

**Select Committee Children's Services**  
**Thursday 12 November 2009**

**Report of the Chair of the Select Committee Working Group on Social Care**

**Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral, and Assessment Arrangements for Children in Need and Children Who May Be In Need Of Protection**

**1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 To outline to Select Committee on Children's Services the issues arising from a report presented to the Social Care Working Group on 22 October 2009
- arrangements for unannounced inspections of Children's Social Care Services
  - current performance and workload pressures in social care fieldwork services.

**2.0 Background**

- 2.1 A report from the Assistant Director, Children & Families was presented to the Select Committee Working Group on Social Care on 22 October 2009. This also included a presentation by a district Social Worker highlighting the role and function of social workers within the Assessment Service.
- 2.2 The working group determined that as the report related to safeguarding arrangements for children and young people and the implications of a forthcoming inspection the issues raised should be reported to select committee on children's services. A glossary of terms used in this report can be found in Appendix 3
- 2.3 The new inspection arrangements commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. They take place on an annual basis and are without notice. They focus on front line practice and on the Local Authority as the lead agency for child protection. However, they also evaluate the contribution of partners. Ofsted use the findings to help determine the timing of the wider inspections of safeguarding and looked after children.
- 2.4 In addition to daytime services, the inspections will include assessment of the effectiveness of out of hour's provision, including Accident and Emergency Services.
- 2.5 A random sample of cases will be examined from among the following:
- Common Assessment – that proceeded/did not proceed to referral
  - Contacts - that proceeded/did not proceed to referral
  - Referrals - that proceeded/did not proceed to initial assessment
  - Re-referrals - that proceeded/did not proceed to initial assessment
  - Initial Assessments - that proceeded/did not proceed to further service or core assessment
  - Core Assessments - that proceeded/did not proceed to further service

- Section 47 Enquiries - that proceeded/did not proceed to an initial child protection conference

Inspectors will determine how far they will track cases, and will take opportunities to consult with other agencies. They will also use performance information and survey information on user views that they already hold.

- 2.6 A Safeguarding Audit was undertaken in March 2009. Briefing events have been held with the Assessment Service on the scope of the Inspection (see Appendix 1) and guidance on effective practice as set out in the inspection framework (see Appendix 2). Briefings have also been provided to the Safeguarding Board and the Children's Trust
- 2.7. The remainder of this report sets out the headlines for Dudley. Whilst strengths are highlighted, the report particularly focuses on the improvement areas we are working on. It also refers to reports on pressures that have already been presented to Corporate Board, Children's Trust, and Dudley Safeguarding Children Board.

### **3.0 Response to Child Protection Referrals in meeting statutory guidance**

- 3.1 All children with a Child Protection Plan are allocated to a qualified social worker. This area of work receives the highest priority and referrals are always responded to in a timely way.
- 3.2 Divisional Managers meet with the Police on a 4-6 weekly basis to address local practice and operational issues. A regional protocol has been agreed relating to working practices within the Police on child protection issues. This will be updated in the context of the government's new Working Together requirements.
- 3.3 We have very good performance on de-registrations, good performance on re-registrations, and very good performance on child protection reviews. However, performance on holding Initial Conferences within 15 working days requires further improvement. We have increased capacity in this area and are seeking to ensure comprehensive recording is in place.

### **4.0 Completion rates for assessments**

- 4.1 We compare well with our statistical neighbours and appear to be maintaining performance despite workload pressures. The completion rate for Initial Assessments within 7 working days was 67.1% in Quarter 2 – this may rise slightly after there has been a check that all work for the period has been inputted on to the electronic system. However, this is an area we will seek further improvement.
- 4.2 The completion rate for Core Assessments within 35 working days was 83.7% in Quarter 2, which is very good.

### **5.0 Workload Pressures**

- 5.1 Inspectors will identify any delays in the allocation of new referrals requiring initial assessment and any cases awaiting transfer out of the Assessment Services,

alongside performance and quality. They will assess how we have responded to increases in demand.

- 5.2 Since 2007/2008, there has been a 95% increase in new referrals to the service, a 58% increase in Initial Assessments and a 47% increase in Core Assessments. Within this increase, which has accelerated since the death of Baby Peter in Haringey, there has been a rise in the number of complex cases as reflected in the rising trend of looked after children and children with a child protection plan.
- 5.3 It should be noted that the pressures continue on an upward trend. However, additional resource from other service areas has been allocated to respond to these difficulties.
- 5.4 Work is underway to reduce the number of referrals that do not require or proceed to an initial assessment. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for use of all partners was implemented in 2007 and recently we have renewed efforts to encourage all partner agencies to use this important and valuable process.

