

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL	ITEM No.
REPORT OF: Children's Safeguarding Overview Project Group	
CONTACT OFFICER: Julie Gallagher Principal Democratic Services Officer	
TITLE: PROGRESS REPORT – June 2017	

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the work of the Children's Safeguarding Overview Project Group over the last Municipal year.

2.0 BACKGROUND

As part of its work programme for 2014/15 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that an Overview Project Group be established to review and consider the issue of Children's Safeguarding.

The Membership of the Group comprised of Councillor Susan Southworth (Chair), Councillors R Caserta, M Hankey, D Jones, S Kerrison, N Parnell and M Whitby.

Interim reports were presented to the Committee in March 2015 and March 2016 setting out the findings and recommendations of the Group, one of which was for the Group to remain and continue its work as an ongoing Sub Committee.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The Group has met on the following occasions:-

7th April 2016
23rd May 2016
15 September 2016
27th February 2017
26th April 2017

Members also visited and meet with staff from the Victoria Family Centre in Radcliffe.

Members were supported in their work by Martyn Burrell Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Bart Popelier Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

During this municipal year the Group agreed that the focus of the Project Group (OPG) for 2016/17 should include the following:

Ofsted Inspection Report - Examination of the Ofsted report and the subsequent action plan would be the primary focus for the OPG.

Social Worker Recruitment Process – Follow up Staff Interviews
- Arrange for Group to speak to staff in the workplace.

Phoenix Team and Child Sexual Exploitation – Receive briefing on the work of the team across Greater Manchester with focus on the awareness raising work undertaken and areas of concern within the Borough.

Performance Monitoring - Continue to receive quarterly monitoring reports in relation to safeguarding children

Oasis Team – Examination of the non statutory support and early intervention provide by the team.

Home Education – Following the significant rise in the numbers of children choosing to Home Educate members agreed to invite Debra Wood, School Attendance Manager and Susan Morris, Home Education Officer to a meeting of the OPG.

Education Achievement at KS2 and KS4 – Klare Rufo, Assistant Director Learning and Culture will report.

4.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE GROUP

4.1 OFSTED Inspection Report

Jackie Gower Assistant Director Safeguarding and Social Care attended the meeting to present the Ofsted inspection report.

The Ofsted inspection report concluded that Children’s services in Bury require improvement to be good.

12 inspectors carried out their inspection over a four week period and the focus was on the following areas;

Frontline case practice

Children and Young People’s own experiences

A greater emphasis on the outcome of the needs of the child

Early identification and help for children, young people and their families
A greater emphasis than in previous inspections about how partner agencies work together to protect children and young people
Services for LAC (including Fostering, Adoption and care leavers)
A review of the LSCB

Members of the Group placed on record their thanks and appreciation to all staff for their hard work during the Ofsted inspection.

Members discussed the cost of implementing the Ofsted Action Plan; concerns raised in respect of care leavers, the non-attendance of police officers at Child Protection Conferences, children living out of area and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officers.

The OPG have received regular updates in respect of the Ofsted action plan and continue to hold the Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Quality assurance to account in respect of all areas of the plan. Members wanted to ensure that the document continues to be relevant and there is no room for complacency. This will continue to be an area for further scrutiny in the forthcoming municipal year.

4.2 Social Worker Recruitment Process – Follow up Staff Interviews

In attendance were newly qualified and experienced social workers from the Children's advice and assessment team and the safeguarding team. The social workers were given the opportunity to explain their roles within the team, their previous experience, the support and mentoring available and highlight any areas of concern.

Members of the Group were given the opportunity to ask questions of the social workers and the following points were raised:

- The newly qualified social workers are supported in the role by mentors. The support provided is good, accessible and helpful.
- The caseload has increased since their initial appointment, the level is still manageable and there is a wide range of support available.
- The majority of care proceeding cases are being dealt with within the recently introduced 26 week timeline.
- There is a good open relationship between social workers and middle/senior management.
- Social workers highlighted duplication and high levels of paperwork as pressure points/area of concern.
- Relationships with other partner agencies has improved, social workers feel respected, there is however sometimes problems with information sharing with partners from the NHS.
- The social workers reported that they felt the recent Ofsted report accurately reflected the work being undertaken across the Department.

Members of the Group agreed that meeting with front line staff enabled them to get a more rounded picture of child safeguarding issues within the Borough.

4.3 Phoenix Team and Child Sexual Exploitation

Members considered this item at two separate meetings of the OPG. Susan French and Kath Thomas attended the most recent meeting to provide Members of the group with an update in respect of the work undertaken to tackle child sexual exploitation following concerns raised by Elected Members. Their update included the following information:

- Phoenix team staffing details
- The profile of CSE work in Bury
- Demographic information
- Number of CSE crimes recorded
- Use of the CSE Risk Measurement Tool

Members sought assurances from the officers present in respect of information they had received with regards to problems in the Clarence Park and Whitehead Gardens areas of the Borough. Members were informed that the Phoenix team were aware of potential issues in these areas and a multi-agency approach had been taken to address and alleviate some of these concerns.

The Assistant Team Manager reported that there continues to be a significant problem with exploitation via the internet/mobile phones, often in the form of image sharing. This accounted for 39% of all CSE Risk Measurement Tools completed between April 2016 and March 2017.

