

29 January 2013		ITEM 5
Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION		
Report of: Barbara Foster, Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Foster, Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Director of People Services		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: For Members to consider the Council's duties to safeguard and protect children and lead on Child Protection and whether this should be considered more frequently in the annual calendar.		

Executive Summary

Members are invited to consider local and national performance and developments in Child Protection in a multi-agency context and how Thurrock's participation in the Children's Improvement Board can best be developed and scrutinised.

Appendix 1 - Performance data

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members are asked to agree the contents of the report
2. Members are asked to consider whether Child Protection should feature more frequently than annually in the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The OFSTED inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children in June 2012 was one of only three in Eastern Region to achieve the Grade of Good for safeguarding but there were grades of Adequate for

- Quality of provision
- Contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe

- Quality Assurance and performance management

This led to an Action Plan which was submitted to OFSTED and has resulted in action already being taken on expanding the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), key actions for health and improvements to social work practice. There is now a monitoring and quality assurance follow up on these actions.

- 1.2. A national development is that in November, the House of Commons Education Select Committee published a report entitled 'Children First – The Child Protection System in England' which highlights the importance of taking action to protect children at an early stage, emphasise that neglect is a danger to children which should never be underestimated and that older children are often as much at risk as younger children. The report emphasised the need for clarity as to thresholds for intervention and the importance of all agencies working together.

This report was the culmination of a year's work by the Committee and the Chair, Graham Stuart, commented on service pressures,

"Whatever your view on the cuts it is essential that the children in our society most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation are not the ones to pay the price. These children must be first and foremost in the minds of councillors and ministers so that the welcome improvements we have seen over recent years are maintained and built upon".

2. The council's role

- 2.1 The council's role as lead agency in child protection functions is part of a complex and constantly changing inter-active professional system which Professor Munro refers in her national report of guidance as the "whole system", which must work together to protect children. This system includes schools, health provision, the voluntary sector and families themselves. Schools and Early Years settings in Thurrock have scored well on the child protection elements of their Ofsted Inspections. Social care staff are invited to head teachers meetings and there are head teacher representatives at the Children's Partnerships but the picture is complex. Most senior schools in Thurrock are academies and the individual school populations differ in the element of need within them, while schools also differ as to how pro-actively they fund welfare and protective services for their pupils. Similarly, the approaches made to social care do not necessarily reflect the level of need which might be predicted from each school.
- 2.2 Health provision was an element in the Thurrock SLAC Inspection which ranked an adequate score and that there have been particular pressures at Basildon Thurrock University Hospital (BTUH) There is strong co-working on child protection cases between health and social care staff and firm shared structures in the governance of the Children's Partnership, LSCB and Health & Wellbeing Board. This is assisted by the existence of the Safeguarding Children Clinical Network which enhances the roles of designated nurses and

doctors across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. The SCCN Board is attended by the Head of Service and the Director of Nursing of the Clinical Commissioning Group. Across all health provision, work is taking place to arrange new structures for children. This includes the health element of the Early Offer of Help. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services will be re-commissioned this year, bringing another element of change.

3. Changes in Thurrock

- 3.1 In Thurrock staff are ambitious to constantly improve services and this is a constant aim. We have some changes in the community which is becoming more racially diverse. We have new challenges in terms of practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour based violence which are usually associated with particular ethnic groups. Many Thurrock staff have experience in London where these forms of abuse more often require a service and there are no significant increased service pressures. In December 2012 the council and partner agencies launched the Local Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and embarked on a 16 days of action campaign, which was a huge success and gained both local and national recognition. The implementation of a Missing Children Panel in January 2012 which regularly reviews children who go missing is also beginning to show benefits
- 3.2 The development of the Early Offer of Help is a major system re-design for Thurrock which fulfils the Munro requirements for families to be offered help early in the development of problems and, whenever possible, early in the lives of children. As in other local authorities, the clarity of thresholds in Thurrock was a focus of the last Inspection and Inspectors required us to take several actions to expand the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). These steps have already shown some changes and improvement and the foundation is in place to take forward the multi-agency Early Offer of Help in order to make sure that families receive help at the appropriate level.

4. Financial Factors

- 4.1 The Audit Commission ranks Thurrock as the lowest spending authority in our group of statistical neighbour comparators. However we rank fifth of the eleven statutory neighbours in terms of our spend on Children's Social Services. This information has to be seen alongside the fact that we are one of only four of these councils being in south-east England and therefore having higher costs. Amongst the unitary authority's group, we remain a low spending authority and average for social services amongst this national group. The Audit Commission is the only national source of national funding now available for our area of service.

