

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****9TH JULY 2013**

1. **Present:** Councillors Worton (Chair), G. Carr, Rusby, Saunders and C. Wraith together with co-opted member Mr. J. Winter.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr W. A. Haigh in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

2. **Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

3. **The Council's revised governance arrangements - the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Governance) outlining the remit for the new Children's Services Scrutiny Committee was discussed and endorsed by members. Members highlighted that there was an expectation that there would be an open and honest dialogue between officers and members of the committee.

4. **The Work Programme 2013/14, Topic one - Performance Management of Outcome: Staying Safe**

The Chair welcomed the following invited guests to the meeting:

Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Spokesperson for Children, Young People and Families
Hilary Owen, Assistant Executive Director, Safeguarding, Health and Social Care, Children, Young People and Families

It was explained that the last eighteen months had been spent developing performance data monitoring and performance management across the council and partners to capture activity data and drive improvement. Lots of data is produced and regularly examined to monitor the health of the child protection system in Barnsley. When Barnsley was required to put an improvement plan in place following the inspection, this included a need for this committee to robustly scrutinise fundamental child protection data both now and in the future.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- a) What information will members of the committee have access to? What about confidentiality issues around sharing of data?

The Corporate Parenting Group currently looks at twenty 'headline' items, the local Safeguarding Children Board takes the bulk of safeguarding information but the primary reporting body is this committee, who will be given full access to all the data. It is envisaged that regular liaison will take place and areas of concern will be highlighted. Work is underway to identify specific data which will be reported to this group on a regular basis.

There are three types of data available. Global information is information which is widely available and in the public domain. The next cohort is information which involves between 50 and 200 people and which could be used to identify some people in certain circumstances. This is often handled by the Safeguarding Children Board or the Corporate Parenting Steering Group (which looks only at children in care - around 237 children and young people). Within this information is an even smaller cohort - for example, the examination results of children in care. Individuals can be easily identified from this data so it is important that it is protected. However, all reports which have been sent to the Minister are shared with this committee. It was explained that the last report was 'noted without comment', which can be seen as positive.

- b) Is there scope for further improvement around keeping children safe?

There is always room for improvement. The Improvement Board was set up as a temporary measure until OFSTED have given the all clear, but there is a need for continuous improvement, the upward trajectory for improvement cannot stop. The council is aiming for 'outstanding' and then 'world class'. Legislation and expectations may change but the drive to improve will remain.

- c) Will the cuts to budgets hinder this improvement? We were previously warned that we would never achieve 'outstanding' within existing resources.

It was explained that OFSTED had stated that resources should not be an issue. Other local authorities who have a similar social mix have suffered cuts have still managed to achieve 'outstanding' for children's services and safeguarding. Resources should not be a barrier to improvement or an excuse for poor performance. What is a concern however is lower level services such as the Youth Service which are being cut. As early intervention services are removed, this may create pressure on other services. A member was of the opinion that the 'softer' side of safeguarding should be protected too, as it is better to prevent than to mend.

There is a link between the Troubled Families and Stronger Families programmes as the Troubled Families family support workers are part of the Stronger Families teams. There are early indications that the Troubled Families programme is 'gatekeeping' around 30% of families and is effective at preventing them from progressing into statutory services. The Stronger Families programme is a multi-agency approach and offers a more cost effective way of delivering services across the borough. In the past, children's social care dealt with early support level issues with family support social workers. This has been successful in keeping teenagers out of the care system

and is one of the reasons why the care population has fallen from around 265 in 2007/08 to 235-240 now . The age profile for children in care has changed now, with fewer teenagers and more younger children. The number of children with child protection plans is also relatively stable, remaining at between 185 and 200 children over the last few years.

It was pointed out that safeguarding is guided by statutory guidance which was published in April 2013. The new guidance is very clear about what local authorities and their partners need to do in relation to early support. This is the first time that early support has been included in the guidance.

- d) A member asked about Barnsley's performance regarding runaways from care, which is part of the DfE consultation which closes in September 2013.

It was explained that Barnsley is reasonably good at this as it commissions the independent voluntary organisation 'Safe@ Last' to represent the child's interests independent of social care, parents etc. Part of their role is to provide a return interview for the child.

- e) Is the new children's social care IT system up and running?

The new IT system went live yesterday (8/7/2013) and no problems have been reported as yet.

- f) If a child is admitted to hospital for possible non-accidental injuries how is this monitored? If the child subsequently returns to hospital with similar injuries is this taken into account?

