

REPORT TO: Cheshire East Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting:	11 th March 2014
Report of:	Ian Rush and Kate Rose
Subject/Title:	Local Safeguarding Children Board priorities and role in improvement
Portfolio Holder	Rachel Bailey

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Report sets out the key role that the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has in ensuring that the improvement required in Children's Services in Cheshire East, and how this is reflected across the partnership arrangements for safeguarding Children. The Report also outlines, for the Committee, current development areas.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB's) are local partnerships of Agencies working together to ensure the co-ordination and effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard Children – to keep Children safe from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- 2.2 The statutory guidance covering the work of LSCB's is set out in Government guidance "Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010), and revised from April 2013)". The Cheshire East LSCB meets every two months and has senior level representation from all the statutory Agencies involved in dealing with Child abuse relating to Children and Young People. It has an independent chair, Ian Rush, and a smaller, multi-agency executive group to drive forward the work of the Board. The LSCB are required to publish their Annual Report, and this, together with the board's current business plan, can be reviewed on the Cheshire East LSCB website.
- 2.3 The role of the LSCB, essentially, is to ensure that the Child and Young People's protection system in Cheshire East is working effectively and improving. Members will be aware of the findings of the OFSTED Safeguarding Inspection published in April 2013, where inspectors found that the LSCB needed to improve. Since then, the Board has substantially revised its activities, experienced new leadership, and has set in place a series of internal and external reviews and challenges to improve its effectiveness.

- 2.4 The LSCB works closely with the Cheshire East Improvement Board, which was put in place following the OFSTED inspection, but is separate to it. The LSCB also works in collaboration with the Cheshire East Children Trust, and has established ongoing liaison with the Cheshire Policing and Crime Commissioner. It is vital that the accountability of the LSCB is visible and transparent and one of the ways in which this happens is through periodic reporting for scrutiny to this committee.

3.0 Improving safeguarding performance across the strategic partnership.

- 3.1 Some of the key changes to the way the Board is working in the past six months have included:

- Improving the performance framework which the board uses to scrutinise current performance and activity in and between statutory agencies.
- Putting in place a programme of robust multi-agency audit of cases.
- Reviewing and reissuing the "levels of need" by which all Agencies determine the type of assessment and level of intervention required when cases involving potential risk to Children and Young People are identified.
- Reviewing and changing the membership.
- Clarifying the relationship and mutual accountability is between the LSCB and other key strategic bodies.

4.0 Current priorities for the LSCB

Current safeguarding performance

- 4.1 There are currently 204 Children and Young People who are the subject of Child Protection plans in Cheshire East. This compares with 193 at the same time last year, the Board's focus has been to ensure that Children are placed on Plans appropriately, usually after other forms of intervention have not been sufficiently successful. The majority of Children and Young People who are the subject of Child Protection Plans are removed from a Plan within 15 months, at a point at which professionals are satisfied that a Child or Young Person is being safely cared for.
- 4.2 As this committee will be aware from other reports, and the work of the Improvement Board, there have been a number of improvements made to the way in which these cases are being assessed and progressed through the key stages of the Child Protection system (see later).

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

- 4.3 Following a number of well-publicised significant failings to Children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation across a number of Local Authorities, this issue has

rightly received a high national focus.

- 4.4 In Cheshire East, the LSCB has a multi-agency group that considers how services can work better together to identify, respond and reduce risk to these children, (and children who go missing or are trafficked). There is also an operational group that shares intelligence across Agencies where there are concerns about children, perpetrators or locations so that profiles can be built up and preventive action taken. Where it is assessed that a Child is at risk, a multi-agency meeting is held to place a plan around that Child to reduce the risk, where possible this actively involves the Young Person themselves.
- 4.5 Cheshire East Council commission a service to promote awareness within Agencies involved with Young People and supporting interventions. A report comes to the LSCB on a quarterly basis which sets out the patterns and trends in the profile of CSE in the area. There is also a PAN-Cheshire Strategic Group with the Police to ensure progress against the strategy, consistency of practice, effective cross boundary intervention and sharing of best practice. This Group also considers children who go missing from home or care and children who are trafficked.
- 4.6 In January, Cheshire East LSCB invited a peer challenge from a specialist Police/Local Authority team dealing in CSE from another North West Local Authority. This challenge suggested that current practice was basically sound, but suggested a number of potential improvements.
- 4.7 The numbers of children who are subject of a CSE plan, where this is known to be a risk factor in their lives, has increased over the last year. At present there are ten young people on a Plan, with the oldest being seventeen and the youngest thirteen. They are mostly girls but there are also boys. The Children and Young People receive intensive support and supervision and where necessary, are or will be the subject of legal intervention.
- 4.8 The Operational group is still building a picture of the profile within Cheshire East. However residential Care Homes have been targeted for raising their awareness of CSE and their responsibilities in respect of the Young People for whom they care.

