

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

SUBJECT: **CSSIW SAFEGUARDING AND CARE PLANNING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROGRESS REPORT TO INCLUDE UPDATE ON THE DEMANDS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To provide Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a progress update on the implementation of the key findings from the CSSIW Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children.

1.02 The report will also provide an update on the demands on Children's Services and how these are being managed.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 In 2014 the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) undertook a national thematic inspection that focussed on Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours. All twenty two local authorities were inspected with the findings of each of these inspections captured in a national overview report.

2.02 The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively :

- Supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
- Identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviours of looked after children and care leavers;
- Promotes rights based practice and the voice of the child;
- Promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
- Promotes compliance with policy and guidance

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The final conclusions of the inspection were set out in the report in the form of a number of questions asked about practice and

processes within the local authority. This report will therefore provide an overview of the key developments the service has taken in response to those key questions.

3.02 Did the authority effectively discharge its corporate parenting roles and responsibilities promoting the stability, welfare and safety of looked after children and care leavers?

3.02.1 There are a number of key activities within Flintshire that enable an effective and appropriate discharge of corporate parenting responsibilities which includes:

- Bi-monthly Children's Services Forum – at the recent forum (May) four young people attended and actively contributed to the discussions.
- Annual Climbie visits to visit Children's Social Services teams – the most recent visit was undertaken 11th May by Councillors Bernie Attridge, Chris Bithell and Christine Jones and supported by Chief Officers Ian Budd and Neil Ayling;
- Elected member rota visits – the most recent visits have been undertaken to Bryntirion school;
- Annual Pride of Flintshire event – very successful event that took place on 4th July 2015.
- Regular Scrutiny reports;
- Social Work activity delivered through all Social Work teams (CYAST in particular);
- The roles and responsibilities attributed to the dedicated Participation Officer

3.02.2 As has previously been reported to Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee the performance in relation to promoting outcomes for looked after children (LAC) and care leavers has been positive throughout 2014/15 with a notable improvement in respect of educational outcomes (such as attainment and attendance). The timeliness of health assessments for looked after children did experience a small drop in performance in 2014/15 however the appointment of a dedicated LAC nurse working closely with health is seeing improvements in performance in year. In addition a meeting has been set up with the strategic lead in Health lead to identify opportunities to improve process and practice.

3.02.3 Placement instability did increase slightly in 2014/15 and there are a number of developments in place to actively target this area which includes:

- In- house placement range – Peter/ Jenny to confirm what we have done
- The timeliness of disruption meetings has improved in order to

prevent the potential for placement breakdown;

- Effective and robust processes in respect of the Public Law Outline and associated care proceedings processes alongside a stronger focus on Special Guardianship (through the support of a designated post holder) is starting to lead to a reduction in LAC placements
- A review of the terms of reference for the Out of County Panel has taken place and work is underway with Health across North Wales to improve the process for identifying and agreeing Continuing Care packages
- Planning for the service restructure has commenced and key features that should directly impact on LAC population and placements include a stronger integration of early intervention services and more targeted family support services that will include support to foster carers

3.02.4 The matter of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was also highlighted in the CSSIW report and as a local authority there is involvement in a range of initiatives that are focussed on safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation on both a local and regional platform.

3.02.5 At a local level there is: a newly formed CSE multi-agency panel that works to ensure multi-agency assessment and support for children/young people who are identified as being at risk of CSE; we have Victim Contact Team arrangements in conjunction with the Police to provide direct engagement and support to young people. At a regional level the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board has identified CSE as a key priority and as such has working groups focussed on CSE, the initial findings of which will be fed into a CSE themed annual conference (for the Regional Safeguarding Board) in the autumn.

3.03 **Were care and pathway plans informed by relevant assessments, including explicit risk assessments, which supported a comprehensive response to the needs and experiences of children and young people?**

3.03.1 The quality of assessments and care plans are subject to case file auditing arrangements and monitored through supervision. The case file auditing tools have recently been revised to ensure a stronger focus on practice quality, outcomes, ensuring the voice of the child is heard, effective analysis and decision making. In 2014/15 there was 100% performance in respect of care leavers being allocated a named personal advisor and having appropriate and timely pathway plans in place.