A paediatrician would be best placed to answer this question. However, no children leave hospital where a professional view is not given regarding the cause of the injury. If it could be accidental or non-accidental, this will be recorded. Any further injuries will take into account the previous information. Training has been repeated at the hospital and there is an embedded level of awareness with working protocols which would pick up this. Professionals have to give an opinion which is based on evidence, taking all the circumstances into account. They will examine all possible causes and eliminate them one by one by looking at the evidence to give the most likely cause. A member highlighted that the information provided for measure 56 (emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries) was for 2010/11 and asked for an up to date copy of the data. It was agreed that this will be provided.

- g) Who would be involved in a suspected safeguarding case? What is the procedure?

Anybody who has reason to believe that a child may have been harmed must refer this to Children's Social Care and/or the Police. If staff have suspicions and do not raise them they can be disciplined. Children's social care will look at the strength of the information received alongside the significant harm threshold. If this threshold is met, the police will be contacted to determine how best to investigate the case. Other agencies involved with the family will also be contacted to obtain relevant information which will inform the decision about what to do next to safeguard the child. For example, GPs will decide what information they have which is relevant to the safety of

the child. Children have a right to safety and to be protected from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

- h) There have been well documented cases in the media in other areas where information sharing has not been happening between agencies and children have been at risk. How are we doing in Barnsley? How are the police involved?

Social care and the police are co-located in Barnsley and there is excellent joint working and information sharing between them and other agencies. There are many more contacts to social care than are accepted as referrals. The police and social care work to the joint investigation protocol whereby the team manager will talk to a sergeant in the public protection unit as part of the investigation. Sometimes it is not possible to talk to the designated sergeant and in these circumstances the decision is delegated to other senior officers with the understanding that they talk to the sergeant as soon as practicable. It was highlighted that there is no statutory framework whereby GPs must contact other agencies in cases of suspected sexual exploitation. This is curious when there is a statutory list of agencies who must be contacted by GPs if they are presented with gunshot wounds, which happens rarely. This needs to be addressed.

- i) How can we ensure that this joint working is happening and that it is not just a box-ticking exercise?

It was explained that it is not a box-ticking exercise and that there are good reasons why the protocols are as they are. There is a regular monthly audit of case records. Every manager has a randomly allocated case from another team which they have to audit using the structured audit tool to make sure the protocols are being followed and action recorded. Cases are measured every month and graded. If a case needs attention the team manager will speak to the social worker about what is required.

- j) How good are schools at dealing with bullying? Are concerns raised at a local level and compared across schools?

The schools which are good at dealing with bullying have more concerns raised. This indicates that the children feel safe and are able to raise concerns as they know they will be listened to. However, this makes the data difficult to interpret. Education Welfare Officers support both the schools and staff within them to ensure children feel safe. All schools are required to have anti-bullying policies which indicate how situations will be handled. It was explained that it is the responsibility of individual schools to monitor their performance around bullying. They are required to produce an annual safeguarding report for governors. This is required by the Safeguarding Children Board who collate the information to ensure all schools comply. The annual report is adequate for discharging the statutory responsibility but the designated teacher and governor should keep an eye on the situation.

A Member felt that a positive outlook and aspirations will start to improve when other things improve. Young people need to aspire to better things. Parents too have greater expectations and will drive higher standards.

- k) A member indicated that it would be helpful to know the actual numbers of children in the performance data rather than just the percentages.

It was stated that there are between 230 and 240 children in care and between 185 to 200 with child protection plans. Social care receives in the region of 13,500 contacts per annum or 30 per day.

The number of children in care who are working towards GCSEs is 14. The number of children subject to a child protection plan for the second time in a year are low, often between 2 and 5 children per year.

It was acknowledged that the performance information produced is very detailed but this is out of necessity and a need to be thorough, with different data produced for different bodies. It was confirmed that this information will be available on a ward basis.

The Chair then explained that the previous sub-group which was monitoring performance had expressed a desire to hold an investigation into the work of the Safeguarding Children Board. Members felt that this is an appropriate topic for the new body to discuss at its meeting on 10th September 2013.

The invited guests were thanked for their attendance and contributions.

IT WAS AGREED:

- a) That bespoke performance information will be collated and reported on a regular basis to this committee so that it is able to monitor performance in specific areas and does not duplicate the performance monitoring work of other bodies.
- b) That up to date information regarding emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries will be provided.
- c) The next topic which the committee will look at will be the work of the local safeguarding children board.