

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27TH MAY 2014

25. **Present:** Councillors Worton (Chair), Rusby, Saunders and C. Wraith; co-opted members Mr Haigh, Mr. Winter and Ms K. Morritt together with Susan Fiennes, Independent Chair of the Sheffield Local Safeguarding Children Board and Adult Safeguarding Board as Expert Advisor to the Committee.

26. **Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives**

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

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

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

28. **Minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2014 were accepted as an accurate record.

29. **Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2013 and Business Plan for 2014/15**

The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

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

Cllr Emma Dures, Cabinet Support Member, Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

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

Jean Imray, Interim AED Safeguarding Health and Social Care, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Bob Dyson, Independent Chair, Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board

Andy Brooke, South Yorkshire Police,

John Fitzgibbons, South Yorkshire Police,

Matt Fenwick, South Yorkshire Police,

Brigid Reid, Chief Nurse, NHS Barnsley CCG, BSCB member

Susan Hayter, Secondary Head Teachers' Association, BSCB member

Bob Dyson was invited by the Chair to give an overview of both the Annual Report 2013-14 and the Business Plan 2014-15. The Safeguarding Board is a key driver for change and continuous improvement and is committed to continually challenging partner agencies. Despite the ongoing austerity measures, the Chair expressed

confidence that all agencies will be able to respond to the challenges around safeguarding.

Key points highlighted included:

- There is now a much stronger focus on performance monitoring following changes in leadership. The number of performance indicators which have to be reported on has reduced from 69 to 15.
- School Annual Head Teacher's Safeguarding Report show a much improved return from 34% to 83%.
- Multi Agency training is a strength.
- Areas for further development include the application of thresholds, hearing the voice of children and young people and Child Protection Conferences.
- A strategy is being developed to address the issue of neglect.
- There is a continued emphasis on prevention of child sexual exploitation.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- i. Why is attendance at training by the Police and Probation comparatively low?

It was explained that South Yorkshire Police have a comprehensive training programme, which includes safeguarding. To attend BSCB safeguarding would be a duplication, as they do in fact help to deliver some of the training on behalf of the Board. The Police have a dedicated public protection training lead and are just starting a programme of integrated offender management for violent sex offenders. The Probation Service is undergoing a great number of changes at the moment to become a two-tier service and hence have limited capacity to input.

- ii. Members welcomed the promotion of multi-agency training on the impact of adult mental health on parenting children and also enquired about thresholds for intervention, as there can be an impact on the wider community when living alongside problem families where children may be at risk.

It was reported that there are several 'tiers' of service which can be offered. Stronger Families is a Tier 2 voluntary early help offer where cases are monitored. If the case escalates to Tier 3, a social worker is allocated to the family. The aim is to provide the right support at the right time, along a continuum of care, and the current structure facilitates this. However, if children are at risk of significant harm, the authority's statutory responsibility comes into play. As a final resort the authority may use its legal powers to removed children from their parents. If there is an immediate risk to the child, immediate action will be taken. Although there is no set timescale, once children have been placed on the child protection register the case is monitored closely. If, after around 9 months, there is no improvement or risks have increased, the child protection conference will recommend that legal proceedings are considered.

- iii. A Member asked about the BSCB's commitment to improve through the action plan and also the 'challenge log'.

The BSCB is under constant scrutiny through monitoring of the action plan by the improvement board. There was shock at the initial result of the inspection in 2012 but coupled with a genuine commitment to improve. Improvements can fluctuate – for

example, performance has gone up and down again around child protection conferences but these are now getting better. There is a desire to be 'good' or better, not just 'adequate', and improvements are being embedded. The challenge log is a method of demonstrating effectiveness to OFSTED in a way that is not captured in minutes of meetings etc. It was also highlighted that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee had also upped its own game and was now more rigorous and robust in terms of challenge, as evidenced today by the attendance of Sue Fiennes as an expert advisor to the committee.

