

9 October 2018		ITEM: 10
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Safeguarding and Performance Management Children's Social Care		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Key
Report of: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee take note of the current arrangements for safeguarding children.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** This report sets out the arrangements for the monitoring and oversight of children's services to reassure Members that children are safe, services are transparent and that the quality of reporting is robust. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 to ensure that children within their area are safe and their welfare is safeguarded. This report looks at three key areas which will enable Members to judge whether these requirements are being met by the department. These are:

3. Child Safety

Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties: section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area, regardless of where they are found; section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services in local authorities are the key points of professional and political accountability, with responsibility for the effective delivery of these functions.

Guidance on how partners should work together is set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The guidance makes it clear that safeguarding children is everyone's business and there is a statutory duty for agencies to co-operate.

The responsibility for this join-up locally rests with the three safeguarding partners who have a shared and equal duty to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area. The safeguarding partners are: the local authority; Clinical Commissioning Group; the Police. The three safeguarding partners should agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents.

The responsibility for how the system learns the lessons from serious child safeguarding incidents lies at a national level with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) and at local level with the safeguarding partners. Locally, safeguarding partners must make arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases which, in their view, raise issues of importance in relation to their area. They must commission and oversee the review of those cases, where they consider it appropriate for a review to be undertaken.

4. Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

ILACS is a system of inspection whereby Ofsted uses the intelligence and information they have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority. This system includes:

- local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice
- an annual engagement meeting between our regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future
- Ofsted's local authority intelligence system (LAIS) (which brings data and information into a single record)
- focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children
- standard and short inspections where they make judgements using a four-point scale
- joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) which are undertaken on a themed basis

In 2018 Thurrock has already had an annual engagement conversation and a focused visit from Ofsted. The focussed visit looked at children in need and children with a child protection plan. At the time of writing this report the findings had not been published.

After a focused visit, Ofsted will not usually follow up with an urgent inspection. They publish the focused visit letter setting out the areas that the local authority needs to address. They then review the progress in these areas through the local authority's self-evaluation and the annual engagement meeting until the next judgement inspection happens.

This approach aims to support improvement, while still holding the local authority children's services to account in meeting their legal responsibilities to children in need of help, protection and care.

5. Staffing

Children's Services currently has a vacancy rate of 13.64% which is lower than the wider Council rate of 16.75%. Recruitment drives have been successful with advertisements attracting good application levels and resulting in high quality appointments. The recruitment and retention of social workers is a key priority within Children's and Family Services. The Recruitment and Retention Board meets monthly to review performance in this area and to recommend actions. Current performance shows a vacancy rate of 18.64% for qualified social workers.

Overall in Children's Services agency worker usage is reducing with costs on agency staffing in the directorate reduced by almost £1million from the 2016/17 to 2017/18 financial year. Q4 of 2017-18 and Q1 of 2018-19 have seen the lowest spending quarters on agency staff costs in the directorate for years and this positive trend is expected to continue. A number of long term agency workers have been assimilated into permanent roles in the organisation and a renewed focus on recruiting to vacancies across the directorate has seen instances of agency staff usage decrease.

Since 2016 the Council has been actively working to reduce the usage and costs associated with agency social workers and are signed up to the Eastern region Memorandum of Cooperation which caps the hourly rate paid to qualified social care agency staff. In March 2016 there was a total of 66 agency workers across Social Worker, Senior Practitioner and Team Manager roles. This had reduced to 53 by March 2017 and a further reduction to 40 overall by March 2018 shows the positive trend in this area. Most significant is the reduction in agency Team Managers from 8 in March 2016, to 5 in March 2017 and 3 by March 2018. The recruitment of Team Manager roles is critical to ensure the stability of the teams. Typically it is harder to recruit to vacancies in CFAT/MASH and FST for social worker and senior practitioner roles. The responsible senior managers in Children's work closely with the in-house recruitment team who use a direct sourcing approach and, in some instances, a specialist selected recruitment agency to help fill these roles. Costs associated with qualified social care roles have reduced consistently since Q1 of 2017-18 due to the work and reductions outlined above.

The turnover rate for the whole Children's Services directorate is 13.65%. The turnover rate for qualified social workers is 7.76% which shows good retention of social workers. The Council-wide turnover rate is 12.70%.