Neglect:

- 4.9 The neglect of Children (and Young People) is a continuing priority for the Cheshire East LSCB. Children experiencing severe neglect constitute by far the biggest percentage (56 %) of those on Child Protection Plans. The short and long-term consequences of neglect are well documented.
- 4.10 The LSCB has recently revised its approach to neglect and has devised a new strategy, the key aims of which are to:
 - improve the early identification of children experiencing neglect, with accompanying action and support through the "early help strategy";

- § ensure more effective inter agency working between Children's and Adult services to address adult behaviour which is compromising their roles as parents e.g. substance misuse, alcohol misuse, mental health problems.

4.11 The recently completed Multi-Agency audit of cases where neglect was a primary feature suggested the following improvements:

- § Greater clarity between Agencies about their specific roles in the plan, particularly where numbers of Agencies may be involved.
- § Clearer identification about their progress in these cases is being measured, specifically through the viewed experience of the Child.
- § So far as is possible, trying to reduce the numbers of occasions where there are changes of Worker in dealing with these cases.

Child Protection and Domestic abuse.

4.12 The data from last year for Cheshire East would show that there were 1065 police incidents of domestic abuse, with 3171 lower risk incidents. There were 343 adults at a high level of risk that required a Multi-Agency Plan of intervention. Those families that were considered at high risk contained 449 Children. Cases tend to be mainly clustered in Crewe, Macclesfield and Congleton Local Area Partnership areas. However it is possible that there is under reporting or hidden abuse in the less populated areas of the Authority.

4.13 It is well researched and understood that domestic abuse has a significant impact on Children who live with violence or the fear of it. In Cheshire East, forty five per cent of Children subject to a Child protection plan had domestic violence as a significant factor in the risk of harm to them.

5.0 Current provision

5.1 Some £1.5m funding is spent on commissioned or charitable sector specialist services including (3% from Police/PCC/Criminal Justice reducing to less than 2% from April 14, 11% Health, 66% Council, 20% charitable). This provides:

- § Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) – high risk domestic abuse professionals.
- § Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) – process for information and action planning.
- § Three Refuge and Outreach Services (two commissioned by Council)
- § Initial Voluntary Perpetrator Programme and parallel partner and children support work.

§ Children and Young People's Change and Therapeutic Programme (co-ordination commissioned by Council)

§ Partnership co-ordination, training, publicity, target hardening.

6.0 Priorities

- 6.1 Re-modelling of services through pooling of budgets by April 2015 to provide a comprehensive service managing all levels of risk through two community bases in Macclesfield and Crewe.
- 6.2 Refuge/dispersed housing for service users who can't be kept safe at home.
- 6.3 Access via a local 24 hour contact point with one database logging all risk/need/interventions and outcomes – easier and earlier access to services for victim, community and professionals.
- 6.4 Whole family approach to ensure that any contact from any family member results in a response to all and that support includes the journey to recovery and independence.

§ In the interim, steps have been taken to impact on reducing the risks to Children, this includes:

§ Placing an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) with Children's services front door.

§ A Christmas campaign in partnership with the Police.

§ Placing an IDVA within A&E.

§ The development of a Young People's violence coordinator to begin to tackle the issue of peer abuse and exploitation.

7.0 Serious Case Reviews (SCR's) and Reflective Reviews

- 7.1 One of the responsibilities for all LSCB's is to consider the circumstances when any Child dies or is seriously injured due to neglect or abuse. There is a national focus on using these as a mechanism for driving learning and improvement in the multi-agency systems for Safeguarding Children.
- 7.2 Many of these cases have also received national attention, for example, the death of Hamzah Khan in Bradford and the seven Young People in Rochdale identified as victims of Child Sexual Exploitation.
- 7.3 Any inspection of Children's services will consider any SCR's carried out by the LSCB and what has changed as a result of the lessons learnt in delivering safer services to Children and Young People. The last serious case review in Cheshire East was published in February 2011, access to the executive summary and recommendations for change can be accessed at [Serious Case](#)

