



**Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny
Committee**
28 March 2018

**Report from the Strategic Director
of Children and Young People**

Update on Implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent 2018

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Email: sonya.kalyniak@brent.gov.uk Tel: 020 8937 4526</p> <p>Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy Email: brian.grady@brent.gov.uk Tel: 020 8937 4173</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in February 2017, a members' task group report on Signs of Safety was received. The task group report had four recommendations, including that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People updates scrutiny annually about progress with Signs of Safety.
- 1.2 This report provides Scrutiny with the first annual update on the implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent, including progress on Scrutiny recommendations.

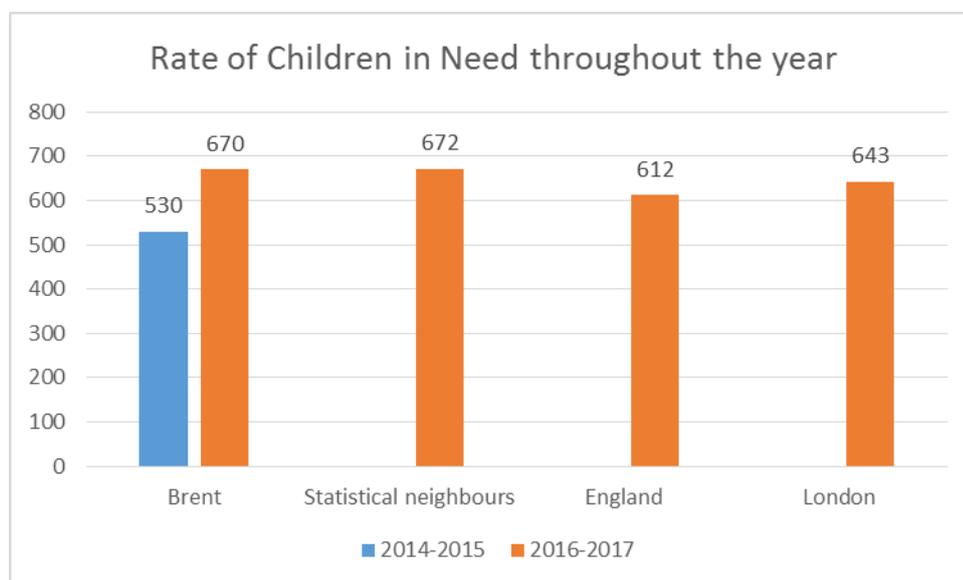
2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee considers the progress of implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent and the impact of implementation.
- 2.2 That the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee endorses the proposed key objectives for 2018/19.

3.0 Detail

Background

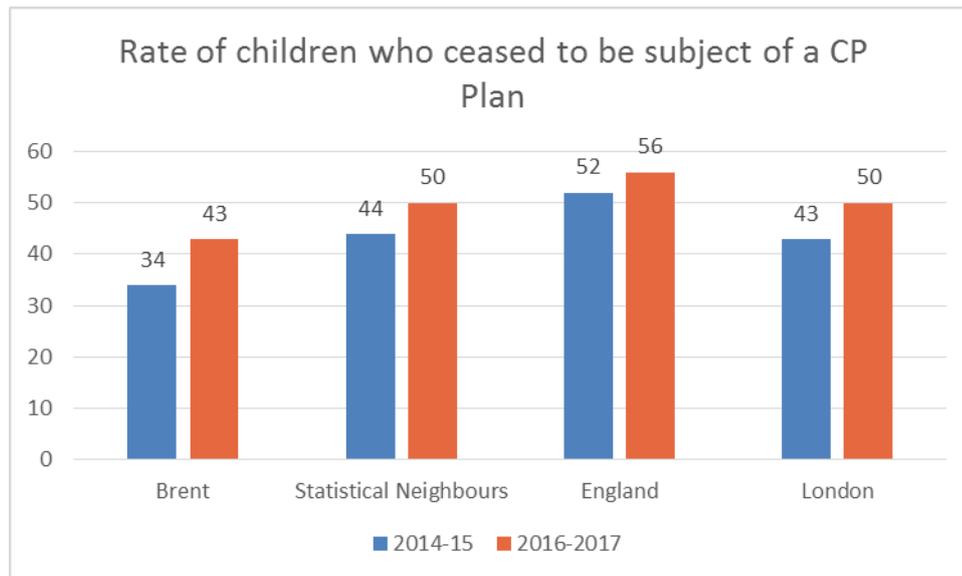
- 3.1 Scrutiny committee requested demographic information for this report. Children and young people continue to be a growing proportion of the community with an estimated 78,000 under 18s growing up in Brent. Brent's children and young people are considerably more diverse than the population of England. Primary and secondary schools report that 92% of pupils come from non-white British backgrounds. Over 145 languages are reported to be spoken within Brent families with 68% of primary and 55% of secondary pupils speaking a language other than English in their home. Many Brent children are continuing to grow up in poverty with almost one third of children in school receiving the pupil premium.
- 3.2 The total number of Early Help Assessments completed during 2016-17 was 476 and 639 have been completed between April and December 2017.
- 3.3 The rate of Children in Need has increased from 530 in 2014-15 (the first year of the Signs of Safety implementation in Brent) to 670 in 2016-17 (rate of children with an episode of need at any point during the year per 10,000 children). This is now in line with statistical neighbours¹ (672) and above England (612) and London (643).