6. Staff Survey Results

A full Council-wide Staff Survey was carried out in April/May 2018. The results have been analysed and considered at a Children's Services Workshop on 28 August 2018. An engaged workforce is one of the key factors influencing organisational success. The Staff Survey was able to measure engagement through analysing the results of targeted questions and Children's Services workforce was found to be engaged with an engagement score of 69% which is exactly in line with the wider Council workforce which also scored 69% (see figure 1 below).

Areas of strength within Children's Services included; staff clearly understand how their work contributes to the objectives of their team/service (97% positive score), staff are clear about what is required of them (90%), PDR ratings are accurate (87%) and line management is effective. Staff in Children's Services were significantly more likely than the wider Council workforce to agree that their manager provides effective leadership (79% compared to a Council-wide score of 74%).

A key area of improvement is change management which was also the case for the Council-wide results. However the Children's Services results were below the Council-wide average showing that this needs to be an area of focus for the management team. Less than a third of Children's Services staff agree that when changes are made they are usually for the better (27% compared to a Council-wide score of 34%) and that change is managed well in the Council (29% compared to a Council-wide score of 35%). Other areas of improvement include staff levels, confidence to challenge how things are done in the Council and motivation to go the extra mile.

Job satisfaction is high with nearly eight in ten (77%) employees in the Directorate being satisfied, with just 9% that are dissatisfied. These results were in line with the rest of the Council. Children's Services were significantly ahead of the remainder of the Council in terms of being kept informed of what is happening in their team (77% compared to 71%), actively seeking customer feedback to improve (70% compared to 64%) and were significantly more likely than the wider Council workforce to agree that their line manager provides effective leadership (79% compared to 74%). The largest negative variances from the Council-wide average were being able to meet the requirements of their job without working excessive hours (42% compared to 54%) and being able to strike the right work-life balance (65% compared to 73%). This has been acknowledged by management as demonstrating the commitment to work of the staff and will be addressed as part of an action plan to promote agile and flexible working.

The current absence rate for Children's Services is 4.43% with the majority of absence being long-term in nature (2.98% absence rate for long-term compared to 1.46% short-term). Long-term absence is defined as absence lasting over 20 working days. The main absence driver over the last 12 months has been stress/anxiety which is also the case Council-wide and is one of the key action areas for People Board. Children's Services average days lost amounted to 0.89 per employee which was lower than the Council-wide average of 0.92 and lower than other comparably sized directorates.

The findings of the survey were shared with staff at a workshop on 20th September to enable them to shape the action plan and address any further areas for improvement.

The primary purpose of Children's services performance management approach is to give managers the framework, support and tools with which to make systematic, continuous improvements to the social work service delivered to children, young people and their families in Thurrock. It supports the achievement of better outcomes for children, young people, parents and families.

As important is to enable the service to be publicly accountable for its performance – this is done through:

- Statistical returns to government (DfE) which are then published for comparison and scrutiny
- Regular reports to Corporate Performance Board, Overview and Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting.
- Safeguarding Children's Board has a statutory role in ensuring that single agency and multi-agency work in child protection is of a good standard. It receives regular reports on the performance of agencies in the professional network. An Independent Chair of the Board provides appropriate and independent challenge to all member agencies.
- Benchmarking with the Eastern Region Children's services
- Benchmarking with statistical neighbours' Children's services

The service is also subject to external scrutiny by OFSTED, with a focused visit having taken place on the 11th and 12th September 2018. OFSTED is the regulatory body that has responsibility for inspection of local authority children's homes, fostering, adoption and private fostering arrangements, as well as the unannounced inspection of contact/assessment services. It is also responsible for three-yearly inspection of safeguarding and Children in Care services.

7. Performance Standards

Performance management delivers a strong structure where action is taken to make outcomes better by taking action in response to actual performance, which might be at an individual, team or service level.

The service ensures that performance monitoring facilitates performance management and performance management drives performance improvement.

Children's Social Care has adopted an approach to performance management which incorporates the following characteristics:

- Real-time, regular and robust performance data turned into useful intelligence to support decision making;
- Accountability and transparency;
- Clear performance management review, combining challenge and support.

