
Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board – Monday 30 January 2012

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board of the outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services in Dudley which took place between 28 November 2011 to 9 December 2011.

Background

2. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
3. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - Discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members, senior NHS health representatives and a range of community representatives.
 - Analysing and evaluating reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with '*Working Together To Safeguard Children*', 2010.
 - A review of over 60 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.

Finance

11. The financial implications of the recent safeguarding and looked after children inspection will be fully evaluated and assessed as part of the action plan process.
12. The actions will be reported to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

Law

13. The legislation and guidance which relates both generally and specifically to looked after children and care leavers is the Children Act 1989, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Adoption Children Act 2002, the Children Act 2004, the Children and Young People's Act 2008.
14. The law governing the Local Authorities duties in respect of referrals of a child protection nature, is set out primarily in the Children Act 1989, with further guidance under The Framework for the Assessment of Children In Need and their Families 2000 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010.
15. Under section 11 of the children act 2004 there is a duty on the LA and its partners to safeguarding and promote the welfare of children.

Equality Impact

16. The provision of Looked after Children Services contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after children in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.
17. The Local Authority and its Partners have a duty under Section 11 of the Children Act to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and ensure that they are not disadvantaged by living in circumstances which compromise their care and well being.

Recommendation

18. Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board to receive a copy of the Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children report and note and comment the content.

Appendix 1

Safeguarding Services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Good
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Adequate
Quality of provision	Adequate
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Adequate
Services for Looked after Children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Partnership working	Good
Equality and diversity	Good
Services for Looked after Children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Being healthy	Adequate
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Outstanding
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Good
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Adequate
Services for Looked after Children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Good

services are responsive to the diverse needs of the population with good examples of targeted and specialist provision to promote inclusion. At operational level there is evidence of some good direct work with children, young people and families although this is affected at times by capacity pressures and is not consistently evident across the partnership as a whole. Frameworks are in place to monitor performance against national and local indicators including timeliness. A wide range of good services is available to support children, young people and families in need including a network of 20 children's centres across the borough supporting some 500 individual children. The contribution of the voluntary sector is good. Barnardo's 'My Time - My Space' is an excellent example. Child protection case conference chairs provide challenge on individual cases. However their quality assurance role is not yet fully established due to increasing service demands, despite capacity having been increased.

The unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in March 2011 identified strengths in the organisation and management of the front line services. Areas for development have substantially been addressed. Arrangements for contact and referral, including children with disabilities, are explicit and understood across the partnership. Child protection cases are allocated promptly to suitably qualified and experienced social workers and are overseen by managers, although the timeliness of assessments and quality of recording is variable in some cases, particularly those that do not meet the social care threshold for child protection. Children and young people are seen as part of investigations and assessments but the recording of their views is variable and it is not always possible to see how these views are taken forward in planning. The quality of recording and assessments is adequate but not yet fully consistent. Assessments undertaken within the contact teams are at least adequate, some are good and the trend in quality is an improving one. The electronic recording system is in a state of transition and until this is completed presents difficulties to staff in its day to day use and collation of good quality data. Suitable attention is being given to the specific needs of children and young people from minority ethnic groups or with additional needs. The children with disabilities team is a good model of integrated working and is well managed. Assessments of need are being undertaken and timeliness has improved. However, assessments do not routinely reflect the level of risk in cases or how professionals will monitor outcomes against agreed objectives and contingencies.

The level of Police notifications for domestic abuse is high but are being processed well by social care and the Domestic Abuse Referral Team (DART). Domestic abuse work is good overall but the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) arrangements are not currently operating effectively following gaps in chairing arrangements. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs) is working well with the full, informed engagement of all partners. Accident and emergency (A&E) health services are effective in identifying risks to children and reporting cases of concern to children's social care.

capacity has been increased in key areas to improve the quality of assessments and political support has been unwavering in protecting children's services, despite wider economic pressures. The partnership is active in learning from serious case reviews, research and national developments to strengthen safeguarding activity.

