

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUP

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 16 October 2018

Present: Councillor Susan Southworth (in the Chair); Councillor Caserta; Councillor Grimshaw, Councillor Hankey, Councillor N Jones, Councillor J Walker and Councillor Whitby.

Also in attendance: Karen Dolton, Interim Executive Director Children's Services
Bart Popelier, Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
Ahmed Ajmi, Projects Manager
Leigh Webb – Democratic Services

Apologies for absence:

CS.01 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J Walker declared a prejudicial interest in Minute CS.06 below, Troubled Families Update, as the Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities. Councillor Walker left the meeting during consideration of this item as the issue is an area of policy that falls within his portfolio area.

CS.02 OFSTED VISIT UPDATE

The Interim Executive Director of Children's Services presented a report setting out the findings of a recent focussed visit to Children's Services. The visit had taken place on 25 and 26 July 2018.

The Inspectors had reviewed the local authority's arrangements for contacts and referrals in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) for children who need help, including safeguarding. Inspectors also considered thresholds for early help and statutory services for children in need, including those in need of safeguarding.

A wide range of evidence was considered, including case discussions with administrators, social workers, managers, representatives from partner agencies, and senior staff responsible for quality assurance and performance management. Performance data and management reports were also reviewed, and children's case records were sampled.

The Interim Executive Director reported on the following positive findings:

- That the MASH is an effective multi-disciplinary service which

provides clear pathways for members of the public and professionals to raise concerns about children. Contacts are prioritised and processed in a timely way by skilled and experienced staff. Management oversight is robust and all recommendations for next steps are reviewed prior to authorisation.

- That Contacts and referrals are authorised promptly by managers and there is no backlog. Partner agencies routinely use the agreed referral form. Consent is sought from families, and referrers are informed of the outcome of their referral. This ensures that families' rights are fully considered, and that referrers know what is happening in response to their referral and what to do if they disagree.
- That information-sharing by those partner agencies in the MASH is a strength. If a child needs specialist services, this triggers swift information-gathering from a range of agencies. Responses are generally prompt, and all gaps are followed up.
- That decision-making and information-sharing is supported by co-location and effective joint working between children's social care, police, health and education staff. Information from different providers is gathered and analysed by the health specialist, ensuring that the significance of health information is understood.
- Strategy meetings in the MASH are convened swiftly and have improved significantly since the internal audit at the end of 2017. Composition, chairing and minuting have all improved. However, the MASH health and education specialists are unable to participate in all meetings, although background information from their service area is gathered and shared. Strategy meetings held in other teams are well attended and minuted, and the rationale for decisions made is set out.
- Children who may have complex safeguarding needs, such as children who go missing from home or care and those who may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation, benefit from prompt consideration by staff in the specialist complex safeguarding team. Contacts are swiftly routed from the MASH to the appropriate service.
- Children who require social work assessments are allocated promptly to staff in the initial response teams. The social workers know their children well and can articulate the strengths and difficulties in families, which means that the right support can be put in place.

During discussion of this item, the Interim Executive Director acknowledged the areas for concern which had been highlighted, including the need for more work to be done in respect of the "voice of the child". With regard to the issue of Early Help through the Oasis team it was reported that issues and improvements were being addressed through the transformation process and auditing. On the wider issue of auditing, the Interim Executive Director explained how robust auditing had now been implemented through internal departmental audits which include effective follow up to create a cycle of improvement.

In response to a question concerning administrative duties, the Interim Executive Director acknowledged there was a lack of support in this area, but highlighted that often Social Workers did want to perform their own writing up of case conferences in order to provide the correct context in relation to the meetings and the issues discussed.

The Chair, Councillor Susan Southworth, highlighted the issue of the weight given to the view of parents. The Interim Executive Director explained that at the early help phase there was a balance to be struck between trusting the family and intervening. It was reported that the issue had been addressed and systems were in place to challenge and look at where families sit in the system and that the system supported professional judgements.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

CS.03 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Bart Popelier gave a presentation setting out Children's Social Care Performance in respect of the key performance indicators for children's safeguarding. Performance information was set out in respect of the following indicators:

- Number of Contacts
- Number of Referrals
- Number of Repeat Referrals
- Number of S47 Enquiries
- Children in Need
- Child Protection
- Public Law Outline
- Edge of care – Start of Care
- Children with Disabilities
- Workforce

Questions were asked and responses given in respect of the presentation, however a number of causes for concern remained for the Group, which can be summarised as follows:

- Whilst acknowledging that a number of new systems had been introduced and would take time to bed-in, the Group had serious concerns over a lack of improvement in terms of performance across the indicators. Members felt that they were receiving similar responses to those received 12 months ago.
- IT systems were not as advanced as they could be, resulting in staff not being able to work efficiently. The Group felt that improved technology and agile working would free up staff to make more efficient use of their time and produce improved quality in their work.

- With regard to recruitment and retention, the Group expressed concerns in relation to workloads and case load numbers. Members highlighted the correlation between staff turnover and performance as a result of cases having to be re-allocated. Issues were also raised about the use of agency staff.
- Concerns were expressed in respect of relatively high levels of sickness, with much of the long term sickness being stress related. The Group highlighted the issue of capacity and workloads as potential contributory factors.
- In respect of children in need, the Group expressed serious concerns about children not being seen.

It was agreed:

That the Chair of this Group, meet with the Interim Assistant Director (Social Care & Safeguarding), with a view to raising the issues above in advance of a formal response to the next meeting.

CS.04 TROUBLED FAMILIES

A report was submitted from the Interim Executive Director for Communities and Wellbeing outlining how the Council safeguard the most vulnerable families in Bury, an overview of the programme, the successes of interventions and how residents are safeguarded.

Bury Council's response to the programme has been the SCIL (Supporting Communities and Improving Lives) team. The team comprises of Family Co-ordinators and a member of staff from DWP. There are two analysts that also provide data support for submissions to central government and also the GMCA.

Greater Manchester, on behalf of the 10 districts, has signed up to the Troubled Families 2 (TF2) programme and has committed to improve the lives of 27,200 families over the next 5 years. Bury's contribution is 1297 families.

Troubled Families is at Greater Manchester (GM) level, part of a wider package of reforms (Public Sector Reform) to help individuals and families. This includes supporting 50,000 people into employment, reducing reoffending, implementing the Early Years New Delivery Model and greater integration of service provision through Place Based Integration.

The report set out information in respect of numbers on the programme; actions undertaken and risks within the programme. Ahmed Ajmi, Projects Officer, attended the meeting and briefed the Group on a number of positive interventions which highlighted how well Bury had performed to date, which was backed up by positive feedback comments from partners. Included within the report were a number of case studies setting out the issues faced by families and the outcomes achieved.

In response to a question from the Chair, Ahmed undertook to provide the number of re-referrals to the programme from phase 1.

With regard to the voice of the child, Ahmed explained about the tools and initiatives in place to ensure this is captured. An undertaking was given to provide copies of the feelings wheel toolkit.

During discussion of this item, Members of the Group acknowledged the good work being undertaken in respect of the Programme.

It was agreed:

The an update on the programme be provided to this Group in 12 months time.

CS.05 NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed:

That the next meeting of the Group be held on 8 January 2019, to consider the following items:

- **Performance Report Response** - Interim Assistant Director (Social Care & Safeguarding) to be invited.
- **Leaving Care Service**
- **Healthy Young Minds**

COUNCILLOR S SOUTHWORTH
Chair

(Note: the meeting started at 5.30pm and ended at 7pm)