment part so that everything was in one place. This was in line with other authorities and had led to a reduction.

Councillor Brookes was concerned about the amount of time staff had to record information especially with staff shortages and the volume of case loads to deal with. He asked if the same staff come under audit as being inadequate and if these things were taken on board. The Strategic Manager explained that there was a clear HR process with regards to competency and capability and actions would be put in place when required. The Children's Services Service Improvement Manager confirmed that this was effective and some staff did have action plans in place. The Strategic Manager added that when anything was identified below a good standard there would be an action for each manager and the practitioner would be held to account. The Heads of Service also held quality clinics to work with all managers. She added that there were issues with agency workers and this sometimes affected the stability of the service. The service were attracting staff through a university programme to the social worker academy. The Strategic Manager assured members that the service would continue to strive to improve quality.

With regards to the audit inspection Councillor Jewell asked about the independent inspection and what expertise the auditors had and how consistent the inspections were. The Strategic Manager advised that the service was commissioned following a rigorous process to identify external validators and extensive research had been carried out and that the process was robust. Members were informed that an audit carried out in December 2016 reported that none of the cases were good however significant improvements had been made during the year. The Children's Services Service

Improvement Manager reported that the external auditors carried out two audits a year and the service had recently discussed using a further external auditor to provide additional assurances.

Councillor Kennedy on referring to early help asked if there was training offered to pastoral staff in schools. She was aware of the work that they carried out and the relationship with the One Point Service but that they often were the first port of call. The Strategic Manager advised that training was available and the service were in the process of developing an e-learning package around the single assessment. The expectation was that safeguarding children was everybody's business and to become involved, She added that primary schools had set up case clinics whereby staff could meet with other staff to share the ownership of families as it did not have to be the One Point Service taking the lead. Councillor Kennedy said that training was a requirement for all pastoral staff and she was assured that a programme for local level information sharing was in place.

Councillor Maddison asked if there were tools in place to ensure that everyone received training and was assured that a record of attendance was kept. She went on to ask how cases were selected for auditing purposes and was informed that the performance team select the case files and ensure that they did not re-audit the same child. More cases than were needed were selected to ensure a rotation of staff.

Referring to agency worker staff, Councillor Maddison asked how we ensured that they were up to DCC standards. The Strategic Manager explained that there was a good induction process in place and that agency workers would be familiar with practice standards and would have an understanding of the framework. They also receive feedback when their cases were audited.

Moving on Councillor Maddison enquired about the transfer of cases from one local authority to another and asked at what stage did they become part of an audit process. She was informed that there was a transfer protocol for handing over cases especially with issues which we were required to know. She added that this was one of the thematic audits.

Councillor Maddison's final point was about the delays created when partners did not have the same computer systems when transfer occurred and was advised that managers were aware when a transfer was being made and the case would be risk managed.

The Chairman thanked officers for their presentation and asked that an update be brought to a future meeting.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be received.

6 Role of the Social Worker - Overview

The Committee received a report from the Director of Children and Young People's Services that raised awareness and understanding of the role of the social worker in Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Manager for Child Protection and Disability gave a very detailed presentation that included the range of work covered by Children's Services Social Workers, the current activity, performance management framework and service pressures.

Members were provided with a snapshot of social worker activity as at 31 October, information on the performance management framework and how the pressure on the service had increased in the past few years.

He highlighted paragraph 17 of the report that gave examples of the type of work carried out on a typical day including domestic abuse referrals, mental health issues, attending team around the family meetings, being cross-examined in court, working with foster carers and prospective adopters and working with vulnerable children at risk of homelessness.

Councillor Kennedy referred to domestic violence when it was the young people abusing their parents and asked about the approach in that situation. The Strategic Manager advised that this would be recognised within LSCB procedures and if the parents were struggling in their own home the urgent care service would formalise a robust and flexible approach for them. Further to another question from Councillor Kennedy about where a child would be placed if taken from the home in these circumstances and was advised that extended family members would be approached in the first instance and on rare occasions the child would be placed in foster care. The main aim of the service would be for the child to return back to the family home safely.

