

	<p align="center"><b>Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b> 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009</p> <p align="center"><b>Report from the Director of Children and Families</b></p>
<p align="right">Wards Affected: ALL</p>	
<p><b>Report Title: Child Protection Arrangements in Brent</b></p>	

Forward Plan Ref: C&F 08/09-017

## 1.0 Summary

1.1 This report informs Scrutiny Members of the operational and strategic child protection arrangements in place in Brent in the light of the death of "Baby P" and the publication of the Ofsted inspection report on safeguarding and child protection in Haringey. It updates Members following the verbal feedback that was provided at the Executive meeting on 15 December 2008.

1.2 It advises members of the outcome of four pieces of work that were undertaken in the light of the events following Baby P's death. These were:

- an updated audit of services in response to Lord Laming's original recommendations,
- an audit of the action plan which arose following Brent's inspection of child protection services in 2003,
- an audit of the position in Brent measured against the findings of the Haringey Joint Area Review (November 08) and finally,
- an audit of all child protection cases and related plans (undertaken in December 2008).

The Executive, at its meeting on 16 February 2009, recommended an increase in resources for children's social care to be considered by Council on 2 March 2009.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- Note the findings of these audits, which were undertaken in November and December 08 to be reported to the Executive.
- Note the proposals contained within the report for the strengthening of both the operational and strategic oversight of child protection arrangements in Brent (paragraphs 3.14 to 3.19).
- Agree to receive a future report on the implementation and impact of the growth in children's social care post of £1.07m as set out in Paragraph 3.9.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **Operational Management of Child Protection**

- 3.1 Child Protection work in Brent has until recently been carried out by separate Referral and Assessment and Children in Need teams. The Referral and Assessment teams carried out all initial assessments and short term pieces of work including conducting child protection investigations and arranging initial case conferences for children considered to be at risk of significant harm. The Children in Need teams worked with children in the longer term when they remained with their families and if they were removed into care.
- 3.2 The service restructured in January 2009 into 5 Locality teams working with children in need and child protection cases where the children remained at home or in the community. These teams combine both a short and longer term function. A separate service, comprising 4 teams, works with children who are looked after away from home (those in foster and residential care) and those who were looked after (care leavers).
- 3.3 This new structure was adopted to reduce the changes families experienced when cases moved from short to long term teams, to increase continuity and therefore understanding of families circumstances, to improve the links between locally based services (eg. schools) and social care teams and to increase focus on the needs of children who are looked after.
- 3.4 The referral pressure on services in Brent is high with the department receiving approximately 3000 referrals in 2007/8. These ranged from children in need of preventative support to those in need of immediate protection. It is the work with those in need of immediate protection and where there are child protection allegations that are the most complicated and time consuming. There has been a sustained increase in the number of these child protection investigations carried out over the last three years, rising from 516 cases in 2006/7, through 720 in 2007/8 and a likely year end figure in 2008/9 of approximately 860. Currently between 20 and 25 child protection referrals are being received each week.
- 3.5 There are currently 172 children who are subject to child protection plans – this has risen from 124 in 2006. The numbers are continuing to rise. The reasons for the increase include:
- A requirement that incidents of serious domestic violence be investigated as potentially abusive to children and an increasing tendency to refer cases when domestic violence is identified

- The training of a wide range of professionals in the Common Assessment Framework means that there is better awareness of the signs of child abuse and therefore more referrals.
- Heightened awareness and concern following the Haringey investigations and surrounding media coverage.

- 3.6 This suggests that the increase is likely to be sustained into the future.
- 3.7 The structure prior to January 2009 had been in place since March 2007 and the steady increase in child protection work had led to an independent review in 2008. This had recommended that an additional four social worker posts were added to the establishment of Referral and Assessment service to manage the increased workload.
- 3.8 A further review of all child protection arrangements was conducted in November and December 2008 to ensure that the department was compliant with the messages arising from the inspection of Haringey, the learning that had been identified and the greater clarity about appropriate caseload figures for children's social workers.
- 3.9 A number of additional posts were deemed necessary following this review to ensure that Brent had sufficient resource to manage child protection safely, that social work caseloads were manageable and that there was sufficient oversight and scrutiny of those most serious of cases. They comprised the Head of Service Child Protection, 6 additional social workers, an additional case conference chair, a new post of Principal Officer Children in Need and three independent reviewing officers for children in need, a Child Protection Quality Assurance post in the Locality Service and re-grading of five posts at Principal Social Worker level to improve recruitment and retention. The £1.07million proposal (which included a small allocation to services to children with disabilities) was approved at the Executive on 16 February and will be considered by Council on 2 March 2009.