5. The Children's Improvement Board

- 5.1 The proposals in the Munro Report have both local and national implications. The Local Government Association, Association of Children's Directors and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives have worked together to create the Children's Improvement Board, supported by Government funding. This takes up the Munro challenge to create Child Protection services as learning organisations and sets up a structure and process by which Council's improve their performance through peer support and challenge. This structure sits alongside a continued inspection regime. The Children's Improvement Board have created Munro Demonstrator authorities and Thurrock is one of 17 selected. The features of our work, on which the application was based, (which we are required to share with others whilst we take part in learning opportunities in other Councils) are our system change to the Early Offer of Help, the commissioning of services for this, cultural change in the workforce and creating a learning culture.
- 5.2 OFSTED has a new model of inspection which is even more rigorous than previous formats. So far, a third of the authorities judged under the new method have been ranked 'inadequate'. Inspectors arrive on site and stay for 14 days whilst they track cases and monitor how a child moves through the system – 'the child's journey'. New requirements are for social workers to be observed and the inspection to be totally unannounced. London Borough of Redbridge was the first local authority to be awarded 'good' on this model. This model will then be replaced by a new multi-agency but still unannounced later structure from 2014.
- 5.3 The Children's Improvement Board has changed the expectations of councils by introducing new forms of peer review and co-operation between councils. A useful checklist of data has been published of warning signs as to service pressures and potential deterioration. This highlights information which is not currently collected and will be submitted in April. The report will include caseloads and unallocated cases (which we do not have in Thurrock), work which is out of timescales, the work which has been audited and staffing information. Thurrock has a reducing reliance on agency staff, but when expressed as a percentage of staff in front-line teams, we have 19% (16), social workers and 44% (4) team managers. There is continuity of senior managers up to the level of DCS and agency staff are predominantly long standing with the majority having been here for over one year, with some for over two years.
- 5.4 The Children's Improvement Board has also gone so far as to suggest a set of criteria on which councils can assess their organisational risks which might de-stabilise child protection and safeguarding. They are as follows:-

- Turnover and change in senior leadership- as above, this is not a high risk in Thurrock and the retention of the Director and Service Managers has been constant for the last three years
- Service re-organisations combined with challenging budget reductions- this goes across all the children's sector where direct risks to children are known to increase during periods of change
- Limited self awareness and an absence of internal and external challenge- this has been addressed in Thurrock by the expansion of the quality assurance element of the social work service and the LSCB's role as scrutinising the performance of the whole of the local children's services.
- Lack of learning organisational culture- this applies not only to the workforce but to the whole system and partnership. The council has a strong Workforce Development Team and the Munro Demonstrator opportunities will open up more connections with other councils.
- Not obtaining, understanding and addressing the impact of practice on the child's journey- this is the key but not exclusive task of the Munro Principal Social Worker who will be recruited imminently
- Lack of investment in developing the workforce- this is monitored by Workforce Development and the LSCB, particularly in relation to multi-agency working
- Cursory acceptance of shared responsibility across partners- our high rate of contacts made to social care and the need for inspectors to emphasise the development of the CAF may suggest that there is further need for development of the scrutiny of shared responsibility.

6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 This report has covered the main local and national changes in child protection services in Thurrock. Financial pressures on families and on the council will highlight this service area and every effort will be made by staff to keep Elected Members fully informed as to new developments.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

The report sets out the framework for the continued development of Safeguarding and Child Protection which clearly has a number of budgetary implications. Any financial support for this has to be from established budgets and any pressures contained within those budgets.

Implications verified by: Michael Jones
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7.2 **Legal**

The report sets out statutory role of the Local Authority for child protection. Although section 31 Children Act gives power to the NSPCC as an authorised person to make an application to the Court for a Care or Supervision Order in practice it is Local Authorities who make such applications.

Implications verified by: Lindsey Marks
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7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

The children who become subjects of child protection plans are predominantly white so there is an under representation of children from other racial groups but this would connect with the generally more middle class profile of black children in Thurrock. We have a small number of disabled children who are subject to child protection plans and this is constantly being evaluated.

Implications verified by: David Lawson
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7.4 **Other implications (where significant)**

8. **CONCLUSION**

8.1 For information

9. **BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:**

9.1 Monthly Performance Data Figures

10. **Report Author Contact Details:**

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