- 3.4 Current numbers of children subject of a Child Protection (CP) plan (306) are above those for statistical neighbours (277). The rate of children who ceased to

¹ Brent's statistical neighbours are Ealing, Waltham Forest, Croydon, Haringey, Enfield, Newham, Hounslow, Lewisham, Greenwich, and Hackney

be subject of a Child Protection Plan increased from 34 per 10,000 in 2014-15 to 43 in 2016-17, bringing Brent more in line with statistical neighbours (50), England (56) and London (50).



- 3.5 The introduction of Signs of Safety is a corporate priority for the council. It supports delivery of the objective in the Borough Plan 2015/2019 to improve outcomes for children and families in the borough. One of the stated aims of the plan is to 'provide high-quality safeguarding to keep children and young people safe'.
- 3.6 Between October 2014 and March 2016, Brent participated in the Department for Education sponsored England Innovations Project to implement Signs of Safety (EIP1), with nine other local authorities. This project was supported by the Department for Education and led by Professor Eileen Munro, Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy of MTM Consultancy.
- 3.7 Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee undertook a review of the implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent and a Scrutiny task group report setting out its findings was published in January 2017. This report highlighted that social workers have been receptive to the practice model and were positive about Signs of Safety (SoS). The Scrutiny task group found that as a way of working with children and families, it was a good model due to being strengths-based and seeking partnership in working with families. Signs of Safety was also seen as well suited to Brent and the borough's demographic profile. The Scrutiny task group found that while the department had made considerable strides in implementation, there was not yet consistently good practice across all teams. The task group made four recommendations, and updates are provided within this report:
1. An engagement programme with partners such as schools, GPs and other health professionals is developed to help further raise awareness of Signs of Safety;
 2. The effectiveness of training in Signs of Safety is monitored by using existing workplace surveys to benchmark effectiveness and highlight any issues which may prevent the proper development of training;

3. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People updates scrutiny annually about progress in implementing Signs of Safety, including social worker retention and other factors which may affect development of the practice;
4. a) Measurements are developed for assessing how effective Signs of Safety has been in the long-term in improving outcomes for children and young people.

b) Brent works with other local authorities who use Signs of Safety to share information about developing measurements for assessing the effectiveness of the model.

Progress implementing Signs of Safety in 2017/18

- 3.8 The Children and Young People (CYP) Department Plan for 2017/18 identified the implementation of Signs of Safety as a key priority to help improve the quality of social work practice.
- 3.9 Signs of Safety practice implementation is overseen by the Signs of Safety Executive Group. This group is chaired by the Strategic Director, Children and Young People. Membership includes both Children and Young People (CYP) Operational Directors, Heads of Service and representatives from the Practice Leaders' group to ensure implementation is informed directly from practitioner perspectives.
- 3.10 Leadership of practice change is important for Signs of Safety to be sustained and embedded in practice. All senior leaders are modelling Signs of Safety practice with practitioners. Examples include:
 - The Strategic Director participating in appreciative inquiry, attended by the Children's Services Leadership Team, followed by reflection from the team on the usefulness of this approach.
 - Monthly case studies at the Children's Services Leadership Team modelling reflective practice and case learning using a Signs of Safety approach, informing both practice development and service design and improvement.
 - The Strategic Director has led this reflective practice across the partnership as the chair of the Brent partnership Children's Trust, with case studies using a Signs of Safety approach at each quarterly Children's Trust.
- 3.11 Case audit has been used to evidence that Signs of Safety continues to be used in teams which were part of the original implementation project, with a focus on the Early Help service, the Brent Family Front Door, Child Protection Services, Inclusion Services and some areas of Looked-After Children (LAC) and Permanency. Over the last year, case audit has evidenced progress in the use of Signs of Safety more consistently in the LAC and Permanency Service, including the Fostering and Adoption Services.
- 3.12 Phase 2 of the England Innovations Project for Signs of Safety (EIP2) was announced in September 2017. Brent was again successful in being chosen to participate in EIP2, with nine other local authorities. EIP2 provides two years of resource to further embed Signs of Safety in Brent. As part of EIP2, Brent Council is continuing to work with the child protection consultants Professor Eileen Munro, Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (MTM consultancy).