## **6.0 Staffing Issues**

- 6.1 The assessment arrangements for children in need are provided through three local offices staffed from within the Social Care division, Directorate of Children's Services. 29 social workers, five family support workers, four team managers, and four assistant team managers under the direction of a divisional manager provide the service.
- 6.2 An audit undertaken in February 2009 in response to DCSF requirements to review safeguarding practices found we have safe recruitment practice.
- 6.3 All posts have been appointed to on the Assessment Service. However, Dudley is affected by the national shortage of Social Workers, recruitment is difficult, and we have a high number of newly qualified workers. Agency cover is used where staff have not yet taken up their post, including an additional temporary sessional worker to help address the increases in new work.
- 6.4 The work pressures track through to the Safeguarding Review Unit and the ability of the Independent Reviewing Officers and minute takers to accommodate the need for Conferences and Reviews.

## **7.0 Assessment and risk management practices**

- 7.1 Our audit found that:
- Where there is a need for a high degree of intervention this is recognised and dealt with rapidly
  - Where there is a clear risk to a child's welfare they are safeguarded
- 7.2 We have instigated a programme of support for staff on the following areas:
- Ensuring that children are seen alone routinely
  - Ensuring a consistent focus on the child

- Ensuring children's views are recorded
- Ensuring there is always an audit trail of management oversight
- Improving the quality of child protection plans

7.3 Audit arrangements are currently being updated, and we are actively working on the implementation of our audit framework. A re-audit of Child Protection Plans is about to take place to check progress. An audit on the implementation of private fostering arrangements is underway.

7.4 We are represented within Strategic and local multi-agency public protection arrangements for sexual and potentially dangerous offenders. We have reviewed arrangements in relation to youth who commit such offences and have reviewed local arrangements to safeguard children and young people from potentially dangerous offenders. The Dudley Children's Safeguarding Board (DSCB) is providing staff briefings on these arrangements.

## **8.0 Capacity to Improve**

8.1 In March 2009 an audit of safeguarding arrangements was undertaken which identified areas of good practice and areas for further development and improvement. In order to respond to the outcomes of the audit we have:

- Appointed two additional sessional workers on a temporary basis and the work deallocated in July has been allocated to them
- Appointed one additional sessional worker to help address the rise in referrals in Assessment North
- A multi-agency panel has been established in the north of the Borough to help promote use of common assessment
- Draft guidance on the arrangements between common assessment and Children's Social Care is currently being consulted on
- A Senior Practitioner has been appointed to screen domestic abuse referrals as part of a multi-agency team with the Police
- Training on analysis and decision making is being run and work is underway to refresh training on case recording
- We are using the DCSF usability tool to help assess and improve progress on implementing the Integrated Children's System
- We have a "Neglect Task Group" in place to help improve multi-agency responses to neglect, including the adoption of models of assessment
- A Team Around the Child School Pilot is about to start to improve early intervention in school settings
  - Work is underway to review the structure and delivery of service
  - A Family Group Conferencing Co-ordinator is now in post

8.2 There are also a number of other improvement actions underway in relation to longer-term work.

## **9.0 Child Protection Procedures**

9.1 These have been consistently assessed as high quality and this was the case with the most recent audit undertaken.

## **10.0 Finance**

10.1 The increase in referrals has resulted in pressures on the service that has resulted in additional costs of £800,000 reported to Cabinet September 2009. This situation is mirrored across the region and country with all councils reporting large increases in spending for child protection, children in need and looked after children.

## **11.0 Law**

11.1 Under the 1989 Children Act every local authority is required to take reasonable steps to identify the extent to which there are children in need within its area. Under Section 17 of the 1989 Children Act the local authority may assess the needs of any child who appears to be in need within the meaning of that section. The Children Act 2004 places a duty on local agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## **12.0 Equality Impact**

12.1 The provision of a Contact Referral and Assessment Service ensures that children's needs are assessed and that families receive support to ensure that the welfare of their children is promoted and safeguarded, and that services are targeted to the most vulnerable children in the Borough.

## **13.0 Recommendation**

13.1 That Select Committee receive and note the report and comment on areas for further consideration in preparation for the Ofsted Inspection

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Boleyn". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal dotted line.

