

15 April 2013**Agenda Item: 9****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****LOCALITY VISITS****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an overview of the key issues raised in visits to locality offices by Members over the last nine months, and to seek approval for locality visits to continue and for a review of the organisation of the visits to be undertaken in June 2013.

Information and Advice

2. Visits to locality offices were first established in Nottinghamshire following the report of Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié (2003). This report emphasised the importance of political as well as operational accountability for measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
3. The requirement for political oversight of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements was further emphasised in the subsequent report of Lord Laming, published in March 2009, following the death of Baby Peter in Haringey.
4. Arrangements for Members to undertake regular visits to locality offices to meet front-line staff were put into place as an important way of promoting political oversight of work to safeguard children. The visits provide an opportunity to:
 - raise questions about work undertaken to safeguard children
 - identify significant issues affecting service delivery
 - consider issues specific to a particular district
 - understand any pressure points impacting on effective interagency working.
5. Staff from across Children, Families and Cultural Services participate in these meetings with Members although the majority of staff come from the Children's Social Care division.
6. From 2003 until 2012, issues arising from these visits, and responses to those issues, were considered as part of the agenda of the Safeguarding Children Forum consisting of those Members undertaking the locality visits and senior officers.
7. Following the changes to the political governance arrangements, it was agreed that an overview report should be provided to the Children and Young People's Committee. This is the first of those reports.

8. The aim has been to schedule visits on a six-monthly basis although it has not always proved possible to maintain this consistently across the County.
9. Over the last year, these locality visits have been complemented by visits to Children's Social Care staff by Councillor Allen Clarke and Steve Edwards, Service Director, Children's Social Care.

Locality visits undertaken and issues raised

10. A summary of the visits undertaken is as below:
 - Ashfield – Councillor Bob Cross visited on 22 February 2013.
 - Mansfield – Councillor John Allin visited on 27 September 2012.
 - Bassetlaw and Newark – Councillor Yates has recently agreed to undertake combined visits to these districts but it has not proved possible to schedule an agreed date as yet.
 - Broxtowe/Gedling and Rushcliffe – it was agreed that this would be a combined visit undertaken by Councillor Clarke and a visit took place on 4 December 2012. Previously a visit by Councillor Clarke had been undertaken to Broxtowe and Gedling on 13 June 2012.
11. The above visits took place before, during and just after a period of considerable organisational change across service areas within the department and discussions with staff reflected the challenges this inevitably posed for staff. The general view was that the changes would result in service improvement but the impact of working through the period of transition was acknowledged. There were discussions regarding the importance of understanding the service offer from Early Years and Targeted Support services to support and complement the work of Children's Social Care. It was noted that there would be a period of adjustment and that partner agencies also needed to be aware of the changes.
12. Performance information was considered at each visit, identifying the continued high demand for Children's Social Care services. It was noted that performance reports would be enhanced by the change to reporting by Business Objects which will provide managers with more timely performance information. This is an area of work which is ongoing.
13. Despite the organisational changes and the high work demands, staff morale across service areas was generally stated as being satisfactory. Support from managers was seen as a key factor in this.
14. During this period of transition, there was also reference to staff changes. Within Children's Social Care, a number of agency staff have been required to cover vacancies whilst there has been continued attention given to recruitment of permanent staff. A number of successful appointments have been made but to further this a colleague from Human Resources has now joined the Transformation Team in order to provide support for Children's Social Care in its recruitment processes.

15. Consideration was given at some visits to the impact of national drivers, for example, the national focus on the number of children looked after and adoption timescales. The establishment of a Throughcare Service within Children's Social Care, which allows for specific focus on the needs of looked after children, was seen as a positive development in this respect.
16. Some concerns were raised about the availability of business support to Children's Social Care staff following the centralisation of the administrative service. This has continued to be an issue for staff and is being addressed by senior managers.
17. The issues raised by staff across the County have been broadly the same; there has been little reference to district specific areas other than in the south of the County where concerns were particularly raised about future accommodation needs. Understandably, the focus has been on the impact of organisational change and demand on services. There was positive comment made about the opportunity for frontline staff to meet with elected members and for there to be discussion about the key issues impacting on their work – both positively and adversely.