### **Strategic oversight of Child Protection**

- 3.10 Brent established a children and young people's trust arrangement, now known as Brent Children's Partnership, in the light of Lord Laming's 2003 report into the death of Victoria Climbié. The Partnership is chaired by the Director of Children and Families and the key agencies dealing with children are members of this partnership. The Borough Police Commander, the Brent NHS Chief Executive and senior NHS managers, headteacher representatives, the Executive Members for children and families and Crime Prevention and Public Safety, voluntary sector representatives, senior officers from Council Departments and the independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) regularly attend meetings of the Partnership Board.
- 3.11 There is an effective LSCB with an independent chair (unlike Haringey where the Director of Children's Services chaired the safeguarding board) which is responsible for promoting safeguarding and monitoring performance across all agencies in Brent. It also has responsibility for ensuring that Serious Case Reviews are carried out in the event of the death of a child subject to a child protection plan. The LSCB may also decide to carry out a Serious Case Review when there have been concerns that children known to the agencies may have suffered significant harm that could have been prevented or reduced. The primary focus of such a review is on the effectiveness of interagency working and the lessons that can be learned from failures in this respect.

- 3.12 The LSCB is also responsible (since April 2008) for ensuring that all child deaths, including those where there have been no suspicious circumstances, are reviewed by a Child Death Review Panel and for ensuring there is a rapid response protocol in place for all unexpected child deaths, including those where there are no suspicious circumstances.
- 3.13 The current oversight arrangements comprise the following: monitoring updates at meetings between the Director of Children and Families and the Assistant Director Social Care/Vice Chair of the LSCB and independent Chair of the LSCB who all are members of the Children's Partnership Board; monitoring updates at weekly meetings between the Director and Executive Member who is also a member of the Children's Partnership Board; monthly update meetings between the Director and Chief Executive; monthly meetings of the Corporate Social Care Transformation Board; bi-monthly high level review meetings of Social Care Transformation chaired by the Chief Executive; annual report by the independent chair of the LSCB to the Corporate Management Team; reports to the Executive Member/Chief Officer Programme Co-ordinating Board as part of the annual Service and Budget review process; Annual Performance Assessment report to the Executive and Children and Families Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.14 The Chief Executive has implemented a quarterly high level meeting attended by senior representatives of all departments and agencies with responsibility for children and families across the Borough. This provides senior officers with an opportunity to review current child protection practice and any issues or concerns in their broadest sense. The outcome of the meeting will be available to the three Party Leaders and Children and Families Spokespersons.
- 3.15 The "In Brent" service review of child protection services which was planned for 2009/10 has been brought forward to start in March 2009.
- 3.16 There will be more regular reporting of child protection matters to the Corporate Management Team, the Executive and the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.17 The Director of Children's Services wrote to school governors in January and reminded them of their safeguarding responsibilities and asked them to ensure that their in-school systems met requirements.
- 3.18 The Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, met with the Director of Public Health and the Chair (non- exec.) of the PCT in January 2009 to discuss safeguarding arrangements and to ensure that they were robust and that communication at a senior level was in place and effective.
- 3.19 The Chief Executive is to establish a regular cross party meeting of political group leaders and children's portfolio holders to review child protection arrangements.

#### **Review of child protection arrangements in Brent.**

- 3.20 As outlined in the introduction, four pieces of work have taken place over the last three months to examine the state of child protection services in Brent and to advise on the extent to which these services are sufficiently robust, that children are being kept safe and that agencies are compliant with previous inspection and inquiry recommendations as well as more recent messages emanating from Haringey and Ofsted. These were:

1. An updated report on the current position in Brent children's social care services, on the 'Audit of Services to Children in Need in Brent, in response to the practical recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry' completed by all local authorities in 2003, and submitted to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
2. A report on the current position in relation to the Action Plan following the Inter-Agency Inspection of Brent Child Protection Services in 2003.
3. A report comparing the key findings of the Haringey Safeguarding Joint Area Review, with the current position in Brent.
4. An audit of the cases of all 190 Brent children with child protection plans was undertaken in November/December 2008.

