

The Cabinet – Wednesday 8 February 2012

Report of the Acting Director of Children’s Services

Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Cabinet 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 safeguard 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.

- The outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of Local Authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in March 2011.
 - Interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust, Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust and NHS Dudley.
4. All inspection judgments are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

5. The inspection was focussed on the contributions of all relevant Services in the Local Authority and is approached from a partnership perspective.
6. The inspection provided two overall ratings for Safeguarding Services in relation to their overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement and individual ratings for specific outcomes relating to those Services.
7. The inspection provided two overall ratings for Looked after Children in relation to their overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement and individual ratings for specific outcomes relating to those Services.
8. A record of the main findings with regard to each of the lines of enquiry is shown at appendix 1.
9. A summary of the outcomes for Safeguarding and for Looked after Children is attached as appendix 2.
10. A costed Action Plan against the recommendations is being prepared and will be provided to Cabinet.

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. Cabinet to receive a copy of the Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children report and note and comment the content.
19. That Cabinet in due course receive the action plan and on a regular basis progress reports.



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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
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
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Good

Appendix 2

Safeguarding Services

Overall Effectiveness: Grade 3 (Adequate)

The overall effectiveness of the council and its partners in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people is adequate.

Children and young people who may be at risk of harm are identified and awareness across the partnership in respect of safeguarding is good.

Although there are examples of good assessment and recording practice in children's social care, this is not yet fully consistent and some delays in the completion of tasks are noted. Health provision has also been affected by the degree of change within health services leading to some inconsistencies in practice. These are now being actively addressed. A range of effective services are provided by the partnership to help children and young people feel and keep safe with appropriate joint action to respond to identified concerns and needs. Partnership working is good at a strategic level with effective and long-standing partnership arrangements in place, including the partnership board, DSCB and local planning groups. Services are being provided within local communities in the borough and are becoming increasingly responsive to local needs.

There is a shared vision and commitment to effective safeguarding and this is given high priority across the partnership. Schools are playing a significant role in monitoring the welfare of children and young people, in supporting inclusion and raising safeguarding awareness. Voluntary and community organisations are also very active in key aspects of service development and delivery. Safeguarding policies and plans are in place which also reflects the awareness of the partnership in respect of emerging issues. These include domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and children who go missing. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated and are frequently tested and informed by user views on the services they receive. Mechanisms are in place to seek the views of children and young people through shadow board approaches.

Clear performance targets are set for safeguarding which are closely monitored and are being achieved. Performance overall is improving and most indicators are now in line or exceeding those of similar areas despite increases in service demand. A framework for performance management is established which includes auditing and themed evaluations on a single and multi-agency basis but this is not yet embedded at a team level or in day to day practice to assure service quality. Thresholds for service access have recently been updated and are clearly defined but the quality of referrals remains too variable. Joint

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 (MAPPA) 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.

There is strong political leadership and a commitment to safeguarding which is ensuring high prioritisation within the council. Additional financial resources have been committed in order to strengthen aspects of services, to increase capacity and to sustain improvement. There is a strong ethos of partnership working evidenced through the robust operation of the partnership board, DSCB and local strategic groups. Workforce planning and development are good, with robust recruitment and retention processes firmly embedded. The investment in staff training and personal development is very good and staff morale and commitment are good.

There has been a reduction in the use of agency staff and cases are allocated in a timely manner and subject to prioritisation by managers.

Supervision is regular and regarded as supportive by staff. There is some evidence that users of services are contributing to planning but this is not yet fully consistent. Services are appropriately sensitive to the needs of children and families from different cultures. There are good examples of effective joint work with children and young people with disabilities in the context of safeguarding and promotion of their general welfare. The CYPP drives the work on promoting equality and on meeting diverse needs. The council has an equality and diversity policy which is reflected in the priorities and aims of various plans. Narrowing the gap between key groups and others in the borough is a key and joint priority.

Capacity for improvement: Grade 2 (Good)

Capacity for improvement in safeguarding is good. Ambition for effective safeguarding is clearly demonstrated through strategic plans and through internal and joint processes to evaluate the effectiveness of local services.

The operation of an effective partnership board, local children's partnerships and DSCB is facilitating clear prioritisation and identification of areas for further improvement. Although the health economy has recently undergone significant change and Police capacity has been stretched across the whole West Midlands Force area there is a strong drive to step up the pace of improvement in the context of shifting the balance of services towards early intervention and prevention. Leadership within children's services is effective and ensuring a systematic approach to service development without compromising on the protection of vulnerable children and young people. The commitment to increase the pace of change through the wider partnership and tri-partite work between children's services, Police and health agencies is manifest. This ambition is leading to improved outcomes as measured against national indicators. Prompt and decisive action is taken in respect of issues raised through inspections, internal self assessment, and audits and the partnership has very good awareness of local population needs and pressures.

The partnership provides stable and effective leadership and has secured many service improvements, including in some of the most intractable and difficult service areas. The workforce is well trained and supported by a good workforce development strategy which in turn is responsive to changing demands and reflective of local demography. Staffing

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

- Extend audit processes to routinely monitor the consistency and quality of practice
- Ensure MARAC is fully operational and effective leadership is in place in order to meet the level of demand for such arrangements.

Within six months:

- Ensure the electronic recording system in children's social care is fully operational and embedded to support effective case recording, captures the views of service users and collate data and information in a way that is immediately useful to front line and senior managers
- Develop explicit arrangements for the use of the CAF within strategies for early intervention and family support to ensure that all agencies are assuming responsibility for being lead professionals in suitable cases.

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 an improving trend in performance in most outcome areas. Leadership within children's social care is effective and provides the necessary stability for incremental and systematic development. The trend in service improvement is good with examples where performance has improved in recent years to be in line with or above similar areas and national averages. The borough is participating in a pilot scheme for looked after children in residential care and working with the National Implementation Team and Department for Education to implement a training programme for staff in its residential units to further improve outcomes from an already good basis. The partnership has been active in identifying levels of unmet need within local communities through some very imaginative projects and network of children's centres, schools and other family support services. Although this has placed an inevitable and additional pressure on some elements of services the council and partners have been responsive and deployed additional resources to increase capacity. The partnership is also active in considering how current services can be adapted and developed to shift the balance of provision more towards prevention, while simultaneously ensuring children and young people are kept safe and their welfare actively promoted. A good workforce development strategy is in place and staff experience, skill and stability is good. Staff across the partnership report they enjoy working in the borough and demonstrate commitment to the values of the partnership and sense of direction.

The council's commissioning strategy for looked after children and young people clearly identifies the challenges in providing sufficiency of placement options within the context of a rising looked after population. There is good analysis of the contributing factors enabling the borough to implement a number of strategies to maintain the range and quality of its own service provision. The strategy to reduce the looked after population includes increased use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and securing and supporting placements with families and friends. Health services have identified several areas for further development and are committed to tightening those aspects of services where inconsistencies have been identified. Performance management systems are in place including the use of case and themed audits. Quality assurance frameworks are less well established but this is fully recognised and being incorporated into new systems and strategies as they are formulated.

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 implemented and fully supports improvements in health provision for looked after children and young people including case recording,

health contributions to holistic assessments of need and risk, case planning and measurement of the impact of health services in improving outcomes

- 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.