

# CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

Multi-agency self-assessment - Summer 2012



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation have committed to joint inspection of multi-agency arrangements for the protection of children and have recently launched consultation on the proposed framework. This is the next stage of evolution of previous joint and single inspectorate arrangements including the current unannounced inspection of local authority arrangements to protect children. Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board are formally coordinating a local response to proposals in advance of the consultation deadline of 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2012.

The current Ofsted framework provides a useful structure for benchmarking local services against quality criteria. Locally, a multi-agency working group has convened to review strengths and weaknesses in child protection against the unannounced grade descriptors. This included representatives from across the Local Authority, Health community, voluntary and community sector, Police, and Probation.

## 2.0 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The process provided a space for professional to reflect on progress. Overall, practitioners recognised that the local authority and partners had not been complacent since achieving their Good inspection result. Most practitioners recognised that partners had responded to escalating need in the City based on strong foundations of multi-agency working but communication needs to be improved to ensure the children's workforce as a whole had visibility of the range of help available to help children and families.

### 2.1 Early Help for Families

Overall, services have continued to innovate to ensure that children are protected from harm. Notably, the common assessment framework had become more embedded as a tool for early identification and early help across the system. The recent performance figures show a dramatic increase in uptake and support is being targeted at service areas to ensure consistency of support to families. The turnover of child protection plans insofar as the number of plans that were ended highlighted how co-ordinated interventions had supported families to reduce the level of risk.

The developing Early Intervention Framework, led by the local authority, was seen as a positive tool for ensuring early help is well-coordinated. However, the group recognised a variety of interventions that had been introduced that were having a positive impact – for example specialist midwives for safeguarding and for drugs and alcohol. The Care Aims Model has been introduced for every child who attends the Emergency Department, children's operating theatres or admitted to a ward which has led to improved risk assessment and early alerts. Parenting programmes in the City, including the Family Intervention Programme and Strengthening Families are regarded national as good practice.

Adult-focussed services increasingly understood their role in supporting families for example through Operation Encompass, drug support agencies. The Hidden Harm and Domestic Abuse partnerships have made substantial progress in embedding a family approach across services and improving multi-agency working for families. Family support workers are deployed into allied

services across the City to share skills across partner agencies. This is particularly important given the socio-economic environment and increased numbers of families under duress.

The commissioning cycle was becoming firmly embedded for services, particularly children's centres and leading to positive outcomes for children. A number of services are now being delivered in the heart of the community due to improved relationships between agencies particularly for younger children. The development of parent and child assessment placements in-house and the further development of family group conferences were both recognised as very positive and effective interventions for families.

Recommendations:

- More needs to be done to drive up and maintain multi-agency commitment through child protection conferences. Attendance is inconsistent and there was a perception that attendance sometimes drifted over time.
- Continued improvement is needed to ensure smooth transitions for children
- Multi-agency working is most effective where there are good working relationships. There isn't a systematic coordination point.

## **2.2 Quality Help for Families**

Practice is focused on the needs and views of children, young people and their families with many examples of how service user contributions to their own care plan, recruitment of staff and to strategy development had led to positive improvements in outcomes. There are many examples of targeted teams or workers who work alongside vulnerable groups including traveller families, bme communities and children in care.

Quality assurance mechanisms were consistently operating to ensure high quality practice and it was felt that managers across agencies were able to openly challenge each other about poor performance. Services were able to demonstrate how learning from recent case file audits, management reviews and serious case reviews had led to improvements in practice. In addition there was a quantifiable link between increased take-up of safeguarding training and early identification of children at risk of harm.

Recommendations:

- Consultation mechanisms need to be improved for those key groups of children and families that are not consistently involved in service planning – for example very young children and families in the child protection system.

## **2.3 Leadership and governance**

The continued sign-up to the Children and Young People's Trust and to the Children and Young People's Plan was seen as a positive marker of strong leadership and commitment to children's outcomes. Key agencies are actively engaged in partnership working including PSCB and the Trust.

The Children and Young People's Trust played an active role in shaping Early Intervention Grant spend to support

Plymouth City Council have created a Director for People role, filled by the DCS. This was providing a number of opportunities for joint working across age groups and increased focus on family needs. Initiatives such as Families with a Future were providing momentum in combining best practice from a number of teams and intervening to support children and families together.

Combining services has increased understanding and oversight of broader policy changes such as welfare reform, crime and anti-social behaviour.

Across the broader system though there has been a great deal of turbulence with changes in how organisations are structured and budget reductions across the City. This was leading some confusion among frontline workers.

#### Recommendations

The Family Justice Review and Adoption Action Plan present opportunities to improve engagement between judiciary and the local authority to reduce drift for children in the court system.