

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 20 September 2011

Report of: Lorraine Butcher, Strategic Director, Children, Families and Adults Services

Subject/Title: OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 From 27 June to 8 July 2011, OFSTED conducted its announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Cheshire East. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers. The inspection team consisted of 5 of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one inspector from the Care Quality Commission. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
- 1.2 The inspection followed the unannounced inspections of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements in the borough in April 2011 and previously in June 2010.
- 1.3 The report of the Announced Inspection was published on 19 August 2011 and is attached as an Appendix to this report.

2.0 Decision Requested

Members are asked to:

- 2.1 Note the content of this report;
- 2.2 Consider the areas for improvement identified in the report and the actions required to meet the specified timescales;
- 2.3 Consider and agree any further areas for improvement that arise from the report;
- 2.4 Consider further steps to be taken to demonstrate our ambition to become at least good if not outstanding in forthcoming years;
- 2.5 Note the current consultation on the inspection framework currently being undertaken by OFSTED.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To provide an overview of the outcomes of the recent inspection and to consider next steps to drive the continued strengthening of safeguarding arrangements in Cheshire East.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon reduction - Health

- 6.1 Local Authorities are required to provide leadership through the establishment of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and currently, the Children's Trust to improve outcomes for children. These duties arise from the Children Act 2004, and the statutory guidance on safeguarding "Working Together to Safeguard Children".

- 6.2 This area of work is subject to significant regulation by OFSTED.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Currently being reviewed in the context of the Council's Business Planning process.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 None arising from the inspection.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 Safeguarding children and providing high quality support for the children cared for by the Council is a key area of statutory responsibility for the Council. Failings in this area not only present long term consequences for children and young people, but are an area of significant reputational risk for the Council.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services by OFSTED represents a thorough and intense analysis of the effectiveness of local arrangements by the Council and partner agencies to safeguard children and young people and to improve outcomes for those in the care of the Council and those who are care leavers. In conducting the Inspection Inspectors evaluated an extensive range of evidence including:

- Discussions with children and young people receiving services, with carers, front line practitioners and managers, Headteachers, senior officers including the Director of Children’s Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives;
- Reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children’s Plan, performance data, inspection evidence from settings such as schools and day care provision;
- A review of case files;
- The outcomes of recent annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services;
- Outcomes from visits to a range of services; and
- Interviews and focus groups with a range of front line professionals, managers and senior staff from the NHS

The report details the findings of the inspection, and gradings, while also identifying areas for improvement with specified timeframes according to priority and importance. Gradings range from adequate to good across 22 areas of judgements. Critically there were no areas of inadequacy identified.

10.2 Safeguarding Services

With regard to safeguarding services the key findings are that “the overall effectiveness of the Council and its partners is adequate”. Noticeably the report acknowledges the “significant challenges” that had been faced in reorganising safeguarding services since the Council was formed in 2009, and that as a consequence it was too early to see sustained improvements over a period of time (approximately 2 years). The report continues to note:

“the strong leadership and strategic planning”

That “children most at risk of harm are appropriately protected and prioritised”

“partnerships across all agencies are strong and provide a solid foundation for collaboration”

“workforce development across the partnership has been successful in securing and retaining competent, experienced and committed staff at all levels”

“work to improve partner agencies understanding of levels of need has resulted in improvement in the quality of referrals to social care”

10.3 Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement linked to the findings are identified as follows:

Immediately:

- Ensure that the outcomes of referrals to social care are promptly, routinely and consistently notified to referring agencies
- Ensure that visits to children are clearly recorded and state whether the child has been seen and seen alone
- Ensure that assessments and case planning consistently consider and record the views, wishes and feelings of children and their families
- Ensure that assessment reports are routinely shared with families and that they promptly receive copies of their child protection or child in need plan
- Ensure that equality and diversity issues are routinely assessed, recorded and considered in case planning and service delivery, and are routinely considered within supervision and staff development
- Ensure that staff in adult mental health and the Independent Living service are fully equipped and knowledgeable to identify children's safeguarding issues in their day-to-day contact with people who use services and that these issues are routinely addressed in supervision and performance management arrangements

Within three months:

- Ensure that the electronic case system is able to capture chronologies that represent critical events in a child's life and support case planning and decision making
- Ensure that improvements in safeguarding performance are sustained and that there is improvement in those areas which are below national or statistical neighbour levels
- Ensure that transition arrangements for young people moving from CAMHS and children's disability services into adult mental health and the Independent Living service are robust, involve young people and their family carers and are performance managed effectively
- Ensure that service users are actively and consistently engaged and are able to contribute to service development
- The Primary Care Trust and health providers should ensure that all staff receive regular safeguarding supervision and safeguarding discussion forum opportunities across health services and at all levels

Within six months:

- Ensure that there is sufficient management capacity to systematically undertake case audits within individual agencies and across the partnership. Ensure that the outcome of audits is reported to the CESC and that themes identified from these are used to improve practice and service delivery
- Ensure that there are sufficient resources to support children and their families who are involved in domestic abuse or in substance misuse

10.4 Services for Looked After Children

With regard to services for Looked After Children again overall effectiveness was judged to be adequate with the acknowledgement that “the needs of looked after children are appropriately prioritised by the Council and its partners” and that “elected members and staff actively promote and engage in activities to carry out their responsibilities as corporate parents”. Additionally it notes that “the Council and its partners have articulated clear shared objectives based on a firm understanding of need. The lead manager for Cared for Children has led on the development of a clear vision and a coherent set of principles for partners to subscribe to”.

10.5 Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement linked to the findings are identified as follows:

Immediately:

- Ensure that pathways plans are of a good quality and are routinely audited

Within three months:

- Increase awareness of the CiCC amongst cared for children and care leavers
- Increase the awareness of the complaints procedure amongst cared for children, their carers' and service users
- Ensure that cared for children have access to independent visitors where they wish
- Ensure that cared for children are aware of, and able to access, advocacy services
- Ensure that foster carers are able to access support groups and to contribute to the development of cared for children services

- Ensure that case planning for cared for children placed at home with their parents is robust and that those children are appropriately monitored and reviewed

Within six months:

- Ensure that care leavers are provided with appropriate support to meet their health needs
- Ensure that there is minimal need for cared for children to move placements thereby reducing the number of placement moves

10.6 Next Steps

To finalise the attached draft improvement plan (Appendix 2) with the LSCB and Children's Trust. Progress updates will be provided to both Boards and within the Council the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee will have oversight of the composite Action Plan.

Partner agencies are required to confirm their reporting of the outcomes of the inspection to their respective Boards and secure commitment to contribute towards the areas for improvement that have been identified. This requirement was confirmed by the LSCB and its most recent Board meeting held on 9 September 2011.

Additionally attached at Appendix 3 both the LSCB and Children's Trust have been asked to consider further areas for improvement as identified by the Extended Leadership Team of Children and Families Directorate, Cheshire East Council following an internal 'debrief' on the inspection. The Appendix identifies where internally we consider there still to be weaknesses in our activity which OFSTED did not identify as Areas for Improvement, but the Board/Trust may consider it appropriate to include in the Action Plan

Finally, OFSTED is currently consulting upon "Arrangements for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services" (note the title!). The consultation document is attached as Appendix 4. A response to the consultation is currently being drafted to meet the required closing date of 30 September 2011.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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