3.13 EIP2 funding provides the following additional capacity:

- A project manager to monitor learning and development activities, coordinate and drive the implementation plan.
- Practice leader development sessions (quarterly for 40 practice leaders).
- Specialist training on 'building family networks' and 'safety planning and networks' training.
- Coaching and Quality Assurance for the in-house Signs of Safety training offer.
- Quarterly leaders' workshops and organisational consultancy for senior leaders.
- Organisational consultancy from MTM.

3.14 EIP2 has the following deliverables:

- Working with family and social networks in safety planning, building safety networks drawing on extended family and social supports and the network owning and implementing the safety plan.
- Aligning case management processes, forms and guidance with the continuity of Signs of Safety practice (from first referral through intake and all work with the case to closure).
- Developing quality assurance systems with Signs of Safety practice and establishing effective learning cycles that improve practice and its organisational impact.

3.15 Brent has a Signs of Safety implementation plan, overseen by the Signs of Safety Executive Group, setting out how these deliverables will be achieved over the next two years. Brent is making good progress on these deliverables as follows:

- The Entry to Care Panel has been remodelled to ensure that the panel routinely considers social networks and safety planning in decision making.
- Case management processes and procedures including Child and Family Assessment procedures have been revised to include Signs of Safety and a focus on using 'Three Columns'.
- Collaborative case audits were trialled through February 2018.
- A revised supervision policy, including SoS group supervision, focusing on learning is being launched in April 2018.
- A revised Pathway Plan, including an app designed by young people, aligned with Signs of Safety has been developed and is being prototyped in April 2018.

3.16 The Scrutiny task group recommended the development of an engagement programme with partners, including GPs (Recommendation 1). Brent partners have been engaged in the England Innovation Project since phase 1 launched in 2014 and partnership action has contributed to the development of Signs of Safety in Brent in a number of ways. Examples include:

- LSCB including Signs of Safety in the Level 1 LSCB Safeguarding training.
- The partnership-endorsed Early Help Assessment is based on a Signs of Safety approach to support families to get the right help at the right time.
- Schools working with Brent Education Welfare Service use Signs of Safety tools and principles, and have developed their own bespoke approach

entitled 'Signs of Good Learning', acknowledging the multitude of factors influencing school attendance problems. This approach has shown positive results, helping professional networks understand the child's point of view and to agree with the child and family more effective support as well as improved strategies for families themselves.

- 3.17 The Brent Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) supports Signs of Safety and its use in multi-agency child protection case conferences. There are nearly 1,000 child protection conferences per year in Brent that have representation from schools, police, health partners and other identified professionals, which engages key professionals working with Brent's most vulnerable children in Signs of Safety. Feedback from Child Protection Conferences between April and December 2017 demonstrate that professionals find Child Protection Conferences are good and Danger Statements and safety plans are clearly outlined (216 professionals, average score of 8.8/10).
- 3.18 The engagement of partners is being further developed in 2018. Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has included Signs of Safety awareness into the children and young people focused briefing sessions programme with GPs. A quarterly half-day 'Introduction to SoS' session will be re-launched by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board in 2018/19.
- 3.19 Brent Council has developed its commitment to continue embedding Signs of Safety through the newly developed Brent Practice Framework, launched in March 2018. The Brent Practice Framework builds upon Signs of Safety and supporting approaches such as social pedagogy. The Brent Practice Framework was developed through a review of the evidence of what works and consultation with children, young people and social workers, significantly at a CYP staff conference in November 2017.
- 3.20 To support the implementation of good quality social work practice, including more consistent use of Signs of Safety, a realignment of social work services was completed in January 2018. This was informed by social worker feedback and what children and young people told us about our services. It drew from the research evidence reported by the Department for Education and the University of Oxford regarding the first wave of the England Innovations Programme, which considered what good social work systems were made up of and what best practice looked like.²
- 3.21 The realignment of services led to the creation of smaller teams and team managers closer to practice. These teams are supported by social work practice consultants and a higher level of administration support for social workers. There is also additional capacity in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service to understand, challenge and support good quality practice and drive the implementation of Signs of Safety.

