

Purpose

Update on the Safeguarding Improvement Programme

1. The Health and Wellbeing Standing Committee received an update on the safeguarding and looked after children improvement programme in February 2011.
2. This report provides Members with a further update on developments in the Children's Social Care service.

Information - Sustaining improvement in Children's Social Care

Performance & Workload

3. Key measures in relation to the timeliness of Initial and Core Assessments are much improved over the last 12 months (please see Appendix A)
 - 76% of Initial Assessments completed in time in May 2011 compared with 37% in April 2010,
 - 73% of Core Assessments completed within timescale in May 2011 compared with 50% in April 2010
4. An increased focus on adoption performance and activity continues to show results, with an increased number of children being placed for adoption. A Permanence Team is being set up in the north of the county utilising some of the additional staffing resources to provide additional focus on exiting children from care into permanent placements, such as adoption.
5. We are also seeing a gradual increase in workers with "sustainable" caseloads and a reduction in workers with "high" caseloads. As we recruit additional staff, fill our vacancies and continue to carefully manage thresholds for work coming into the service, the number of workers with sustainable caseloads will increase

Unannounced inspection of contact and duty points

6. In February this year we had a positive unannounced Ofsted inspection. Ofsted concluded that children in Nottinghamshire were safe. The inspectors were very positive about the commitment of our front line staff and the improvements made since previous unannounced inspection in October 2009, and the full inspection in March 2010.

Children's Social Care Statement of Intent

7. In March the Children's Social Care Statement of Intent was approved by the County Council. The Statement of Intent contains the vision and priorities for Children's Social Care, and will guide our work on a day to day basis, as well as informing the work of our transformation programme.

Recruitment

8. From the financial year 2011/12 the Council has significantly increased the budget in children's social care to enable us to increase our capacity. We have been proactive in recruitment to additional posts, as well as recruiting to existing vacancies. To date, we have successfully recruited to posts in occupational therapy, the family resource team, child protection co-ordination, looked after review and social work, including team manager and locality support workers. As we recruit new staff we will endeavour to reduce our reliance agency staff.

Department of Education Improvement Notice review meeting

9. On the 15th April we had a meeting with a number of colleagues from the Department of Education to review our performance in relation to targets set out in the Improvement Notice (issued to Nottinghamshire by the Secretary of State in June 2010). It was a positive meeting which concluded that we were making significant progress and that Ministers were currently happy with our level of improvement. A further meeting with the Department of Education will take place in July this year.

Peer Challenge

10. In May we underwent a Peer Challenge of partnership Safeguarding services. The Government and Professor Eileen Munro are very positive about the idea of Safeguarding Services reviewing and challenging each other - they see it as a key way of critically looking at what we are doing and then improving our performance.
11. The initial findings of the Peer Team were positive and those areas highlighted for sustained improvement were already identified. The formal report of the Peer Challenge Team is being agreed and will be published and shared with partners in July.

Children's Social Care transformation programme

12. Following stabilisation of the service and as part of the continuing improvement journey, we have just commenced work with an external partner to transform the service into a more sustainable model which delivers cost-effective services and improved outcomes for children and families. We will be piloting the model from September 2011, with the wider programme due to be completed within 18 months to 2 years.
13. Initial planning has been presented to Children's Social Care managers in June, and a wider communication plan is being developed to take this work forward with our staff and our partners.

Next Steps

Full Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding Services

14. The only way to finally rid ourselves of the "inadequate" label is to submit to a full Ofsted inspection of our safeguarding services. Anthony May has written to Ofsted requesting a re-inspection after the beginning of September 2011.
15. It is the decision of Ofsted as to whether they take us up on our request but I am confident that they will, and that we are in a strong position to meet the standards laid out in the inspection framework. Clearly, we will need to ensure that we are properly prepared and initial preparation arrangements have been made.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Social Care and Health committee consider and comment on the information provided

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Background papers: none

Appendix A – Completion rates for Initial & Core Assessments