**Councillor L Boleyn**  
**Chair – Select Committee Working Group on Social Care**

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## Appendix 1

### Scope of inspection

1. These inspections will look at practice in relation to contact, assessment, and referral processes for children in need and children who may be in need of protection and consider how well practice supports the effective management of risk and minimises the incidence of child abuse and neglect.
2. Inspectors will focus their activity on analysing and discussing case files to assess the quality of practice and actions taken to ensure good or better outcomes for children and their families. Inspectors will consider any evidence as to how well initial assessment informs case planning.
3. Although the main focus of the inspection will be on the local authority services, any findings about partners' contributions and the quality of multi-agency prevention and support for safeguarding children and young people, including the impact of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Children's Trust Board, will be reported on also.
4. Inspections will usually include an evaluation of:
  - the quality and timeliness of referrals and assessments, including:
    - the extent and quality of partner agency involvement
    - the involvement of children and their families
    - how this impacts on the services offered to children and their families
  - the quality of management oversight and decision-making, including:
    - senior management audit of how well workers manage risk of harm through effective referral and assessment
    - case allocation and caseload management
    - the quality of direct supervision and support
    - the quality of case-file recording and arrangements for informing and involving senior managers in decision-making
  - the application of thresholds, their clarity and consistency and how these impact on outcomes for children
  - the impact of strategy discussions and enquiries in protecting children and young people
  - the effectiveness of communication, liaison and joint working between agencies
  - the effectiveness of out-of-hours provision, including accident and emergency health services, in managing risk of harm through effective information sharing, referral and assessment
  - the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of children from particular groups
  - how well services act on users' views
  - the role and responsibilities of support staff, level of training and support received and how this impacts on the quality of service delivery
  - the effectiveness of social workers and unqualified staff, including family support and social work assistants, in identifying, assessing and managing risk of harm for children and their families.

5. Guidance on identified features of effective practice in relation to contact, assessment, and referral arrangements is set out at the end of this document.

## Annex A

### **Guidance on effective practice (unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children and young people in need and children and young people)**

- Practice and procedures manage risk of harm and ensure best possible outcomes for children and young people.
- Practice and procedures comply with statutory requirements and associated guidance. They are implemented efficiently and effectively and ensure that referrals are responded to promptly.
- Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales. Children suffering or at significant risk of harm are identified and receive a prompt and appropriate response.
- Agreed inter-agency thresholds (or arrangements for access to services), and responsibilities for safeguarding children are applied and regularly reviewed.
- Assessments are clear and analytical. Risk and protective factors that impact on children's safety and welfare are identified. Conclusions flow logically from analysis and include judgements about standards of care, allowing assessments to be translated into effective plans.
- Section 47 enquiries are thorough, timely, and always carried out by a qualified and suitable experienced social worker. Findings in relation to significant harm are clear. Action needed to ensure children's safety is identified and implemented promptly.
- Record keeping is up to date and demonstrates effective management of risk of harm, sound decision-making, and effective planning.
- There is evidence of focused multi-agency and partnership working, led by the Children's Trust Board and Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- Communication and liaison with relevant agencies is established and effective.
- There is evidence that the Local Safeguarding Children Board has a robust approach to quality assurance and audit.
- Monitoring and evaluation are helping to ensure that practice across all partner agencies is improving or sustained at a high level and meeting the needs of particular groups of vulnerable children.
- Senior managers take appropriate measures to assure themselves that referral and assessment processes in their area are effective at identifying, assessing and managing risk of harm.
- There is evidence that senior managers effectively challenge casework and decision-making.
- The experiences and views of children and parents are gathered and used to influence service delivery and development.

- Children and family members are involved in assessment or planning to meet the child's needs, and the views and feelings of children and the views of family members are taken into account.
- Critically reflective supervision, management audit and oversight are provided to all staff, and are resulting in improving practice. Suitable training for staff is available and is improving practice.
- The service is resourced sufficiently to meet identified needs.
- Performance indicators reflect good and sustained and/or improving practice.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Common Assessment</b>	The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a standardised approach to conducting assessments of children’s additional needs and deciding how these should be met. It can be used by practitioners across Children’s Services in England. The CAF also aims to improve integrated working by promoting co-ordinated service provisions
<b>Contact</b>	An enquiry from a member of the public or other professional to social care which is logged but requires no further intervention from social care services. It may lead to signposting to other services.
<b>Referral</b>	Follows from initial contact and is deemed that advice and guidance from social care services is required. This may be open and closed on the same day or may lead to a request for an Initial Assessment.
<b>Re-referral</b>	These are cases where a referral occurs within 12 months of a previous referral which has been closed
<b>Initial Assessment</b>	An assessment of each child referred to social services with a request for services to be provided. The performance indicator against which we are measured states assessment should be undertaken within a maximum of seven working days of the Initial Referral, but could be very brief depending on the child’s circumstances.
<b>Core Assessment</b>	A process undertaken by professionals and family to identify the needs of the child in order that a plan may be developed to meet those needs. The performance indicator against which we are measured states that assessment takes up to 35 working days.
<b>Section 47</b>	Relates to a child protection enquiry and the Local Authority’s duty to investigate where they have reasonable cause to suspect a child who lives in their area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. The duty is laid down in Section 47 of the children Act 1989.