

Report to: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **21 September 2009**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Title of report: **Safeguarding Children – Member and Senior Management Oversight of Services**
Purpose of report: **To advise Scrutiny Committee of the findings of the monitoring systems in place for senior managers and Members to ensure that services to safeguard children are properly co-ordinated and managed effectively.**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to note the outcomes of the monitoring visits and audits undertaken by the Lead Member and senior managers.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no financial implications. The report describes services that are already provided within Children's Services budgets.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 In February 2005, local social care services for children were inspected by inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). It was part of a national programme of inspections using agreed standards and criteria. An area for improvement identified by the inspectors was the arrangements for oversight of intake teams by Lead Members and in response to this recommendation arrangements were made for the Lead Member for Children and Families to visit the duty teams in the County. This arrangement has continued and between August 2008 and July 2009, 9 visits were completed to the three duty teams in Eastbourne, Hastings, and the Disability team at Sorrel Drive, Eastbourne. Regular reports were completed recording the findings of these visits and on all visits the manager was seen along with other members of staff.

2.2 Issues discussed during Lead Member visits included:

- Autistic children: Support and education and the possibilities of 'Aiming High';
- The increased workload, increased referrals and staff working to maximum capacity;
- New management arrangements, how to cope with extra work and recording – positive response.

2.3 Issues raised by the Lead Member with senior managers as a result of the visits included:

- The use of lap tops for home working by Duty and Assessment (DAT) staff;
- Concerns regarding pressures on managers within the Eastbourne DAT;
- Need for more social workers to be recruited to Hastings DAT.

2.4 Lead Member's comments on the teams visited included:

- 'Very competent staff, excellent team work – willing to embrace new systems and change';
- 'I noted the urgency of the delivery, the skill of the staff in making decisions, and the willingness to give do much of their time and professionalism';
- 'Well organised, close working team, who share best practice of case work'.

2.5 In addition to the Lead Member's visits to the duty teams the Deputy Director for Children & Families has continued to visit each duty team at approximately six-monthly intervals meeting with staff in order to discuss any concerns they have and to ensure they are fully aware of any service developments. Similarly, the Director of Children's Services undertakes periodic visits to these teams.

2.6 Senior managers have been conducting quarterly file audits since 2003 and continued to do so during 2008/9. Audits undertaken included all of the newly formed Youth Support Teams, the three Duty and Assessment Teams and two of the Family Support Teams. There was also a specific audit of core assessments from across all teams undertaken because of concerns identified in a Serious Case

Review. Findings from the file audits are reported to the Children's Social Care Management Team and action plans are produced in response to the development areas identified by the audits. Reports now include historical data and identify areas of improvement over the last five years as well as remaining areas of development.

2.7 Areas that continue to be strong are:

- Generally appropriate 24 hour screening and decisions regarding prioritising work in duty and assessment teams;
- Recording of ethnicity and language;
- Effective inter agency work to safeguard children;
- Good working in partnership with parents

2.8 Areas of improvement within the file audits included:

- Recording of supervision on the file
- Some improvement in feedback given to referrers and other agencies;
- Increased direct contact with children.

2.9 Remaining areas for development include:

- Concerns about the quality of recording of the views of children;
- Evidence on files of management oversight;
- Continued difficulties associated with the implementation of Care Assess.

2.10 A further audit undertaken in 2008/9 was of the duty systems in place within the three Duty & Assessment teams and duty arrangements across the Youth Support Teams. This audit which was triggered because of concerns about the quality of some assessments focused on systems to manage the duty and assessment processes and the quality of supervision and management provided to staff. This audit was also part of preparation for the unannounced inspections of duty access points by Ofsted. The audit took place between September and October 2008 and identified some weaknesses in the management of the service and a need for further resources to strengthen the duty function. An action plan was identified to respond to the development areas and a new structure for the duty service was implemented from April 2009. The unannounced inspection in July of the duty systems by Ofsted confirmed that the management structures were sound and that the organisation and management of work was good.

3. Conclusion and Reason for recommendation

3.1 The monitoring arrangements in place provide effective mechanisms to ensure that Members and senior managers are informed about the quality of services being offered by their front-line staff, and are able to take appropriate action to remedy deficiencies as they are revealed.

MATT DUNKLEY

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Fiona Johnson Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance

Tel: 01273 481289

Local Members: All

Background documents: None