



## **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

19<sup>th</sup> July 2012

### **Report from the Director of Children & Families**

Wards Affected:  
ALL

## **Safeguarding and Looked After Children Action Plan 2011/2012**

### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report shows the level of progress made by the Brent Social Care against the action plan following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children provision in Brent.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are requested to note progress and consider areas for further improvement

### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 This report is produced by the Head of Safeguarding and outlines the themes from the improvement journey.
- 3.2 The SLAC inspection graded our services as adequate overall and awarded 'good' grading to four components.
- 3.3 Ofsted launched a new inspection framework in May 2012 and expressed an intention to re-inspect all authorities that were deemed inadequate or adequate within the next 12 months.
- 3.4 This action plan represents the progress Brent Social Care has made against inspection findings and recommendations. The Director of Children's Services monitors progress against the plan at a dedicated monthly meeting with Heads of Service and partners from Health. Brent LSCB also monitors the progress of the plan.

**Safeguarding**

- 4.1 Areas for improvement in Brent Social Care safeguarding arrangements were identified as: reflective supervision and audit of supervision records, strengthened qualitative performance management, quality of child protection and child in need plans, step down from child protection plans and the relationship of strategic plans to front line services.
- 4.2 A programme of mentoring for all front line managers (Localities and Care Planning) has been put in place to boost their skills in reflective supervision. There was not a concern from Ofsted that supervision was not taking place but that there was not enough evidence of the quality of reflective discussion within supervision. A recent comparison with neighbouring London Authorities shows that Brent social workers carry significantly higher caseloads than peers in other London boroughs. This has an effect on the amount of time managers can spend supervising each case in the monthly supervision slot and the amount of time managers have for recording supervision against each case record and on the employee's record. In the Locality Social Work Service the advanced practitioners will be leading group supervision to enhance access to reflective supervision. An audit of supervision records and a survey of the worker experience of supervision are planned for the autumn and this will inform future improvements.
- 4.3 Brent Social Care has developed a Quality Management Framework and robust audit programme to benchmark services and direct future improvements. There are 2 qualitative audits per month whereby managers spend a whole day auditing cases on a particular theme (outcome of s.47, missing children, care plans). The learning from individual cases is fed back to workers direct and the aggregate learning is disseminated through teams. In addition to this there are a number of generic casework audits (2 per manager per month) and data integrity audits carried out by admin. A quarterly report is taken to the Social Care Management Team and findings disseminated to inform service development.
- 4.4 The Brent child protection conference service has been working with the child abuse command at the Met Police to improve the focus of child protection plans across London. Locally we have had an acute focus on preventing drift in child protection plans and this has led to a reduction in the duration of child protection plans and the overall number of subjects of child protection plans in Brent. The step down from child protection plan has been supported by a re-launch of a multi-agency child in need policy and supporting workshops via the LSCB. The reduction in the number and duration of child protection plans is currently being independently audited and the report will be complete in September 2012.
- 4.5 The Head of Localities has established a task group to improve the quality of child in need planning and review. A training programme has been developed and is being rolled out across Brent Social Care. This programme is to improve the quality and focus of child in need plans.
- 4.6 Brent Social Care is currently addressing the Munro recommendations to improve the quality of front line practice. To this end we are adopting the Signs of Safety methodology and, along with a number of English authorities, are embarking on an extensive whole service training and implementation.

- 4.7 A strategy for service user consultation has been developed and there has been an extensive programme of service user consultation in the child protection and child protection population. These views will be used to inform service improvements and will be disseminated to front line staff.
- 4.8 The relationship of strategic plans to outcomes for children has been developed in a number of ways. The Children and Young People's plan has been re-drawn, the objectives of which are carried through to individual service plans. The Children in Care/Care Planning Service has a Looked After Children Strategy and the Localities services is in the process of developing a Safeguarding Children Strategy. Brent LSCB appointed a new chair who took up post in May 2012. The LSCB will take an active role to ensure its strategy is adopted by all partners and reflects the ambitions of the CYPP.

#### **Looked After Children (LAC)**

- 4.9 The Inspection made recommendations for improvements in the following areas: health arrangements for LAC, pathway and transition planning to prepare LAC for adulthood, reflective supervision, focussed SMART plans, improved school attendance, stable placements with sound plans for permanency and an improved process for monitoring educational progress of individual children.
- 4.10 The Care Quality Commission found the health support to Looked After Children (LAC) to be inadequate. NHS Brent and Brent Community Service (Ealing ICO) has launched an action plan and audit programme to address the deficits. A number of areas have been successfully addressed through this action plan although there is some outstanding work on improving the quality of the health reports.
- 4.11 The Care Planning staff has been engaged in the reflective supervision programme referenced in 4.2.
- 4.12 The Care Planning managers have attended training in making SMART child focussed child protection, child in need and supervision order plans. This training has been developed by the child protection conference service and is now being taken direct to social worker teams.
- 4.13 There has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of pathway planning with 94% of plans being appropriately in place. The initiative to improve timeliness has been supported by development of a specific training programme for staff and this is included in the current training calendar. Transition planning pertains to disabled children and young people. The quality and timelines of transition planning has been boosted by the formation of a transitions team that contains both adult and child specialist workers. This is a new team, the benefits for young people can be reported at a later date when the service has had an opportunity to bed in.
- 4.14 The virtual Head of School for Brent LAC has written an attendance policy and this will be implemented in July 2012. There has been a considerable effort on the part of health colleagues to arrange Saturday clinics for regular LAC health reviews to avoid children being absent from school. All professionals working with LAC have been required to review how and when children are offered appointments to avoid disruption to schooling.
- 4.15 Placement stability and permanency are high on the Government agenda and Brent Social Care has a number of processes in place to achieve the best

outcomes for our children. The role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) has been boosted to provide additional checks and balances in the system and placement moves are reviewed both in supervision and in placement panel. A recent diagnostic assessment of adoption and permanency arrangements by the DfE has been extremely positive although the result has yet to be published.

## **5.0 Challenges going forward**

- 5.1 The high caseloads in Care Planning and Localities presents a number of challenges to improvement specifically in respect of staff retention and the quality of service social workers are able to offer. There is a plan in place to put in additional resources into the Locality Service in the short term to close cases down and step them down to emerging services as part of the Troubled Families agenda.
- 5.2 There is a paucity of early help services in Brent. This is being addressed corporately through the one council projects and the Troubled Families agenda. Until there is a health early help offer then the Brent Social Care services will continue to struggle with thresholds and the quality of intervention and supervision.
- 5.3 The Learning and Development service has been brought back to Social Care from the corporate centre. This has enabled us to focus on driving improvements in Social Care as we are better able to control the budget and agenda.
- 5.4 Social Care has benefitted from a stable and largely permanent workforce until recent months. It is imperative that caseloads are brought under control and staff are afforded high quality learning and supervision so that we can retain and develop good workers.
- 5.5 Managers in the service are highly committed to improving the service and have risen to the challenge afforded us through the inspection process and the Munro review of child protection.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 None

## **7.0 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 None

## **8.0 Diversity Implications**

- 8.1 The report is concerned with diversity and differential performance of minority ethnic groups in Brent.

### **Contact Officer:**

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