

Meeting of the Cabinet – 14th December 2016

Report of the Strategic Director People

Ofsted Monitoring Report

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a summary of the outcome from the first Ofsted Monitoring visit carried out on the 12th and 13th October 2016.
2. Ofsted issued their letter setting out the conclusions of their visit on 9th November 2016 (appendix 1). The letter will not be published through the Ofsted website.

Background

3. This was the first monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2016.
4. The visit was carried out by Jenny Turnross and Alison Smale, Her Majesty's Inspectors.
5. The inspection primarily focused on the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), the understanding and application of thresholds for statutory intervention, and the quality of management oversight and decision making. Inspectors also reviewed the arrangements to plan for children looked after who are subject to court care proceedings.
6. From a very low base, the local authority is making positive progress to improve services for children and the pace of change is appropriately swift.
7. Leaders and managers are fully aware of the scale of change that is required to ensure that all children are consistently helped and protected.
8. The quality of practice demonstrates very early signs of improvement. Social workers know the children they work with well and case records seen evidence appropriate management oversight and decision making.
9. All contacts to the MASH are now received by qualified social workers, who make timely decisions. Referrals are dealt with swiftly. Inspectors saw no cases where children had been left at risk.
10. Thresholds for intervention are better understood and applied in the MASH
11. The quality of multi-agency information gathered by the MASH has improved

12. The majority of partner agencies share information effectively that supports appropriate decision making. However, the quality of health information available to social workers is poor and this is not helped by the absence of health representation in the MASH.
13. Further work needs to be done to strengthen the quality of written referrals from partner agencies. Currently, social workers are spending too much time clarifying basic details such as dates of birth.
14. Arrangements with the police to assess and respond to incidents of domestic abuse when there are children present need to improve. Daily notifications received from the police are timely. However, the quality of information is poor. Social workers do not have access to the original police reports, so have no understanding of the risk assessment made at the time of the incident.
15. Progress in the management of court work is evident.
16. Early signs of improvement in the management of court work are evident in terms of timeliness of care proceedings, quality of assessments and court reports.
17. Assessments are detailed and comprehensive and, in some cases, reference appropriate use of up-to-date research.
18. Evidence of direct work is demonstrated in a number of assessments with both children and families and this is leading to an increased understanding of the child's views.
19. Use of the pre-proceedings protocol is beginning to show early signs of the desired impact being established in cases where care proceedings are being initiated.
20. The legal adviser based in the team offers immediate legal advice on new and current cases and this is a strength.
21. Feedback from CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services) guardians is positive in terms of the confidence and skills of the team's practitioners.
22. Care plans are not yet effective. In too many cases, the current care plan does not reflect the care plan agreed in the children looked after statutory review and too often does not reflect the care plan that has been filed before the court.
23. Independent reviewing officers do not challenge or escalate issues such as care plans being presented verbally at children's statutory reviews; this remains an area of poor practice.

Finance

24. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

Law

25. The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

Equality Impact

26. This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

Recommendation

27. It is recommended that:-

Members of Cabinet take note of the report and comment as necessary.



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