Effects of implementation to date

- 3.22 Scrutiny task group recommended the development of measures for assessing the effectiveness of Signs of Safety implementation (Recommendation 4a and

² <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Thematic-Report-2017-Social-Work.pdf>

4b). The impact of Signs of Safety on social work practice and outcomes for children in Brent is monitored by the Signs of Safety Executive group through a mix of measures and methodologies, including participation in England Innovations Programme research and evaluation, workforce surveys and the monitoring of key performance indicators.

3.23 In July 2017 the Department for Education published an evaluation report of EIP related implementation of Signs of Safety. This report outlined evidence of some positive outcomes for children and their families as well as for professional staff. The greatest progress was reported in relation to:

- Embedding an organisational commitment to SoS.
- Using plain language that could be readily understood by families.
- Using tools to engage children and young people, for example, Three Houses; Fairy/Wizard tool.
- Mapping cases, both by individual social workers and in teams.
- Using safety plans across initial and review child protection conferences, and in all related groups.
- Providing advanced 5-day training for all managers.
- Embedding SoS approaches and principles across all training for those working in children's social care.
- Aligning initial child protection conferences with SoS.
- Establishing practice leadership and supervision processes to support SoS.

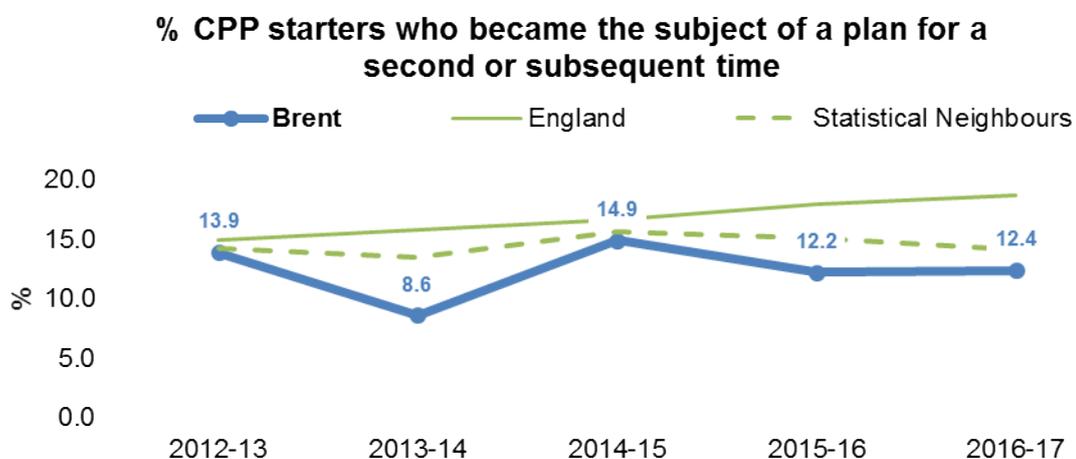
3.24 The weakest areas of reported change were in relation to:

- Progress towards building constructive working relationships between professionals and family members.
- Spending the necessary direct contact time with adults in families.
- Confidence that the service was intervening at the right time.
- Creating a culture where it is permissible to admit mistakes.
- Supporting social workers with administrative tasks.
- Recruiting high-quality staff.

3.25 There are key performance indicators that evidence that families are receiving the right interventions and that these are having an impact. Child Protection Conferences are a key driver for the use of Signs of Safety with some of our most vulnerable children. The rate of children subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time was 12% in 2016/17, lower than statutory neighbours (14%) and England (19%). It is predicted that this number will be even lower in 2017/18. This indicates that the multi-agency safety plans put in place have a lasting impact on children and families.