This is delivered through:

- A monthly digest report to a dedicated performance meeting chaired by the Director
- Quality assurance and challenge takes place prior to the service's performance meeting with the Director. Where the Social Care senior management team, challenge managers against performance, ensuring that they are held to account with any areas of concern highlighted and "deep dives" into the data and service carried out. This determines where corrective action needs to be taken and address any areas where performance is "off target."
- Live reports produced for Social Care teams managers to support them in managing their team

As part of the performance management structure:

- Each member of staff is aware of their performance and targets and their performance against targets is regularly discussed in supervision with their managers;
- There is a clear vision, focus on strategic issues, service quality, customer feedback and citizens needs
- Decisions are based on robust data and intelligence;
- Approved plans, strategies, service reviews and policy objectives are measurable and impact focused;
- New ideas and best practice elsewhere are constantly sought and tried when necessary;
- There is openness to internal and external challenge and a willingness to take and stick to tough decisions and tackle difficult problems;
- Managers keep the Council's vision and objectives in mind when determining actions and communicate this context to their staff;
- People see a direct connection between what they do and how it benefits the community through a clear performance management framework;
- Managers drive performance improvement and engage their employees;

- Performance management and performance improvement are treated as core business within the Council rather than an add-on;
- There is a lot of cross-functional working and interdepartmental communication focused on achieving agreed objectives;
- Everyone has a sense of responsibility for the performance of the service and accountability for results is clear.

8. Measurement and Reporting Progress

The right indicators to assess impact have been identified - these are the benchmarks by which success is measured. This data is collected through the “Monthly Performance Digest” by the Performance, Quality and Business Intelligence team where it is assessed against previous months and years’ trends. Together with other authorities in the Eastern region and statistical neighbours (councils that have similar features within services for children) this gives a picture of the service’s performance against others.

This helps to ensure:

- Good information supports critical decision-making;
- Analysis is used to make best use of accessible data and intelligence created;
- Time and effort is spent converting data sources into relevant information and knowledge - e.g. how things may need to change to improve success against key goals.

9. Creating a Positive Learning Culture

This performance management framework takes place in an environment of learning. Performance data is discussed openly and honestly and used by everybody to make better-informed decisions, and to take actions that positively affect future performance.

Performance information is used to empower people and enable self-management – this is through team managers utilising pre-set reports from the Children’s Social Care system to assist with team performance issues such as list of cases, number of visits etc.

These are then used as part of staff’s one to one supervision where performance is a main feature. Performance reporting uses different formats for different audiences based on current best practice - making extensive use of visual aids (such as graphs and charts) supported by numerical information, and using narratives and verbal communication formats to complement, contextualise and provide meaningful interpretation.

Staff members are able to understand the ‘so what’ implications for their own roles in the service, e.g. ‘How does this affect me?’ and ‘What do I need to do differently in future?’

Everyone at all levels of the service knows what they are aiming for, and why. Buy-in ensures that performance management is an integral part of the service's daily routines.

10. Data Quality

The role of the PQBI team is to ensure that the service has the necessary information and analysis on its performance to make decisions. This team perform the role of facilitating performance management activities. It facilitates strategy design and mapping processes, designing and reviewing performance indicators, collecting and analysing performance data, reporting performance, facilitating the cascade and the performance review processes, maintaining the case management software system as well as training people in the performance management process.

Children's Social Care requires reliable, accurate and timely information. To be confident that effort is being focused in the right places it needs to be assured that reported information reflects actual performance. The PQBI team carries out data quality checks of performance information through:

- Ensuring definitions, calculations and methodologies match those of national, Eastern Region, Statistical Neighbours good practice standards.
- Pre-set standard reports are developed on the Social Care system
- Amendments to these standard reports are in line with any data release changes announced by the government and carried out by the PQBI team
- Discussing areas of concern with the relevant team to ascertain reasons and actions to address performance, then noted as part of the performance meeting(s) discussion
- Working closely with the service's Quality Assurance team whose role is to targets and addresses relevant areas of performance in social care practice.

11. Implications

11.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Management Accountant

No financial implications

11.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

No legal implications

11.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Equality and Communications Officer

No Diversity or equality implications

11.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

No other implications

12. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

N/A

13. Appendices to the report

N/A

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