Councillor Bainbridge asked if the increase in more cases was in certain areas of County Durham and if it was from families already in the system or from alcohol, drugs and abuse. She was informed that there were more cases in the East of the County than in more affluent parts of the County and that austerity was impacting on families coping strategies. This was not just the link to poverty but when people did not feel secure in their lives and could lead to mental health issues, drug or alcohol issues and could lead to abuse within the home. There had been an increase in drug use from parents and the patterns of neglect were identified earlier through the One Point Team and Families First Team. The Strategic Manager also advised that the service was working with parents to support them but there was a link to poverty and children coming into care.

Councillor Crute said that there was a common thread with regards to the direction of travel as the number of active cases and applications for care proceedings continued to increase. With the role out of Universal Credit he asked how the service could plan ahead. The Strategic Manager advised that the restructure of the service would better shape the teams and there would be a focus on babies and adolescents. There had been an independent evaluation from Northumbria University with regards to the pre-birth team that showed that in 50% of cases the child stayed with the mother and the other 50% had first and final statements issued. He added that it was about all services working together to be much more pro-active and look at what could be done to tackle poverty.

The Chairman recognised that this was a difficult profession and asked if the good work was recognised or celebrated. The Strategic Manager said that for newly qualified staff end of first year celebrations were held and that staff could be nominated through the Council's 'great staff, great stuff' award. Recognition had grown over the last few years and by coming to meetings such as Scrutiny, the voice of the profession was reaching the

people who mattered. He also added that the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services hosted a celebration event for the social worker of the year.

Referring to a Select Committee's report on Social work last year, Councillor McKeon asked if merging the Adult and Children's social worker roles would be considered. The Strategic Manager advised that the qualifications had become much more specialised, although they are regulated by the same body, the Health and Care Professions Council. He advised that the roles were the same in terms of the ethics and the Code of Conduct and that the Corporate Directors of Children and Young People's Services and Adult and Health Services were keen to do a joint work programme for next year. However, it was recognised that the knowledge base and legislative frameworks were very different.

Councillor Maddison asked what impact social media had had on the social worker and was advised that there had been a significant impact and had changed the nature of the service users outside of work. A number of incidents had taken place with social workers and sessions had been organised with the Cyber Crime team on how to keep themselves safe on the internet.

The Strategic Manager advised that there were a handful of cases that were monitored pre-birth and in some instances, the child would be taken into care at birth, following a question from Councillor Blakey.

Councillor Crute said that there were a range of factors and that it was important to see how this would link together to take on the challenges ahead. The Strategic Manager said that the restructuring would also work around the voluntary sector and for those parents whose child was taken into care from hospital were the most vulnerable and challenging people to deal with.

The Strategic Manager Child Protection and Disability advised in relation to an earlier question about cases transferred to Durham County Council that the service had seen an increase of children from the south of the country moving into the area who brought with them a number of concerns. This was a challenge but he assured the members that once these children were here they were our responsibility.

The Chairman thanked the Strategic Manager for his presentation.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be received.

7 Scoping Report: Role of the Social Worker from a Child's Perspective

The Committee received a report of Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided scope for an in depth scrutiny review looking at the Role of the Social Worker from a child's perspective (for copy see file of Minutes). The aim of the review was to investigate the role of the social worker assessment and the safeguards of children from a child's perspective to ensure the views of the child are included and reflected in plans relating to them and how this impacts on the social care workforce.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that the first meeting would be held on 1 December 2017 comprising of 10 members and including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Management Board. The review would focus on support to the child, families and carers and would be limited to assessment and safeguarding stages.

The Committee would receive regular verbal reports before final recommendations to Cabinet in the summer of 2018.

Resolved:

- (i) That the scoping report and agree the terms of reference as set out in paragraphs 13 - 25 and the project plan at appendix 2 be received.
- (ii) That a working group of no more than ten members from the committee with the Chair and Vice Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board appointed as Ex-Officio members outside of the ten members, be set up.
- (iii) That verbal updates in relation to the progress of the evidence gathering be received.