4.4 Performance Monitoring - Key Performance Indicators

A large part of the work of the Group has continued to be around monitoring and examining performance data. Regular updates have been received in respect of key performance indicators for children's safeguarding. The Group have had the opportunity to monitor and examine performance data relating to the following areas:

- Referral/Conversion rate
- Contacts and Conversion to Referrals
- Contact Outcomes Breakdown
- Conversion rate of Referral to Assessments
- Re-referrals
- Assessment Timescales
- Section 47 Enquiries
- Child Protection Plans Data

- Numbers of Looked after Children

Quarterly updates will continue to be received at meetings of the Group. Members of the Group have asked that the formula for presenting the reports be revised to enable Members to better understand the demographics and also the personal stories of those accessing the service.

4.5 Elective Home Education

Following a reported 100% rise within the Borough (111 children are now educated at home) members invited Debra Wood, School Attendance Manager and Susan Morris, Home Education Officer to a meeting of the OPG. The purpose of their attendance was to ensure that children that opted out of main stream education system did not fall through the net in respect of child safeguarding.

The School Attendance Manager reported that there is a mixed age range of children currently being home educated, the majority are of primary school age. There is number of different reasons as to why parents choose to educate from home, these can include; problems with bullying, breakdown of the relationship between school and parents, poor communication or dissatisfaction with the support given to SEN pupils.

A member of the home education team will conduct regular visit to parents to offer support and guidance.

With regards to concerns raised in respect of the Council's powers, the School Attendance Manager reported that the Council has the power to issue a School Attendance Order if it is believed the child is not receiving an appropriate level of education.

Members of the Group expressed concern that issues within schools are quickly exacerbated and too easily escalated, parents then feel they are left with no other option but to home educate. Better pastoral support and more inclusive attitude within schools would help to alleviate some of these problems.

In respect of pupils on a child protection plan, these children can still be educated at home. The information and concerns contained within the plan would be shared with the elective home education team to ensure that the child's wellbeing is still safeguarded.

Members have asked that Debra Wood attends the first meeting of the next municipal year and provides members with information in respect of the following areas:

- Is there evidence of any themes emerging that could explain the dramatic rise in the number of parents choosing to home educate
- Evidence of good or poor practice in particular schools.

- Is the growth of those children being home educated confined to a particular area of the Borough?
- What is the gender and age split of the children?
- Any other demographic information that the officer thinks relevant.

4.6 Education Achievement at KS2 and KS4

Klare Rufo, Assistant Director Learning and Culture reported that there had been changes to the system for reporting measure at Key Stage 4, Progress 8, the new system will take effect from 2016.

The Assistant Director reported that the new system for assessing education achievement will in her opinion place greater emphasis on academic achievements and will be less inclusive.

The Assistant Director reported that in respect of the most vulnerable pupils there is no "closing the gap" group established within Bury. Such a group would be able to share good practice within the Borough and undertake more forensic analysis of the issues and concerns affecting those most vulnerable.

Members agreed that Councillor Susan Southworth as Chair of the Safeguarding Overview Project Group would contact elected members asking them to highlight through their roles as school governors, the following;

- Ask/remind schools to inform the Local Authority if a child is to be home educated especially if there is a safeguarding concern.
- Governing bodies to be mindful of the educational achievement and all encompassing support, social and emotional, available to the most vulnerable pupils.

4.7 Visit to the Victoria Family Centre, Radcliffe

Following high praise of the facility by the Ofsted Inspection team, members agreed to visit the service to meet with staff and observe the services provided onsite.

The Centre provides contact for children and Young People in Care in accordance with Section 34 of the Children's Act 1989 and its primary purpose is to preserve and develop family relationships.

Members discussed capacity, ease of referral, risk assessments undertaken in advance of contact sessions, support available for staff, staff retention and sickness absence rates, as well as scope for income generation.

Members of the Group commended the staff for the praise they have received from the courts in respect of the quality of the assessment work undertaken.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Members of the group supported by Strategic Leads within the Department

have meet on five occasions, interviewed 17 different Council Officers and visited the Victoria Family Centre and the Kershaw Centre.

The work of the group was highlighted in the most recent Ofsted report: "Clear political scrutiny is evident through a Children's Safeguarding scrutiny board and strong political attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board. There are sufficient checks and balances in the governance system holding the leadership of children's services to account, providing coherent political and strategic oversight".

'It was recognised by Ofsted that the expertise and knowledge of this group was one of its strengths. However, it needs to be accepted by anyone who is on the group that meetings start at 5-00/30, and that attendance at 4 meetings each year is a basic requirement. When Members are appointed to this group by their respective political group, this needs to be taken into account. Consistency is vital'

Looking forward, it is hoped that the work to date can be built upon during the forthcoming Municipal Year. At an early stage Members of the Group recognised the complex multi agency approach to safeguarding meant that to treat the review as a time bound self contained piece of work would not do justice to the critical nature of the subject matter.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the work of the Overview Project Group be carried over into the new Municipal Year 2017/18.
2. That, in order to retain the expertise and knowledge developed throughout the review, where possible the existing membership be retained and meeting dates be held quarterly and scheduled in advance. (See above)
3. That regular updates be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Group.
4. That the group in consultation with Klare Rufo Assistant Director Learning and Culture examine the feasibility of establishing a a Borough wide "Closing a Gap" Group in respect of Educational Achievement.

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