- iv. Are we doing enough to make sure the voice of the child is heard, particularly that of disabled children?

It was felt that there is a broad expanse of differing needs of disabled children and it may sometimes be difficult to make sure their voice is heard. Some families are particularly vulnerable and their voice is not heard and often there is tension and conflict between children and their families. There have been improvements over the years but there is still a long way to go. It was highlighted that one of the sub-groups of the BSCB is for disabled children, which shows a depth of commitment to ensuring their voice is heard.

- v. Members asked for reassurances that improvements were still being made.

It was reiterated that the shock at the inspection result was felt by everyone but the BSCB had now gone up a gear and was more rigorous at challenging and auditing partners and understanding safeguarding practices. It was acknowledged that more work is needed on some topics such as thresholds but the conversation is continuing. There has been a cultural change and staff now feel empowered to raise issues, setting the conditions to get it right this time. The difficult and complex journey may take a while and has already uncovered more problems than were identified at the beginning. It is rather like turning round an oil tanker and expectations must be realistic.

More work needs to be done with schools as part of the multi-agency audit. A culture change is required with schools believing that there will be a positive change following their involvement and that they are being listened to. There is a need for some agencies such as schools and health to make more use of the escalation policy. The referral process for assessments has changed and an audit of the 'front door' service has fed into the training programme. A booklet outlining the thresholds for intervention has been produced by the BSCB. Agreed thresholds vary across the country and guidance is needed for each case. Partner agencies, including children's homes and private nurseries are all signed up to the escalation policy.

- vi. How does the Board know if training and development sessions are effective in the long term and will personal plans be scrutinised?

People attending training sessions are required to declare how the training will affect their practice. They are also contacted to check that they have followed through with the actions they agreed. There is still a long way to go, but the process has started.

- vii. A member asked about how performance data is monitored.

Social care performance data feeds into Board performance data. There is a performance sub-group and weekly meetings are held regarding performance indicators, scrutinising them and challenging any perceived discrepancies. For example, performance around

looked after children dental and health checks was scrutinised, interventions put in place and key performance indicators used to further challenge performance in this area.

viii. What plans are in place to recruit more in-house foster carers?

A robust marketing strategy is in place with adverts on the radio, on buses and on the website, but there is still much to do. Foster carers are lost every year and it is essential that these are replaced and new foster carers recruited. Three open evenings have been held recently with over 30 potential fostering households attending but these have to be converted into applications and moved to the next phase of the process. There is a performance target of 6 months from assessment to approval. It was pointed out that in the past there has been a lack of effective marketing but this has been addressed with the appointment of a recruiting and marketing officer. There is a need to revise the payments scheme and make it more competitive, as some payments are too low and some too high. A number of models are being considered and a proposal will be developed in the next period. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is something which members are likely to want to revisit in the future.

Witnesses were thanked for their attendance and contribution.

Members asked for more information on the following:

- Numbers of Barnsley children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) as opposed to in house foster carers, and how this compares to previous years.
- Numbers of children on the child protection register currently and how this compares to recent years – what is the trend?
- How many serious case reviews have there been in the last twelve months and how does this compare to previous years?
- Members asked for further copies of the BSCB ‘Threshold’ document and felt that this could be useful for all Council members.

30. Review of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Members were invited to comment on the effectiveness of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee over the last twelve months and to put forward any ideas for further improvement.

The following points were raised:

- Another statutory co-optee should be recruited to fill the current vacancy.
- The option to recruit more members from the Area Councils should be explored, particularly where there are more than two wards in an Area Council.
- Information submitted to the meeting should be in plain English and timely, as there is a danger that members could be swamped with too much information to read immediately before a meeting.

The Chair explained that an Annual report will be prepared, looking back at the work of the Committee over the last twelve months and looking forward to the new work programme

for the municipal year 2014/15. The report will be presented at the next meeting for approval and will then be submitted to cabinet.