

Meeting Safeguarding Children's Board and Children's Trust

date 23 November 2009 agenda item number 9

Safeguarding and looked after children improvement programme

Purpose of paper

1. This report deals with three main areas:
 - actions taken since the unannounced inspection of social care contact, referral and assessment arrangements
 - the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Programme
 - preparation for an inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Services.

Background information

2. Nottinghamshire was the subject of an unannounced inspection by Ofsted on 8/9 October 2009. This inspection identified a number of weaknesses.
3. The inspection came at a time when the volume of referrals to children's social care services in Nottinghamshire has increased by 43% (in the year between October 2008 and October 2009). In addition, the number of children in care has increased by approximately 20% over the past eighteen months. Both of these significant increases in activity have thus far been contained within existing resources but have placed significant strain on the system, in particular social worker case loads, placement capacity and placement costs. It is not only the volume of work that impacts on performance but the increasing complexity of case work which often includes domestic and other forms of violence, drug and/or alcohol abuse, mental health issues and poverty.
4. This strain on the social care system led to a recognition that the existing capacity within child protection services was inadequate, particularly in respect of meeting statutory responsibilities and having flexibility to respond to increased work-load. In response to these challenges and vulnerabilities, at its September 2009 meeting, the County Council's Cabinet identified additional budget provision of £509,000 in 2009/2010 to increase capacity.

5. At the same time, two bids were made for the 2009/2010 budget in respect of the following areas:
 - increased capacity at the front line and to support the front line - £1.7 million
 - increased capacity to meet the costs of special placements for children and young people in care - £3.1 million.

Actions taken since the inspection

6. Since the inspection, a range of actions has been taken to respond to the concerns raised by the inspectors:
 - an audit of cases has been conducted across social care reception and assessment teams and the findings acted upon
 - additional management and staffing capacity has been introduced into the Mansfield and Ashfield area to deal with the findings of the inspection, and the backlog of referrals
 - a “twilight shift” has been introduced in Mansfield and Ashfield to ensure that the workload is managed effectively
 - work to recruit additional staff funded from the resources approved by Cabinet has been accelerated and adverts have been placed
 - work on important policies in respect of workload management, quality assurance and performance management (including regular audit of case files) has been accelerated by use of external consultants
 - a review has been conducted of the pilot referral arrangements being undertaken by Notts Connect, to ensure that these arrangements are of a sufficient quality.
7. Although the Mansfield and Ashfield area remains under considerable pressure, these actions have stabilised the position and provided capacity to enable more sustained improvement.

Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Programme

8. To enable sustained improvement in our arrangements for safeguarding and looked after children, an improvement programme has been commissioned.
9. The programme will encompass safeguarding activity and arrangements for looked after children across Children and Young People’s Services, and will have a significant impact on the wider County Council, and Nottinghamshire Children’s Trust.
10. The programme is comprised of 18 individual projects, all of which have an identified lead. A programme manager has been identified to coordinate the individual projects and provide an overview of progress to Elected Members and senior managers. A list of the individual

projects is included as **Appendix 1** to this briefing. Work on the individual projects has already begun.

11. A programme initiation document has been developed which provides a structure for the improvement programme. It is anticipated that this will be formally adopted by the Safeguarding Forum, which will act as Sponsoring Group. For the purpose of its role as the Sponsoring Group, the Forum will be supplemented by the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board and Nottinghamshire's Children's Services Adviser from the Government Office for the East Midlands.
12. It is anticipated that the improvement programme will operate for a 12-month period, although the final completion date may be subject to further consideration. The criterion for agreeing that the programme has been completed will be an assessment that the improvements engendered by the programme have become sufficiently embedded to ensure that they will be maintained in the absence of the programme management structure. The Sponsoring Group will make this decision.

Preparation for an inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Services

13. The findings of the unannounced inspection are likely to lead to a full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services.
14. The maximum notice period for the full inspections of safeguarding and looked after children services is usually 10 working days, although in some circumstances a full inspection of safeguarding may be carried out without giving this period of notice.
15. The inspection will include not only the County Council but its key partners, such as the primary care trusts and the police. Documentation will be required from the County Council and its partners in advance of the fieldwork element of the inspection and inspectors will hold meetings and discussions with users, managers, health professionals and agencies, police, other staff and stakeholders across the Children's Trust. This will require a considerable logistical exercise with short notice to enable inspectors to undertake around 80-100 activities and which will allow them to make judgements against all the areas of the inspection criteria.
16. The inspection will look at the two separate elements: safeguarding services and services for looked after children.
17. A small project team has been assembled to coordinate preparation for the inspection and a project initiation document has been developed. Amongst other things, the team will co-ordinate:
 - the production of a suite of updated self-assessments for key elements of the inspection, linked to the inspection grade descriptors
 - an update of our progress against the Joint Area Review action plan items relating to safeguarding and looked after children
 - the production of the documentation required by the inspectors

- the scheduling of meetings with the Ofsted inspection team
- our communication arrangements with staff, partners and stakeholders.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that:

- the contents of this report are noted
- the County Council's Safeguarding Forum takes the role of Sponsoring Group for the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Improvement Programme.

ANTHONY MAY

Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services

Projects areas

- Ensure children and young people are safe
- Development & implementation of a performance management framework
- Quality audit process for case files, reports and social work supervision
- Caseload management system
- Framework, ICS and management information improvement programme
- Social care thresholds document
- Equity exercise (internal/external)
- Service responsiveness, including complaints
- Appointment to new posts and the establishment of the new social care performance and policy development section
- Induction, workforce & management development
- Review of service provided by Notts Connect
- Partnership development
- Partnership thresholds & pathways
- Safer recruitment
- Value for money
- Participation programme within children's social care services
- Equality & diversity
- Services for Looked After Children