3.26 Child Protection Conferences are a key forum for using Signs of Safety with parents and carers. Following each conference, parents and carers are asked for feedback using the scaling question: 'If 10 describes a good meeting where you fully know what the concerns are and what needs to happen to make you, and your family, safe and '0' describes a meeting where you do not know why you are there, or what needs to happen to make you and your family safe – what score would you make?' Between April 2017 and December 2017, 163 feedback forms were completed with an average score of 8.4, indicating that families are highly satisfied with this method to develop multi-agency plans to keep their children safe.

- 3.27 The number of Early Help cases closed and where families have achieved outcomes/ goals from their family action plans in 2016-17 was 581 and in 2017-18 is 631 up to Q3, evidencing both increased identification and appropriate/ timely support leading to good outcomes and closure. The re-referral rate into the Early Help and Localities services was 12% in 2016-17 and is currently 6% for Q1&2 2017-18, demonstrating increased resilience following interventions.
- 3.28 An increase in the number of Children in Need evidences that practice has become more effective at identifying children in need of help. This has been achieved through further embedding the Signs of Safety approach in both Early Help Assessments and Child and Family Assessments, supporting practitioners to clearly define what needs to change, and action to ensure Signs of Safety tools are used to improve the measuring of change and re-evaluation of emerging issues to mitigate risks. A focus on measuring the outcomes of interventions is evident in the majority of cases. Examples of good comprehensive and child focused assessments are part of a developing understanding of how to systematically improve the quality of assessments. Following feedback from families, Brent has taken steps to increase the number of parents who receive a copy of their assessment.
- 3.29 The timeliness of Review Child Protection Conferences has improved and there have been consistently low numbers of children subject of a Child Protection Plan for over 2 years (currently 0 children) and a reduction in the number of children subject of a Child Protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Low numbers of Children subject of Child Protection plans for more than 1 year indicate dynamic assessment and effective step up/step down processes. The % of children subject of a second or subsequent CP plan at 12% is lower than SN (14%), England (19%) and London (15%).



Effects of implementation: feedback from children and young people

- 3.30 Children and young people have told us what good Signs of Safety informed social work practice means to them and this is integrated into the Brent Practice Framework. They see good outcomes as things like 'being happy', 'getting a good job' and 'being able to retain my flat'. They say that social workers who support them well demonstrate characteristics such as respect, care, dedication and problem-solving skills alongside being hopeful and optimistic. These

characteristics are in line with the strength-based Signs of Safety model. Children and young people have also said that social workers who invest time in them, show small acts of kindness and are creative and proactive are able to help them to reach their goals.

Effects of implementation: findings from case audits

- 3.31 Embedding the Signs of Safety approach helps social workers build good relationships with children. Case audit evidences that children are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers and this engagement is reflected in good practice examples where an understanding of the child's world is integrated into assessments.
- 3.32 Case audit has evidenced that direct work regularly takes place with children and their families and their wishes and feelings are taken into consideration in plans made to help and support them. Audits have demonstrated good examples of children, young people and families who have benefited from relationships with their social workers to improve safety.
- 3.33 Our audit activity identifies that when Signs of Safety is used well, practice is child centred and this is evidenced on the case file. There is some exemplary practice in Brent, where insight into the child's world and experience informs assessment, planning and reviewed in an evidenced way. There are also examples where full use of Signs of Safety has supported the reunification of children back with their birth family in a safe and planned way.
- 3.34 Practitioners fully engaged with Signs of Safety have child focused practice and demonstrate planned and focused work with children in visits and know them well to develop trusting relationships. Although this is not yet 100% consistent across CYP, practice is strengthening through the support through EIP2, and other initiatives to improve practice including the realignment of social work services, embedding of the Brent Practice Framework and redeveloping quality assurance systems to drive consistently good practice.

Case Study: good practice identified in audit activity

A case file audit was conducted on a family open to Family Solutions with a complex mix of parental mental health issues, domestic abuse and concerns about potential physical abused towards to the two children. The audit identified that Signs of Safety was used to identify risks, strengths, needs and protective factors through case mapping and supervision leading to a robust and family focused plan. Direct work was consistently used and the auditor found that the voices of the children were heard throughout involvement. There was evidence that this work helped to understand the individual needs of each child and ensure these needs were met.