3.03.2 The appointment of a designated CAMHS post for looked after

children is starting to reap benefits with good working relationships established between the service and CAMHS which is now enabling an improvement in the timeliness of CAMHS provision to looked after children.

3.04 Were operational systems and procedures in place that ensured responsive coordinated action was taken to mitigate risk and achieve safe continuity of care?

3.04.1 Within Children's Services there has been a noticeable improvement in staff attendance with a 50% reduction in staff sickness levels in 2014/15. This alongside the position that all looked after children have allocated workers is helping to reduce the potential for children experiencing changes in Social Workers. However, it is recognised that there is further work to be undertaken to minimise the number of changes of Social Workers children and young people which will be addressed through the forthcoming service restructure.

3.04.2 There are ongoing audits in relation to staff supervision although changes have been made to the framework to ensure there is a stronger focus on quality and effectiveness. In April a survey was undertaken with all staff within the fieldwork service to better understand their experience of supervision and the over 97% reported that they feel supervision is timely, effective and of good quality and a positive approach to supporting their personal and professional development.

3.04.3 Work is also underway with the business systems team to streamline and improve assessment and care planning documentation and there is an additional piece of work being undertaken with children and young people to revise and improvement the consultation documentation that they complete themselves.

3.05 Did Independent Reviews and quality assurance arrangements promote safe care and best outcomes for young people?/ Did care and pathway planning effectively capture and promote the rights and voice of the child?

3.05.1 The grading for the Independent Reviewing Officers has now been resolved and has now brought equity to the pay and conditions of similar functions across the region.

3.05.2 The Quality Assurance Framework is being developed with a stronger focus on the voice of the child being central to decision making and service delivery alongside a commitment to identifying, articulating and monitoring the outcomes achieved for (and with) children and young people. Running concurrently with this is practice that is already established that enable the Independent Reviewing Officers to escalate concerns through senior managers, along with

highlighting good practice

- 3.05.3 It is recognised that the Placement strategy does need to be reviewed and this will be done as part of a wider piece of work to develop a new LAC strategy that will be focussed on: reducing the potential for children to become looked after (through early intervention approaches); exploring alternative support arrangements for children and young people that do not require them to come into the formal care system; supporting placements effectively when children do come into the care system; responding to the new changes to duties as set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014).

3.06

Demands on Social Services

- 3.06.1 The responses described above in relation to looked after children have to be considered within the context of the broader activity taking place within Children's Services as coming into the care system is the final stage that a child/ young person may experience on their journey within social care.

- 3.06.2 The referral and contact activity at the front door of the service has increased significantly over the past three years with a total of 709 referrals received in 2012-13 up to a total of 1825 in 2014/15. Whilst these numbers do not necessarily equate to a direct service response by the service the activity levels do indicate the increasing levels of vulnerability within the area. As would be expected with such a significant increase in referrals there has been a notable increase in re-referral rates from 13% in 2013/14 to 26% in 2014/15. However, re-referrals rates are not straightforward as systems can capture multiple referrals relating to a single event and incorrectly reflect these as re-referrals e.g. referrals from multiple agencies attending a single event would appear as re-referrals.

- 3.06.3 In recognition of this increasing demand the service has embarked on a service restructure that is focussed on: building on the processes that have been developed over the past twelve months; strengthening and integrating early intervention services as part of the front door response by the service; working alongside agencies who provide a high source of referrals (such as North Wales Police) to improve and streamline referral processes; strengthening and targeting the provision of family support services to children in need and looked after children. It is therefore critical that there is a synergy and direct correlation between the development of an early intervention/ prevention strategy and a looked after children strategy.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 Social and Health Care Overview Scrutiny acknowledge the detail of the report and the developments that have both taken place and are underway in relation to the discharge of the Local Authority's duties in

respect of safeguarding and promoting positive outcomes for looked after children.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No impact resulting directly from this report

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

Not Applicable

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

No impact resulting directly from this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

The service restructure will be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

The service restructure will require amendments to the roles and responsibilities of key management posts.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

None

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

None

12.00 APPENDICES

None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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