

BRIEFING REPORT

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 10 May 2018

Report Title: Signs of Safety Briefing and Progress Update

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1. Introduction and Policy Context

1.1. Signs of Safety is widely recognised internationally as the leading approach to child protection casework. Cheshire East is adopting Signs of Safety as our way of working across the partnership within our early help and prevention services and Children's Social Care services so that we can achieve:

- better outcomes for children, young people and families
- child-focused services
- practice that is respectful and inclusive
- empowered professionals

2. Background

2.1. Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a briefing on Signs of Safety and an update on our progress in implementing the model in Cheshire East. This report summarises this information, further detail is included within the reports in the appendix.

3. Briefing Information

3.1. Cheshire East is adopting Signs of Safety as our way of working with families in Children's Social Care and in early help and prevention so that we can achieve better outcomes for children, young people and families. Adopting Signs of Safety is a key part of our improvement plan in achieving effective, high quality services.

3.2. Signs of Safety is widely recognised internationally as the leading approach to child protection casework. It is a tried and tested model that has been shown to be an effective approach in achieving good outcomes for children and young people that can be sustained in the long term.

- 3.3. Signs of Safety is a framework for how to work effectively with families and includes:
- **principles for practice** which underpin the work
 - **ways of working** – what to do, how and when
 - **a range of tools** to support engagement with families, strong assessments and plans, and for capturing the voice of the child or young person
 - **ways to support learning, reflection and development**, such as supervision and audit of practice that is aligned with the approach
- 3.4. Cheshire East developed our [Signs of Safety Strategy](#) in July 2017 which sets out our aims and plan for implementation. This was based on our learning from other Local Authorities who have implemented the model. Our strategy and leadership for the practice from senior leaders is being used by our Signs of Safety Consultants nationally as examples of good practice.
- 3.5. Based on feedback from other local authorities on the support needed to successfully drive and embed Signs of Safety practice, we appointed a Lead Practitioner for Signs of Safety in November 2017 to support teams and partners to embed the approach. We also have Practice Leads (champions for practice) within every team and within our key partner agencies who will receive enhanced training to enable them to effectively support and lead the practice within their service areas.
- 3.6. External training for senior leaders and Practice Leads started in November 2017 and is continuing to be rolled out across teams and the partnership. So far we have trained 285 people which has included key partners and Senior Managers including the Director of Children's Social Care and the Director of Prevention and Support.
- 3.7. Our in house trainers will be trained to deliver Signs of Safety training in May 2018 so that we can sustain and maintain the approach in the long term.
- 3.8. In order to support the approach to embed we are changing our organisation and how we work so that it supports Signs of Safety practice. A large body of work is underway aligning our processes, forms, policies and procedures and practice guidance, and how we measure our performance.
- 3.9. Practitioners are enthusiastic about the adoption of Signs of Safety and are keen to use the approach. Although we are at the beginning of our Signs of Safety journey, practitioners are seeing a positive impact of using the practice for children and young people. Partners have really engaged with

the approach and our partner Practice Leads are fully committed and are leading practice within their agencies. Further detail of impact is set out in the Progress Update at Appendix 2.

3.10. Further detail is included within the reports in the appendix:

- Appendix 1: Signs of Safety One Minute Guide
- Appendix 2: Signs of Safety Progress Update

4. Implications

4.1. Members of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider completing the [Signs of Safety e-learning module](#).

4.2. As a new way of working, adopting Signs of Safety will involve a change in culture and changes to our organisation to reflect and support the practice, which includes changes to our quality assurance, processes, policies and procedures. A governance structure is in place which is delivering and overseeing these changes. More detail on this is given in our [Signs of Safety Strategy](#).

4.3. **Legal Implications**

Members of Legal Services who work closely with Children and Families will receive training in Signs of Safety to support the two services to work together effectively and apply the model.

4.4. **Financial Implications**

Cheshire East Council granted £165k from the Corporate Transition Fund in December 2016 to support this project and enable us to adopt this way of working so that we can achieve better outcomes for children and young people that are sustainable in the long term.

4.5. **Human Resources Implications**

Signs of Safety will result in a better skilled and effective workforce and this will promote staff recruitment and retention which is better for children and young people.

5. Additional Information

5.1. Further detail is included within the reports in the appendix:

- Appendix 1: Signs of Safety One Minute Guide
- Appendix 2: Signs of Safety Progress Update