Effects of implementation: staff and confidence in practice

3.35 The Scrutiny task group recommended the monitoring of effectiveness of Signs of Safety training (Recommendation 2). In autumn 2017, staff across CYP were asked about their level of understanding and confidence using Signs of Safety and other approaches as part of developing a training offer in line with the Brent Practice Framework. The results in relation to Signs of Safety are outlined below.

	Between 1 and 3	Between 4 and 6	Between 7 and 10
I have a good understanding of the theoretical principles behind the Signs of Safety approach	6.2%	21.5%	72.3%
The Signs of Safety model is integrated into the way I work	12.3%	26.2%	61.5%
I would be able to provide advice and support to individual colleagues on using Signs of Safety in practice	12.7%	31.7%	55.6%
I would be able to offer training on Signs of Safety to colleagues	29.2%	40%	30.8%

3.36 This survey evidences that a broad base of the CYP workforce continues to have a good understanding and confidence in use of Signs of Safety. Nearly three-quarters of staff rating their knowledge of Signs of Safety between 7 and 10. Nearly two-thirds of staff feel that Signs of Safety is strongly integrated into the way they work and an addition quarter state that Signs of Safety is moderately integrated into the way they work. A large proportion of respondents feel confident providing advice and support to colleagues on how to use Signs of Safety in their practice. There are also a group of very confident staff (30.8%) who feel able to offer training to colleagues. The results of this survey is being used to target people who need further support and guidance, alongside those who are confident in their skills and would like to become in-house trainers.

3.37 A case study example of confident practice in developing danger statements identified from case audit activity is included below.

Danger Statement

Mum, social worker and Brent CYP are worried about the relationship that Mum, Y has with her son, D. This is because D doesn't listen to her and is always on social media. Mum is struggling to keep D safe and is worried about how to be a good parent to her children because of her own childhood experiences. If things don't change, and D continues with his excessive use of social media, D could find himself in situations that he has little control over and he could end up in a situation where he in danger of being seriously injured or harmed by people he may have met through social media.

3.38 In December 2017 and January 2018 an EIP2 survey was carried out to fully understand confidence and competence in the use of Signs of Safety. The results

will be available in April 2018 and will allow us to benchmark our implementation against the other local authorities and inform next steps in Brent.

Effects of implementation: social worker recruitment and retention

3.39 As a result of the directorate restructure in 2016, led by the Strategic Director and informed by the Signs of Safety approach, all three Heads of Service for social work qualified posts are now permanently appointed. All team managers in LAC and Permanency, Localities and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance services are now permanent. This has included some agency managers being appointed to permanent roles.

3.40 The proportion of permanent staff across the service is increasing. There has been a particularly positive increase in the number of permanent social worker grade posts. As of February 2018, there are 97 permanent social workers of an establishment of 124 (78.23%).

Key objectives for 2018/19

3.41 The Signs of Safety Executive Group oversees an implementation plan that aligns EIP2 deliverables and Brent CYP Priorities. Key objectives for 2018/19 are:

- Ensure families and social networks are routinely involved in safety planning for all children potentially entering the care system.
- Enable Signs of Safety practice by reduction of bureaucracy and enabling practitioners to spend more time with children and families.
- Refine quality assurance systems to have a deeper understanding of practice and the impact of improvement initiatives as a result.
- Development of sustainable meaningful measures across EIP2 local authorities and ensuring these meet Brent's needs to understand the impact on practice.
- Further engaging partners with Signs of Safety with the roll out of the LSCB awareness programme through existing professional forums.
- Implementation of the Brent Practice Framework with Signs of Safety at its core.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 In the two year implementation period, EIP2 provides approximately £180k in funding support (approximately £80k in direct grant funding and £100k in indirect funding such as training, support and materials) with the expectation that Brent contributes approximately £330k in practice consultancy and training provision.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report. Signs of Safety implementation has helped the local authority fulfil its statutory duties to safeguard children, protect them from harm and to improve their wellbeing.

6.0 Equality Implications

6.1 Brent is one of the most diverse local authority areas in England. The Signs of Safety approach is evidenced to promote full exploration of culture and diversity in a strengths-based and respectful manner.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

7.1 Signs of Safety implementation forms part of councillor safeguarding induction.

7.2 Children's Trust partners and Brent schools have been engaged in the implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

8.1 The positive impact of Signs of Safety implementation is noted in the main content of this report.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and Young People