3.21 These reviews were all carried out by (or with the oversight of) an independent ex-inspector to ensure that they were sufficiently robust and that there was independent challenge to the service

#### **1.1 Updated Audit of Services to Children in Need in response to the Recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry**

- The report evidenced a steady overall improvement in all aspects of the work since 2003. Using the same grading scores as the 2003 audit, all areas in this update are at least adequate, with some very good features. Brent is compliant with the recommendations of the Laming Inquiry as set out in this audit.
- The report concluded that there were good referral and initial response systems with prompt decision making and actions to ensure that children were safe, that there were good learning and development opportunities for staff, including Brent's involvement in the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) pilot providing intensive support to newly qualified social workers and that scrutiny arrangements in relation to individual cases were good with plans in place to make them even better.
- It recognised that there was an ongoing issue with the recruitment and retention of high calibre and sufficiently experienced staff, although noted that an extensive recruitment campaign was about to be launched. This is reflective of a wider national and London wide concern about social work recruitment. It also noted the need for the proposed new posts which would provide additional quality assurance capacity.

#### **1.2 Updated position in relation to the Action Plan following the Inter-Agency Inspection of Brent Child Protection Services in 2003**

All appropriate actions arising from the 2003 inspection were followed through although some by their very nature require ongoing monitoring. Examples of these include monitoring complaints and providing information to families.

There have been considerable changes to structures and requirements since 2003. In particular, Local Safeguarding Children Boards have replaced Area Child Protection Committees, with a much wider remit and responsibilities for safeguarding children. Specific strengths were noted, including: the LSCB is fulfilling all statutory requirements, with appropriate sub-groups and membership, there is a good multi-agency training programme on child protection and other safeguarding issues, forums are in place to ensure clear communication and resolution of issues of

practice between LSCB partner agencies and serious case reviews have been undertaken with due rigour.

In the light of more recent changes, improvements are planned to the functioning of core groups, the way in which differing views between the police and social care are managed should be reviewed and the LSCB will review its resourcing and its role in evaluating multi-agency child protection practice.

### **1.3 Main findings of the Haringey Safeguarding Joint Area Review, and comparison with current position in Brent Children and Families social care services**

Some of the findings in the Haringey report relate to the degree of effectiveness of, for example, multi-agency working practice or the level of challenge from the LSCB, and an assessment has been made of where Brent may be in relation to the degree of effectiveness. Overall, Brent is judged to be delivering a higher quality safeguarding service to children than Haringey and as identified in other sections of this report, children are judged to be safe.

Many of the findings of this piece of work are reflected above, however the independent chairing of the LSCB was noted as a strength as was the outcome of the audit of Brent's child protection cases. There was not an over-reliance on quantitative data and the ability to provide more qualitative assurance will be enhanced within the new structure. Whilst child protection plans were able to identify risk and ensure that children were safe, work could be effectively undertaken to ensure that they had sufficient focus and clarity.

### **1.4 Audit of all children subject to a child protection plan, December 2008**

Senior managers in Brent Children and Families social care service undertook an audit of practice in relation to each of the 190 children subject to a child protection plan at end November 2008 (previously referred to as 'children on the child protection register'). Any of the cases which gave rise to concerns about practice were acted on immediately to ensure improvements were made. Senior managers undertaking the audits also made directions on cases where the work was adequate, to ensure the work was as effective and robust as possible. This audit gave a good overall picture of child protection practice and enabled some key themes to be identified and an action plan devised.

## **Summary of current position and proposals for improvement**

- 3.22 The conclusions of the four pieces of work identified above have been positive, identifying good strategic oversight of child protection services alongside robust operational safeguarding arrangements. Lessons have been learnt from these audits which have been combined with the post-Haringey learning and are being developed into an action plan which will be implemented over the coming months. Priorities have been identified in the light of Government's announcement of a new "no notice" inspection regime and these will be implemented immediately.

The Brent Safeguarding Children Board will be reviewing the audits undertaken by the individual agencies of the Board to consider the collective response to agencies within Brent to meet the safeguarding needs of children. In addition, the Board is reviewing how agencies work together in child protection conferences and in core

groups to provide effective multi-agency support to vulnerable children and their families.

