

# AMBITIOUS PLYMOUTH

Children's Social Care - 12 August 2013



## Current developments, performance and issues

### Introduction

Children's Social Care (CSC) provides social work and social care support services for vulnerable children and young people in Plymouth. This includes all assessment work, children in need, children subject to Child Protection Plans and children in care.

The service is currently organised so that Children and young people's needs are assessed in the first instance in the Advice and Assessment (A&A) teams. There is a police sergeant from the Public Protection team based with the screening team, and a member of the Common Assessment Framework team based within the service. This means that we have effective arrangements for information sharing and liaison with early intervention services.

Children in need including those that become subject to a Child Protection Plan will transfer to the Children in the Community (CintC) teams, and those that come into care will transfer to the Children in Care (CIC) teams. The CIC teams deal with the cases that are in care proceedings and the adoption and fostering teams. There is a specific Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service team that works with children in care and this team is based with the CIC teams which enables effective joint working.

In addition we work closely with colleagues in the integrated commissioning service, and they are involved in commissioning specific services such as those purchased on an individual basis for specific children such as residential placements. They work closely with commissioning colleagues in the locality from the peninsula – i.e. Devon, Cornwall and Torbay to ensure effective market management, and cost and volume arrangements.

## National Developments

### Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013

The new Working Together guidance was published in March and this brings key changes in expectations in relation to multi-agency, and children's social care safeguarding practice these include. Establishing a single assessment that will replace the current Initial and Core Assessments, there are two key time frames:

- 24 hours from referral/contact to decision to assess
- 45 days from initial referral to complete the assessment.

An increased and specific emphasis on early help and the responsibilities of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) to monitor and quality assure the partnership's early intervention/help offer.

Implementation in Plymouth is being led by the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB), and changes to the Peninsula procedures will be agreed and implemented across the peninsula. Children's social care in Plymouth is developing a new single assessment framework which is based on best practice established in the pilot authorities and the best fit for local needs. It is likely to

include an expectation that the child/children will be seen within the first 10 working days. This work will also ensure that there is consistency with current CAF arrangements and the new SEN Education, health and care assessment and case planning framework.

### **The Early Intervention Foundation**

The Early Intervention Foundation has been established, and following his visit to Plymouth Graeme Allen was invited and encouraged Plymouth to apply to be one of the first 20 to be a 'pioneering place'. This was based on his very positive response to the Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy in Plymouth. We have been successful in this and will be designated a pioneering place.

### **Adoption**

There is a clear expectation from central government that radical change will be achieved this year, and beyond, in the recruitment of adoptive parents. The drive is to move to a national approach to recruiting a national pool of adoptive parents. This will mean a move away from a local authority based local approach to recruitment for the children that need adopting in Plymouth. There is a clear expectation that local authorities will collaborate with each other and with private adoption agencies. Work has begun with other authorities and providers to establish options and a proposal for how this is progressed in Plymouth.

### **Ofsted Safeguarding and LAC children inspections**

Ofsted are changing their inspection arrangements and have just been through a consultation about the new arrangements. This will be reported back on in November this year when the new arrangements will be implemented. This will be a single agency, single inspection regime that will look at the services children, young people and their families receive across all areas including Early intervention, Assessment, Child Protection, Children in Need, Children in care, fostering, adoption and care leavers. Under the new proposals they will also consider how well the Local Safeguarding Children Board is functioning.

### **Changes to the Public Law Outline**

New arrangements for child care proceedings are being piloted in Plymouth following our success in reducing timescales for care proceedings. This means that we have to consider new arrangements for service delivery to ensure that needs are fully assessed at the point that care proceedings are initiated rather than after they have begun.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation and missing young people**

This is an increasing area of work with increased awareness nationally and locally about how concerns emerge and the arrangements that we need to have in place. There have been two whole day events run by the PSCB to raise awareness and ensure that all agencies and practitioners are aware of the guidelines for responding to these concerns.

New arrangements are now in place in Plymouth for dealing with children missing from home and from our care, and in particular appropriate returnee interview, and follow up have now been agreed and are being implemented. This includes a new team based in the youth service including a jointly funded social worker.

### **Welfare Reform**

We anticipate that the impact of the welfare benefit reforms will impact during the autumn and we will be monitoring closely the impact on referrals and all aspects of our work.

### **Key Issues for Children's Social Care**

Referrals remain high and increased last year by 10% this means that the service continues to manage increasing workloads and pressures. This is managed safely by rigorous supervision and case transfer arrangements. We allocate all cases and do not have any CIN, CP or CIC unallocated cases. We have also seen a marked increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans from 312 at the end of last year to 345 in mid - June, although the numbers are now

started to reduce again. The numbers of children in Care have increased slightly from 373 to 380 at the end of June.

### **Care proceedings timescales**

The Family Justice Board's expectations that care proceedings should be completed within 26 weeks has been implemented with rigour by the courts in Plymouth, and social work staff and managers have worked with great commitment to achieve this. This work has been supported and facilitated by colleagues in legal.

We have achieved the completion of all proceedings within this timescale in last quarter of last year, and this is an improvement from 56 weeks in the previous year. National figures indicate that we are the third best achieving borough in the country.

### **Advice and Assessment and Children in the Community services**

Caseloads remain high in the Advice and Assessment, and Children in the Community Teams. Work has begun through a specific action plan that includes identifying cases that can be stepped down to services delivered outside CSC, and how this is managed safely. We are also reviewing current working arrangements and systems to ensure that all activity is as efficient as it can be, and that ICT is utilised to maximise the time social workers and managers have for direct work, reflection, evaluation, supervision, and planning.

Recruitment of experienced across the service remains a challenge, but we have good arrangements in place to support and develop newly qualified staff, and retention of staff remains good.

### **Children in Care service**

There continues to be a difficulty in identifying enough foster care placements in the independent sector as there has been a recent high increase in the numbers of children coming into care in the peninsula, and in particular in Torbay. They have placed a high number of young children in Independent Fostering Agency placement in recently. This has meant that we have placed a small number of children in residential care that we think would have been able to be placed with foster carers but there have been no placements available. We continue to work hard to find appropriate placements and keep the numbers in residential placements low. By the end of quarter 1 we had 18 children in residential placements.

Work continues to maintain good performance in relation to care proceedings and we are looking at how we need to reconfigure delivery arrangements to meet the new demands in relation to the Public Law outline for care proceeding.

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