

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH SEPTEMBER 2013

5. **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.

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

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

7. **Minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2013**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2013 were accepted as an accurate record.

8. **The Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board**

Members expressed concern that reductions in funding could be a barrier to improvement but were reassured that this will not happen and children will continue to be protected. A large number of safeguarding referrals continue to be received but Members felt that it is better to be 'safe than sorry' and that people should not be discouraged from raising concerns.

The Chair welcomed the following invited guests to the meeting:

Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Bob Dyson, Independent Chair, Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board

Claire Simpson, Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Manager,

Sean McMahon, Detective Inspector, South Yorkshire Police, Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Member

Margaret Kitching, Director of Nursing for NHS England South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw, Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Member

Tim Breedon, Director of Nursing, Clinical Governance and Safety, South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Trust (SWYPT), Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Member

The Chair of the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board, Bob Dyson gave a presentation which explained the current structure of the Board, the concerns which OFSTED raised following their inspection, the response to those concerns and headline areas of success together with areas for further work and next steps.

Mr. Dyson reported that over two hundred actions had been developed as part of an initial improvement plan, which is monitored by a separate improvement board. All these actions have now been signed off and work is underway on 'Phase 2'. There are some concerns around timeliness of reports to child protection conferences. The quality of some case files is still not up to standard. The groundwork is good, but recording and evidence of action needs improvement. Work is underway to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat child sexual exploitation and more qualitative performance data is being developed in accordance with the Munro recommendations. It was reiterated that Barnsley has an ambition to be 'outstanding' in the future but the immediate goal is to be shown to have made improvements in a number of areas and to be assessed as having met the requirements of the improvement notice when next inspected by OFSTED (which could be at any time).

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- (i) Are the new IT systems compatible with those from other organisations? Do the systems 'talk' to each other?

It was reported that the new IT system has had some introductory problems but that these are being ironed out. Good information governance dictates that the social care recording system should not be able to 'talk' to the health system in live time. It was explained that if there are problems with the IT system, practitioners can always rely on manual counting. It was explained that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) comprising police and social care now work together in the same building so that although the IT systems cannot talk to each other, staff can. This has also helped to ensure that the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Joint Investigation Protocol (JIP) is followed, which was another concern in the inspection. This represents a real step forward. Prior to this, police and social care staff worked independently. This situation has now been completely reversed. Staff are aware of the protocols, what is expected, and Section 47 joint visits and joint investigations now take place. There are weekly joint working audits and the JIP is adhered to by all staff.

It is not possible to give a blanket assurance that mistakes will never happen, but the culture has changed significantly. All partners have audit programmes which are overseen by the Performance Sub-Committee and individual agencies address concerns when they arise. People management is now much stronger and every single case which meets the JIT threshold is thoroughly audited.

The JIT is to be expanded and enhanced further with the addition of a Social Work Manager and the Emergency Duty Team, which will cover Section 47 and others (such as domestic violence). The JIT is being developed into a multi-agency

safeguarding hub. It was reiterated that although the systems may not talk to each other, people in the JIT do speak to each other on a daily basis.

A Member asked for reassurance that conversations are properly recorded. It was explained that when a referral comes in to the team, Managers have an initial conversation whereas previously it could have been anybody in the office. This is recorded. There is a weekly audit of what was said and done, and how this has been recorded in order to eliminate any ambiguity.

(ii) How have staff reacted to the changes? Has there been resistance?

It was acknowledged that change in practice can take time. The first stage in the change process was to make sure that policies, practices and procedures were embedded across organisations. The second stage was to support staff in learning and improving their practice in line with policies and the vision of continuous improvement. Everybody was shocked with the inspection judgements but there is a commitment from all to improve.

(ii) Will it be possible to improve the timeliness of case conference reports?

It was explained that social care, health and the police are responsible for submitting the majority of case conference reports. Case conference reports fall into two distinct categories: initial reports and review reports and it is difficult to break performance information down into the two types. Review reports should be able to be produced in a timely manner as they have a 3 month lead-in time. The problem is that the initial reports contain a lot of detail and have to be produced quickly. However, all agencies recognise the importance of reports being ready on time and have developed action plans to improve performance, which will be monitored by the Board.

(iii) Are the resources of the Improvement Board temporary? What will happen in the future?