Reviews

- 7.4 All of the recommendations from this review have been implemented.
- 7.5 Cheshire East LSCB have a learning framework that carries out reflective reviews where the criteria for an SCR have not been reached but it is considered that there is learning that would improve Multi-Agency working. In the last year, three reflective reviews have been undertaken. The actions from all these are over-seen by a sub group to the LSCB. Alongside this the LSCB has recently requested that a 'True For Us' exercise is conducted across agencies in respect of the findings from the Hamzah Khan SCR, which will be taken to the Board in March for agreement.
- 8.0 Thematic Review of Young People who took their own life:**
- 8.1 As part of the learning and development function of the Board, any local patterns and trends that may impact on the safeguarding of Children and Young People in Cheshire East should be identified and scrutinised.
- 8.2 In the last year, there have been four Young People living in Cheshire East who took their own life. This number is slightly unusual and there appear to be some similarities in the circumstances and contact with services leading up to the deaths.
- 8.3 As a result the LSCB has commissioned an independent author to review all the deaths and consider if there are improvements we can make in Cheshire East to prevent or minimise the risks of other Young People taking their lives in these circumstances. The parents will be engaged in the process wherever possible. This report is due to be presented to the Board in June.
- 8.4 The findings will be shared with the parents wherever possible and in line with Government expectations, these will also be published. The Board will ensure that individuals are not named and that sensitive family information about the young people is not disclosed.
- 9.0 Levels of Need**
- 9.1 For services to Children and Young People and their families in Cheshire East to be effective from the earliest point that a need is identified it is critical that Agencies understand what their responsibilities to the families are and how this fits with Children's Services provision.
- 9.2 The statutory guidance , 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' was revised in 2013, and required the LSCB to review their current continuum for levels of need and ensure that the guidance was explicit in ensuring a consistent response to families.
- 9.3 The revised documentation was agreed at the Board in January and is attached at Appendix 1 and 2. Multi- Agency audits conducted by the LSCB will test that the understanding and implementation across Agencies is appropriate, and that

the levels of these are being used appropriately by frontline workers across all Agencies.

10.0 Independent Safeguarding Chairs (ISC's).

- 10.1 The Local Authority has a responsibility to provide an independent review service for all Children who are subject of a plan that relates to Child Protection, CSE, Missing from Home or Care, or are Cared for Children. The service has a key role in ensuring plans for children are child-centred, reflect the experience of the child and meet their needs. The service is also critical in acting to ensure that the Plans for children are safe, realistic and achievable.
- 10.2 In December of last year an independent review of the service was carried out and a number of improvements suggested. These are in the process of being actioned and will strengthen the service that the ISC's provide in helping to challenge and improve practice. The key areas for improvement are:
- the need for improved tracking of plans for Children, and ensuring these are improving their experience;
 - better direct engagement with our Children and Young People so their views are known and understood and can influence the plan appropriately;
 - more robust challenge of poor practice.
- 10.3 There are current risks within the service, as with other areas of Children's Services, with vacancies being covered by agency staff. However there is a strong commitment to ensure that the practice in Social Care is driven by improving the experience of our Children and Young People, and ensuring that agencies do not consider a referral to Children's Social Care provides them with an exemption certificate from acting to keep children safe.
- 11.0 An annual report of the service is a statutory requirement and this will reflect the performance over the last year, the changes that have been made and the action to be taken as a priority for 2014/15. Once approved by the Children in Care Council, this will be disseminated across agencies, and published on the Council's website.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

- 11.1 Members will be aware of the recent raising the profile of this issue at a national level, primarily due to campaigning by organisations and individuals about the failure to bring any prosecutions to date on this issue.
- 11.2 There is no evidence that FGM is an issue in Cheshire East, nor have there been any identified cases coming to the attention of agencies. Notwithstanding this however, the LSCB is undertaking a rapid project to assure itself in relation to:

- alertness and awareness in key agencies, notably the NHS;
- clearer guidance for schools in how they might approach this issue in a sensitive and appropriate way;
- engagement with faith and community groups in Cheshire East to continue to raise awareness, making it clear that this is an illegal practice and a form of abuse.

12.0 Conclusions

- 12.1 Any comments, issues and challenges raised by the scrutiny committee in response to this report will be reported back to the LSCB.

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