

Dear Colleague

The Children's Services Select Committee took place this week. At this committee Elected Members scrutinise our performance across children's services and also make policy recommendations to Cabinet. The safeguarding and LAC task group chaired by Cllr Hubbard is a sub group of this Committee.

Lin Hitchman attended to present the annual adoption report prior to this going to Cabinet in January. This is a detailed statutory piece of work setting out how the Adoption Agency (Wiltshire Council) is performing and Members have to assure themselves that we are operating a safe, effective and efficient service.

The updated national adoption scorecards have been published today and show some improvement for us in relation to the time taken from a child moving into care to being placed with their adoptive family. This however remains a key priority for us and hence the focus across the whole service on good permanency planning in the best interests of children (with adoption being one important route to permanency).

The Select Committee made one very important resolution which I was asked to convey in this bulletin. The Committee would like to sincerely thank staff for the commitment, dedication and hard work that is so clearly evident. The Committee noted that we have fully acknowledged the need for improvement, that we are being transparent about where things are still not where we need them to be, and that we are determined to make progress.

As we know there is no greater challenge or greater reward than making a positive difference for vulnerable children and families in our communities.

Thank you.

This bulletin provides information on the following:

- An analysis of children who became the subject of a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time
- Findings from the children in need audit
- Review of initial access to social care
- Key lines of enquiry for the January Safeguarding Peer Review
- Social Care Briefings – January 2013
- Early intervention conference 15<sup>th</sup> January 10am to 1pm at the Civic Centre in Trowbridge
- Research in Practice November bulletin

One of the Reference Groups which met on 20<sup>th</sup> November focused on how to encourage a focus on recording outcomes and over the next couple of months each bulletin will include some information on outcomes including definitions, practice advice and case examples.

### **An analysis of children who became the subject of a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time**

Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) is a well known approach which enables groups to think about issues and problems in a different way. Within Wiltshire we would like to reduce the number of children and young people who are subject to more than one child protection plan. The Reference

Group which focused on knowing how well we are doing used an OBA technique called Turning the Curve to help think through the reasons for repeat child protection plans and identify plans for improvement. A Turning the Curve report which summarises the group's discussions has been attached. This includes data, an analysis – the story behind the baseline, information on what works and some suggestions for improving performance. We will keep you informed about how we will be following up this work.

### **Findings from the children in need audit**

In September an audit of 14 cases where children in need plans had been in place for more than 9 months took place. There were some examples of good practice. For example positive outcomes were noted where the school had a Parenting Support Adviser (PSA) and the social worker was able to liaise with the PSA to support the parent.

The audit found that in many cases there was not a clear focus on what needed to change and the lack of focus made it difficult to know whether things were improving. It is important that we are all rigorous in working to the social care quality practice standards. All open cases including children in need cases should have a SMART outcome focused plan. This means all plans should be very **specific** about what needs to change so that progress can be **measured**. Plans should be **achievable** and **realistic** which means parents need to understand the plans and know what they need to do. Finally plans need to have a clear **timescale**.

The following actions have been taken in response to audit findings:

- Changes have been made to the process for managing children in need cases in the Referral and Assessment team to avoid drift and ensure “step down” promptly if this is appropriate
- The Gateway Panel process has been changed. This will ensure families receive appropriate timely intervention and that drift does not happen.
- Closer links are being established with the social care Family Support Service to ensure that families receive intervention in a timely way.
- The regular monthly audit by social care managers will include a proportion of children in need cases every month.

### **Review of Initial Access to Social Care**

In July Children's Services requested a systems thinking review to focus on 'Initial Access to Social Care'. Heather Lovelock from the Business Transformation team and Tamsin Stone, Lead Commissioner from the Commissioning and Performance team are leading the review and working closely with the Referral and Assessment Team.

Work began with understanding the purpose of those contacting Referral & Assessment. This was undertaken in several ways:

- Listening to calls
- Looking at emails
- Examining historic contacts on Care First

This analysis identified that R&A receives an average of 4,616 contacts each month. This divides into 3,735 phone calls, 839 emails and 42 letters. Further analysis showed:

- 59% of all calls were for allocated cases
- 14% of the calls were for other agencies or other Council departments
- Only 19% were calls reporting a concern
- 63% of emails received were domestic violence notifications from the police

Process maps were produced to understand internal processes. These highlighted that there is a lot of duplication, handoffs and rework in the process. Next stages of the work will take place in two phases: Phase 1 – Freeing up capacity                      Phase 2 - Improved ways of working

Freeing up Capacity will be achieved by:

- Calls for cases already allocated are now going directly to social workers.
- Information on our website and Wiltshire Pathways has been amended to direct the caller to the appropriate team/service.
- Work is taking place with Wiltshire Police to reduce the amount of duplication in the Domestic Violence notifications process.