- 3.23 The Council has, in response to the above, arranged for an injection of £1.07m to provide necessary further capacity within children's social care. This will allow the department to ensure that it has sufficient front-line social workers with manageable caseloads, that it has sufficient strategic oversight of both its own work and that of its partner agencies and that it has robust and sustainable quality assurance systems in place to monitor the work.
- 3.24 The specifics of the additional posts which have been agreed are included in section 6. Key amongst them is the Head of Safeguarding who will report directly to the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and the Principal Officers who will support the Heads of Service in managing the locality and care planning social work teams.
- 3.25 Brent's longer term strategy for quality improvement with families where there are children at risk of harm or in need is in the creation of the Locality Service as outlined earlier in this paper. The proposal being that these teams will work with identified families from initial referral through to closure, only transferring the case if the child requires long term accommodation away from home. The benefits of this model being greater continuity for families who do not have to change social worker so frequently and the opportunity for the locality teams to develop closer working relations with local providers of services such as schools. This opportunity to develop closer working relations between social care teams and providers of universal locally based services is seen as key.
- 3.26 The intention is that these teams will eventually be co-located with the multi-disciplinary Integrated Services teams. The Integrated Services teams will implement the Common Assessment Framework assessments aimed at supporting children whose needs are below the Child in Need threshold – essentially preventative work. The Integrated Services teams target vulnerable children and families where there are lower levels of need while the social work teams will focus more specifically on higher level child protection work. Locating these teams together will be essential in ensuring good communication and working relations between the respective teams.
- 3.27 Ensuring that there are adequate numbers of suitably trained, experienced and competent staff in the social work teams is an ongoing challenge both in Brent and across London. It is a concern that has been recognised at a national level and recent comments from Ed Balls, Secretary of State, suggests that there may be renewed initiatives from Government in this area. The Children's Workforce Development Centre has invested significant resource in this area, especially in supporting newly qualified social workers and we are involved through the West London Alliance in some potentially exciting cross Borough initiatives.
- 3.28 The LSCB is similarly aware that recruitment and retention of professional staff across the workforce in Brent agencies is a key factor in creating and maintaining the capacity to meet the level of need within the children's population in Brent. The Board will be asking agencies to report on the capacity within their own agency to meet the expressed level of need to establish the overall capacity within Brent to identify, assess, and provide for the needs of vulnerable children in the Borough. The Board will be developing a system for this information to be kept under review. In Children's Social Care there are currently 120 social work posts of which 65% are filled by permanent staff.

- 3.29 The department has a range of strategies to address the current staffing situation including a work based route to assist suitable unqualified staff to gain a social work qualification, a bursary scheme with local universities, a high profile national recruitment campaign and some current exploration around overseas recruitment.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The growth agreed as part of the 2009/10 budget is sufficient to fund the increased posts as identified in this report.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

The Local Authority has a number of duties in relation to child protection and to children in need under the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. Section 47 and Section 17 Children Act 1989 set out the responsibilities in relation to child protection and children in need respectively. Section 10 Children Act 2004 requires each Local Authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the authority, each of the authority's relevant partners and such other persons or bodies working with children in the local authority's area, as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the well-being of children in the area. Brent established what is now known as the Brent Children's Partnership in pursuance of this duty. Section 11 Children Act 2004 requires a range of statutory bodies including the Local Authority, Health and Police to make arrangements for ensuring that their functions, and services provided on their behalf are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

#### **6.0 Staffing Implications**

- 6.1 As set out in Paragraph 3.9 growth has been agreed to fund the Head of Safeguarding post, 10 additional social workers (4 of whom had already been agreed in mid 2008), an additional case conference chair, a new post of Principal Officer Children in Need, a Child Protection Quality Assurance post in the Locality Service, three independent reviewing officers for children in need and re-grading of five posts at Principal Social Worker level to improve recruitment and retention. There is also some limited additional resource in services to children with disabilities.

- 6.2 The Haringey review report makes it clear what the standards for a safe service will be for future inspections and these appear to be higher than they have been in the past. In addition, standards will be monitored by a new regime of unannounced inspections of social care by Ofsted, commencing in 2009.

#### **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The profile of child protection arrangements in Brent is that of a hard pressed service working hard to meet the challenges of increased demand in a deprived and highly diverse community. Brent is a relatively deprived London borough with a highly diverse, mobile population many of whom have been born outside of the UK. This demographic profile creates high levels of demand for work to support families and to protect their children. This challenge is made considerably harder by difficulties in attracting and retaining a stable and experienced workforce. There has been strong corporate support, at both management and political levels, and a considerable



financial investment in the service and this has resulted in year on year improvements in performance. Despite this and the best endeavours of a highly committed workforce there are still some areas for development needed in practice and management oversight that will be addressed by the improvement measures proposed in this report.

- 7.2 The current audit has given confidence that no child is at immediate risk in Brent but this is a snap shot and there can never be guarantees that a tragedy will not happen in the future. However, there are considerable strengths to build on in Brent's child protection arrangements and with support the service will be able to learn from the lessons of the tragedy of "Baby P" and strengthen its ability not only to protect Brent's most vulnerable children but to bring about lasting improvement in their lives.

Background Papers (essential)

- (i) Haringey Joint Area Review November 2008
- (ii) Executive summary of the Serious Case Review into the death of Baby P.

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