

Committee: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **10 September 2012**

Title of Report: **Safeguarding Children – Member and Senior Management Oversight of Services in 2011/12**

By: **Director of Children's 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 coordinated and managed effectively.**

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Consider and comment on the outcomes of the monitoring visits and audits undertaken by the Lead Member and senior managers.**
 - 2) Endorse the continuation of the existing arrangements.**
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1. Financial Appraisal

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

2. Supporting information

2.1 Following a Social Care Inspection recommendation for an area for improvement in 2005, a system was put in place for the Lead Member for Children and Families to visit the duty teams within the County. This arrangement was extended to assist the new Lead Member to familiarise himself with the service and these team visits have continued and between November 2011 and July 2012; 7 visits have been completed (4 Family Support Teams, 1 Looked After Children Team, 1 Care Leavers Team and 1 Fostering Team). 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:

- Caseload pressures and high thresholds
- IT support
- Parking issues at certain offices
- Delay in courts
- Office space
- Difficulty in accessing rooms at Children's Centres
- Not enough social housing for care leavers
- Lack of permanence foster carers
- Ocean House – lack of soap etc in toilets, kitchens need facelift, dishwashers, public baby change facilities, permits for parking
- Good foster carer recruitment event
- CICC now has 14 members
- Preventative aspect view that threshold not where it should be

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

- IT software and hardware support to workers
- Hot-desking issues, lack of privacy for sensitive calls, not enough desks for team size, no quiet space for report writing
- General issues relating to operation of Children's Centres

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

- Very dedicated and well run team
- Mix of people excellent, a really good bunch
- Very good team under pressure from number of children entering service

- A really professional group of caring people
- Doors in Ocean House dangerous
- Team is growing but space in not
- Morale excellent
- Public view of service is negative

2.5 In addition to the Lead Member's visits to the teams, the Assistant Director and the Head of Safeguarding attempted to conduct an unannounced inspection to the duty and assessment teams mirroring the Ofsted inspection procedure in October 2011, however this was abandoned due to Ofsted actually arriving on the same day. A new Quality Assurance Framework is being developed for Children's Social Care which will detail the requirement for the AD Safeguarding, LAC & SEN to lead a 'mock' inspection of Safeguarding and LAC services mirroring the new Ofsted inspection framework.

2.6 Ofsted conducted the Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in November 2010 and graded Safeguarding Services Overall Effectiveness as 'Good' and Capacity for Improvement as 'Good'. The areas identified for improvement were developed into an action by Children's Services but are also subject to scrutiny and monitoring by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Ofsted conducted the Annual Inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in October 2011. No areas for priority action were identified and 2 areas of strength were identified, (improved recruitment and retention and senior management audit activity and use of performance data and management information). The report detailed many areas where the service met or exceeded statutory requirements and a number of areas for further development which was formed into an action plan for service development and presented to the Senior Management Team.

2.7 Senior managers have been conducting file audits since 2003 and continued to do so during 2011/12. 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.

2.8 Areas that continue to be strong are:

- Good evidence of 24 hour screening and decision making following referral
- Effective inter agency work to safeguard children
- Good working in partnership with parents
- All children were deemed safe and in nearly all cases all actions were taken to keep the children safe
- The majority of files clearly evidenced that the intervention and case planning had a positive impact for the child and demonstrated positive outcomes

2.9 Areas of improvement within the file audits included:

- Child's wishes and views being evident
- Quality of recording continues to be variable with continued lack of consistency of use of records or where documents are stored

2.10 Remaining areas for development include:

- Evidence of management oversight and supervision being recorded on case files which needs to be challenging, reflective and analytical
- Evidence that visits to children subject to child protection plans are timely and that child is seen alone

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

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. The Lead Member and management oversight and audit activity will be reported within the new Quality Assurance Framework. A recommendation is made that the existing arrangements continue.

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Local Members: All

Background Documents: LSCB Annual Report