There is a good track record of improvement. Regulated services are all rated at least good for safeguarding with some examples of very good performance. Outcomes for children and young people are increasingly being linked to service improvement. Foundations for safeguarding are in place, including contact referral and assessment processes and thresholds.

Schools are playing an increasingly effective role in safeguarding children, with good evidence of the impact of inclusion strategies in improving school attendance, and ensuring children and young people are appropriately safeguarded. The local authority and its partners have a clear sense of vision, ambition and prioritisation and articulate appropriate priorities that will deliver and sustain improvement. The partnership has an accurate understanding of their key strengths and areas for further improvement. The acting Director of Children's Services is providing good leadership and impetus to continuous improvement and has established clear lines of communication with key partners to deliver on agreed actions.

Areas for improvement

In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Dudley, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Within three months:

- Ensure the draft health action plan is agreed and fully supports improvements in health provision, including case recording, health contribution to holistic assessments of need and risk, case planning and measurement of health outcomes and impact
- NHS Dudley and NHS providers ensure timely access to emotional and mental health services for women who require additional support prior to and following the birth of their children
- Develop explicit joint protocols between children's services, health and adult social care to ensure that older young people and those at points of transition receive appropriate, timely and continuous services to meet their assessed needs
- Establish joint and agreed quality standards for safeguarding practice across the partnership and implement a joint quality assurance and performance framework underpinned by efficient information systems

Appendix 2

Services for looked after children

Overall Effectiveness: Grade 2 (Good)

The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is good. An active and knowledgeable Corporate Parenting Board effectively champions the interest of looked after children and care leavers. Careful attention is paid to safeguarding the welfare of looked after children and young people including the use of statutory visiting, meetings with service users and the development of opportunities for user representation and involvement. The partnership demonstrates ambition for looked after children and young people and outcomes are mainly good with outstanding outcomes for education and attainment on a comparative basis. Health outcomes have been less good and further areas for development and improvement remain. Nevertheless, there are some examples of effective and individualised health services for looked after children and young people including accelerated access to CAMHS, good integration of services to meet the needs of children with disabilities and examples of targeted community support. Joint services identify the diverse needs of the population leading to targeted and specialist provision to promote inclusion and to ensure the needs of looked after children and young people from minority groups are being met.

The partnership places emphasis on understanding the population it serves and ensuring the right services are located to meet varying levels of demand. There is a good understanding of the looked after population within the borough and the changing profile is regularly scrutinised. There is now a more robust focus on permanency planning for children and young people with increasing attention on services to support vulnerable children and families to reduce the need for local authority care. Good progress is also being made to secure alternative family provision where children cannot safely return to live with their own families. Ambition and prioritisation for looked after children and care leavers are good across the partnership, including the voluntary sector. Elected members also champion the needs of looked after children and young people and have supported some imaginative initiatives such as an award winning video produced by a looked after children's group within the borough (known as 'Chatback') and the promotion produced by the borough's looked after children group and the promotion of healthy leisure activities for children in care, their carers and carer's children.

Capacity for improvement: Grade 2 (good)

Capacity for improvement is good. The partnership is demonstrating its commitment to continuously improving services for looked after children and care leavers leading to good outcomes. There are good examples of services having impact on improving outcomes and

- NHS Dudley to review the capacity of the specialist health services to looked after children and young people to ensure health support, including dental health care and annual health assessments, is accessible, timely and user-friendly
- NHS Dudley and partners to review the additional supports needed for teenage and looked after parents, including those who have experienced loss and establish relevant joint services to support their identified therapeutic needs
- Ensure there is sufficient IRO capacity to enable the team to fully implement their quality assurance responsibilities including data collation on quality and performance and reporting to relevant boards and committees.

Within six months:

- Strengthen quality assurance and auditing systems across the partnership to ensure there is in-built and robust challenge to practice against jointly agreed service and quality standards.