It was confirmed that the Improvement Board is temporary and cannot be relied on in the future. On-going monitoring improvement will be picked up by the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board and individual agencies. The Improvement Board was initially set up with the help of a small investment of funds from the National Children's Improvement Board, which has now been disbanded. Improvement Board processes, the Chair and audit staff are funded but there is work to be done over the next six months in building a sustainable path for the Council and partners.

(iv) What is the future role for the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee in performance monitoring?

It was felt that this committee has a critical role in the future, particularly at a time when significant cuts are on the horizon. It was highlighted that children and young people represent the future and investment will always be needed to make sure that they are safe and can achieve. Scrutiny has an important role to challenge and hold to account. Members are now better placed to give that level of challenge than was the case in the past.

(v) A Member pointed out that some training sessions were not well attended.

It was agreed that attendance at training has been problematic. The quality of training is excellent but there has been a disappointing take-up at some events. Email reminders are sent and a different training 'mix' is now being explored, such as holding events at lunch time in order to encourage attendance. A coordinated approach across all partners is being developed and an improvement in attendance is anticipated.

(vi) Are the voluntary sector in the loop?

The voluntary sector do have some places on Board sub-committees but there is a need to engage with the sector more, particularly when money is tight. There is a representative of the voluntary sector on the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board but it is difficult for them to speak on behalf of the many voluntary sector organisations. Voluntary Action Barnsley (VAB) is currently developing a consortium arrangement to address these problems.

It has been reported in the media that volunteers working on behalf of Childline plan to visit all primary schools every two years to raise awareness of abuse. School reporting in to the Board is not good, with poor responses. This is something which is being followed up with a view to progressing improvement. It was felt that a head teacher from each Area Council area should have a seat on the Board and should be provided with copies of Board minutes. Members felt that links should be made with the new Area Councils both in terms of safeguarding and also when considering performance of particular schools in individual wards.

A member pointed out that Barnsley College attendance at Board meetings had been poor. The problems which were being experienced have now been addressed and attendance is now good.

(vii) A member asked about the level of child sexual exploitation in Barnsley.

It was reported that child sexual exploitation covers a range of new types of offending driven to a degree by advances in technology and a number of high profile cases reported in the media. A designated child sexual exploitation Detective is in post. Every authority will have individual cases of child sexual exploitation but organised and gang based activity is an added concern. The more vulnerable children are highlighted in police systems and the Runaways Forum picks up cases of child sexual exploitation but a co-ordinated response with all bases covered is required. A recent case of child sexual exploitation in Barnsley resulted in a six year prison sentence for the perpetrator.

With the increasing risk of grooming etc., highlighted in the media, a member enquired if there was an approved list of individuals (such as private tutors) who can work with children. A response was given that there is no such list, but the person with concerns can check with the police if the person presents a danger to children. If it is found that the person has been found guilty of a criminal offence of a sexual nature against a child, the disclosure of this information will be managed appropriately.

- (viii) How many families does the Stronger Families Project work with and is it effective?

The team was established in July so is relatively new. Workers are currently building up caseloads but are involved with the family much earlier, particularly if there is evidence of domestic violence. Performance data will be evaluated based on outcomes and a report will be submitted to scrutiny when available.

- (ix) Are referrals followed up with the person who made the initial referral?

It was explained that the level of response and information given to the person who made the referral depends on what the person has witnessed and the required response. Sometimes people leave anonymous referrals and cannot be informed of the outcome. It was pointed out that OFSTED had identified that feedback needed to improve and as a result a lot of work has been done around thresholds and risk, with strengthened reporting back as evidence of improvement.

Calls to 101 (police non-emergency number) are taken by a centralised call centre, with staff trained in safeguarding to a degree. Previously Sheffield City Council paid a premium for calls to this number, but it is now a national contract and number. It was acknowledged that the telephone operators cannot be experts in all police matters and they work to a drop-down menu with callers concerned about safeguarding either given an initial response or signposted to the Public Protection Unit. It was reiterated that it is important that people continue to call 101 or if there is an emergency situation, 999 should be used.

The invited guests were thanked for their attendance and contributions.

IT WAS AGREED:

- a) That the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board will share performance information with scrutiny.
- b) That the Stronger Families Project will be examined at the next meeting as there is a strong link to the safeguarding agenda.

9. Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny process

A report outlining the arrangements and Terms of Reference for the scrutiny process was accepted subject to amendments that reflect that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is independent of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.