Once this work is completed Health and Tamsin will move on to working with the team on phase 2.

### **Key lines of enquiry for the January Safeguarding Peer Review**

As we noted in a previous bulletin a Safeguarding Peer Review is taking place the week of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013. The team will be on site in Wiltshire Council for a week and the review will involve managers and staff from all levels.

The review is not an inspection - rather it is a supportive but challenging 'critical friend' approach which assists councils and their partners in celebrating their strengths and identifying their own areas for improvement. The key purpose of the review is to stimulate local discussion about how the council and its partners can become more effective in delivering improved safe outcomes for children and young people.

The peer review team will study practice, documents, policies and performance information. This will include questionnaires completed by frontline social care staff and staff from partner agencies. All social care staff will be receiving a copy of the questionnaire in the next couple of weeks.

The Peer Review team asked us to decide on some key lines of enquiry which we would like the team to explore. We know we have made many improvements since the Ofsted inspection but we still have much work to do. We are asking the Peer Review Team to focus on checking that we have established a solid basis for making further improvements and that we are clear about what good practice looks like and have a good understanding of how well we are doing at the moment. The key lines of enquiry are noted below:

### **There is a developing learning culture on safeguarding and in all partner agencies which focuses on outcomes.**

- Good top down/bottom up communication in children's social care.
- Social care values are demonstrated in action in children's social care.
- Evidence of listening to and acting on feedback on safeguarding issues raised by staff and front-line managers and all agencies.
- Overall, leadership and management on safeguarding is improving and is at least adequate.

**There is good awareness and understanding of child protection practice across all agencies**

- Staff and managers in all agencies and key councillors are aware and understand what good child protection practice is. This includes understanding the importance of timeliness and what constitutes a good outcome focused plan.
- Staff in all agencies feel confident about making the right safeguarding decisions at the right time.
- There is understanding of risk assessment and management being integral to all aspects of safeguarding work across partner agencies and increasing evidence of this.
- Managers at all levels in all agencies and key councillors are clear about their responsibilities in ensuring and promoting good safeguarding and child protection practice.

**Systems have been developed for ensuring that child protection practice is effective**

In particular the Peer Review Team will be asked to consider:

- Social care quality and management standards
- LSCB and Council audit framework
- Performance reporting within children's social care and by the LSCB
- LSCB governance changes
- Role of DCS, councillors including scrutiny
- The commitment and priority given to safeguarding within the Council
- Role of the Safeguarding Improvement Board

**Children and young people have early access to services when they need them (below social care thresholds)**

- Understanding of thresholds across all agencies
- There is an appropriate range of early intervention services across all agencies
- Access to early help services – including Multi-agency Forums and the Gateway process
- In particular - effectiveness of 2b/3 interface

**Social Care Briefings – January 2013**

Two staff briefings have been arranged by Cllr Jane Scott Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Children's Services and Cllr Laura Mayes Portfolio Holder for Children's Safeguarding. **All social care and Independent Safeguarding Unit staff are invited to attend one of the briefings.** The briefings will be an opportunity to discuss progress and our vision for social care. Both sessions are being held at the Corn Exchange Devises at the following times:

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 10am-12pm

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2pm-4pm

Please email Margery Grant with your choice of session: [margery.grant@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:margery.grant@wiltshire.gov.uk)

**Early intervention conference 15<sup>th</sup> January 10am to 1pm at the Civic Centre in Trowbridge**

The children in need audit mentioned above found that there was inconsistent understanding of thresholds. The multi-agency thresholds are being reviewed and will be re-launched in January.

You will also have noted that early intervention is one of the Peer Review Team's key lines of enquiry.

The early intervention conference will re-launch the thresholds, consider our current approach to early intervention and look at some key issues which have been raised in recent inspections, reports and policy documents. For example working to address neglect issues and working with teenagers where safeguarding is an issue. This will be a multi-agency conference and we are hoping all team and services will be well represented.

Please email Margery Grant to book a place: [margery.grant@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:margery.grant@wiltshire.gov.uk)

**Research in Practice November Bulletin**

Each month Research in Practice issue a bulletin. The November edition is attached for your information. The bulletin refers to the National Children and Adults Service Conference which we have covered in recent bulletins. It also includes a link to a resource on the Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers.

I hope you found this bulletin useful. We would like each bulletin to feature examples of good practice which is taking place in social work teams and in early intervention or social care services. Last week I was pleased to include an example from Independent Reviewing Officers and in the past we have included other examples. If you would like to contribute please contact me or Jane Shuttleworth or the Principal Social Workers – Jackie Chipping and Pier Pritchard.

With kind regards

Carolyn  
Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director