Visits by Councillor Allen Clarke and Steve Edwards, Service Director, Children's Social Care

18. A series of programmed office visits has been arranged to allow Councillor Clarke, Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, to have direct access to front line staff. During these visits Councillor Clarke is accompanied by Steve Edwards, Service Director, Children's Social Care. To date, visits have taken place at the following Children's Social Care office bases;

• Chancery Lane, Retford	10 January 2013
• Ollerton Energy Village	7 February 2013
• Sir John Robinson Way, Gedling	12 February 2013
• Meadow House, Mansfield	14 February 2013
• Padge Road, Beeston	4 March 2013
• Mercury House, Annesley	18 March 2013

Further visits are planned to;

• Centenary House, West Bridgford	19 March 2013
• Chadburn House, Mansfield	21 March 2013
• Sandybank, Mansfield	21 March 2013

19. The visits allow front line staff direct access to Councillor Clarke and the Service Director. The format for visits is an initial walk through the office base, meeting staff at their desks, followed by a more formal meeting where staff are able to raise any issues they have directly with Councillor Clarke and Steve Edwards.

20. Feedback from staff has focused around the following areas:

Car parking

21. This is a particular issue at Meadow House and Ollerton Energy Village. Councillor Clarke has consequently raised car parking formally with colleagues in the Ways of Working team and work is currently underway to identify additional car parking at Meadow House and Ollerton Energy Village. A strategic review of car parking across the Council has also been commissioned.

Accommodation

22. Accommodation was a consistent theme during visits; many staff had recently moved building because of the new operating model. In addition there is uncertainty regarding the future of several Children's Social Care office bases. Sir John Robinson Way is currently for sale and Chancery Lane, Padge Road, Chadburn House, Meadow House and Centenary House have all been on and off the Council disposal list over the last 18 months. This has caused considerable uncertainty for staff, particularly for staff with nursery or school aged children. Councillor Clarke has raised concerns about office accommodation for Children's Social Care staff at the highest levels within the Council leading to a commitment from the Council to provide locality bases for Children's Social Care teams.
23. Overcrowding was a particular issue for staff based in the Bevercotes building at Ollerton Energy Village. At the request of Councillor Clarke, a review of their office accommodation has been arranged.

New Operating model

24. Generally front line staff and managers were positive about the future operating model. Some issues were raised about the potential to increase the numbers of social workers families may come into contact with as a consequence of the new model. It was however acknowledged that many families experienced drift and significant changes of social workers in the old model, particularly looked after children who had to compete for priority with child protection cases, often resulting in significant delay for looked after children. It was also acknowledged that the new operating model would be reviewed and this issue would be considered as part of the review.

Caseloads

25. Staff in the Assessment Teams and in the Looked After Teams raised particular concern regarding high caseloads. Caseload analysis has been on-going and additional capacity through new social work posts has now been allocated in both areas.

Business and administration support

26. Frontline staff from Children's Social Care and business and administration teams raised concerns about the number of vacant posts in the business and administration service, the number of vacancies covered by agency staff and the capacity of the business and administration service to manage demand and be effective. Social workers also

described a lack of clarity regarding what was a business and administrative task and what was a social work task. Social workers also said that they were unclear about which administrative staff were supporting which teams. Social workers and business and administrative staff identified the loss of the team support worker role as detrimental, resulting in social workers completing more administrative tasks.

27. Councillor Clarke raised the issues of vacancies and agency staff with senior managers, all vacant posts have now been advertised and many have now been recruited to. At Councillor Clarke's request a range of office based meetings involving front line staff and managers have been arranged to ensure that delegation of responsibilities between Children's Social Care and business and administration support are agreed and understood.
28. Councillor Clarke has regularly visited front line staff and will continue to do so. The above visits with the Service Director should therefore be seen as augmenting rather than replacing Councillor Clarke's solo office visits.
29. It is planned that all Children's Social Care offices are visited jointly by Councillor Clarke and Steve Edwards at least twice per year.

Other Options Considered

30. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

31. Over several years, the practice of locality visits has provided evidence of connectivity between frontline staff and elected Members in considering the work undertaken to promote the protection and welfare of children and young people. This has been found to be generally positive both internally for front line staff and in external inspections. The nature of these visits has evolved over time and it is appropriate for this to be reviewed at intervals to ensure that the visits remain pertinent and have an impact on service delivery.

Statutory and Policy Implications

32. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) locality visits continue in order to ensure connectivity between frontline staff and elected Members.
- 2) the organisation of these visits be reviewed in June 2013 to agree the future schedule and content of visits and reporting arrangements.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Pam Rosseter
Group Manager, Safeguarding and Independent Review
T: 0115 977 3921
E: pam.rosseter@nottsccl.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (SG 21/03/13)

33. The Committee is the appropriate body to decide the issues set out in this report.

Financial Comments (KLA 19/03/13)

34. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

Minutes of locality visits.

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0208