

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Health and social care overview and scrutiny committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>29 January 2016</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Children's safeguarding performance data</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Director for children's wellbeing</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Key Decision**

This is not an executive decision.

## **Wards Affected**

Countywide

## **Purpose**

To note the performance in relation to children's safeguarding for the month of October 2015, together with trend data over the previous 12 months.

## **Recommendations**

**THAT:**

- (a) the performance of children's safeguarding be reviewed and any additional improvement actions identified for consideration; and**
- (b) any other performance indicators which the committee would like to be included in future reports be identified**

## **Alternative options**

1. There are no alternative options as this is an opportunity for scrutiny to review and challenge the performance of children's safeguarding.

## **Reasons for recommendations**

2. To allow the committee to undertake effective scrutiny of the council's statutory functions in relation to safeguarding for children in need.

## Key considerations

### Outcome of whistleblowing investigation

3. As members of the committee will be aware, staff in some teams have raised concerns about the behaviour and culture prevailing in those teams which is not conducive to effective working and practice. These concerns have been thoroughly investigated and a short term task and finish group is implementing some changes to aspects of general management such as induction; case load management and reporting and performance management.
4. An action plan has been developed and a resource manager has been appointed to manage and oversee many aspects of this plan and to continue the development of the actions when the group disbands. The resource manager will work with managers and corporate functions on key areas such as recruitment, retention, training, performance, HR, finance, ICT and property related matters.
5. The purpose of this role is to work alongside managers to ensure that improvements are made in these areas, which will also create the capacity for managers to focus on supporting and developing their social worker teams, paying particular attention to safeguarding, quality supervision and appraisals to ensure we have good professional standards and quality across the service.

### Recruitment and retention

6. At the end of November 2015, the ratio of permanent to agency workers was 61:39. This compares with the ratio at the end of September 2014 of 43:57, so we have seen a significant incremental improvement over the last 14 months.
7. Most recently, during the period September 2015 to November 2015:
  - 3 overseas social workers started
  - 8 additional newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) started
  - 8 NQSWs became qualified social workers and replaced 6 agency staff
  - 3 potential permanent staff were recruited through the rolling social worker recruitment campaign
  - 3 “step up to social work” students are commencing their training programme and will qualify by April 2017 when they will become permanent members of staff.
8. As a result of the above, the division is starting to reduce the use of agency staff. This in turn has reduced the financial pressures by approximately £600k.
9. In April 2016, a new cohort of 4 further NQSWs will start, with a further 6 in September 2016.
10. There is confidence that the workforce strategy currently being used is the right approach. However further work is needed and there may be a need to strengthen the establishment further, particularly within the children in need teams.

### Caseloads

11. Caseloads in the children in need and MASH teams remain challenging. As at

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
John Roughton, head of safeguarding and quality on Tel (01432) 260804

October 2015, average caseloads were in the mid to late 20s on average. Additional temporary resources have been deployed in the child in need (CiN) service to help manage demand.

#### Case file audits / QA framework

12. Individual case file audits are undertaken on a monthly basis by managers, and the findings aggregated to identify themes and trends, positively and negatively, to enable us to better understand what is working well, and what we need to prioritise in terms of practice improvement. This information is considered alongside feedback from complaints, and outcomes from any multi agency case or thematic audits undertaken through the HSCB.
13. Linked to the process above, an audit of cases being progressed through the MASH was undertaken in September 2015, revealing improving practice and confidence as to the application of thresholds and the timeliness of decision making and action. 27 children's cases were audited, with 18 of the 27 (67%) assessed as 'good' and 8 (30%) 'requires improvement'. 1 case was identified as inadequate and remedial action has been taken to address the identified issues.
14. That being said, a recurring theme of concern emerging from audit activity is the quality of assessments undertaken. This in part relates to the recruitment and retention issues highlighted previously, in the changes of social worker and delays in completion both impact on timeliness and customer satisfaction, but the degree of inconsistency as to assessment standards remains. Initial work has been commenced through the Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (CHIPP) as to the development of standards and practice guidance with respect to assessment quality, and this work is now being progressed through a task and finish group, to ensure that staff have the training, skills and abilities to this end. Further audit activity will focus on assessment quality to evaluate progress in Q3 2016/17.

#### Performance

15. The attached report considers performance for the month of October 2015, together with trend data over the previous 12 months (appendix 1).
16. We believe the information being reported is more accurate than before and this is linked to the overall transformation of Frameworki, the social care case management system. This includes installing 19 case management and reporting upgrades to Frameworki since April 2014. This transformation project is part of the overarching (CHIPP) with 70% of the work in the Frameworki project plan completed. However, whilst the work is being completed within project timescales, further improvements have been put on hold as attention turns to the upgrade to MOSAIC in April 2016. We do now have a much better understanding as to how the whole system is operating than we have had previously, and this has enabled us to drive up standards and performance.

#### *Positives*

17. Regarding performance over the last period there have been some positive improvements to report. In relation to all contacts received by children's safeguarding being screened by a qualified practitioner on the same working day, this has been consistently strong over the last five months, with performance at 98.2% at the end of October 2015. Audits have confirmed that all contacts were screened appropriately.

18. There is clearer definition of when a contact should be appropriately progressed to a referral, and as at this month, 48% of contacts were progressed, reflecting a broad trend over the last six months. Whilst the majority of contacts and referrals from the police during October 2015 follow the established pattern of domestic abuse notifications, the upward trend of sexual abuse has continued in relation to significantly heightened awareness of child sexual exploitation. The high rate of contact from the police is being explored, and work is progressing in the implementation of a triage system to reduce unnecessary contacts, albeit too early to evaluate the impact of this.
19. The re-referral rate has continued to remain within expected parameters and consistent with regional and national levels, at 21.4% at the end of October.
20. The number of initial assessments completed within timescales during October 2015 has improved in comparison with the previous two months, and is at an all year high of 140 completed within timescales and 192 completed overall, therefore 73% completed in timescale. This improving figure reflects the consolidation of resources in the MASH and a clearer business process in terms of transitioning cases from MASH appropriately.

### *Challenges*

21. Of continuing concern has been the increase in the number of strategy discussions/meetings leading to S47 child protection investigations reported in June and July reflected the higher than usual number of child protection referrals from the police in relation to an ongoing child protection investigation. However, whilst having reduced, there were still 131 during October, of which 41% did not progress to S47, which may be indicative of too low a threshold being applied to convening such meetings. Audit activity to test this hypothesis is due to commence.
22. The rate per 10,000 in Herefordshire of children subject to a child protection plan is higher than our statistical neighbours and the England average, and this number continues to rise to 246 children subject to a plan at the end of October. The incremental rise in the number of children subject to plans as a consequence of emotional abuse, where domestic abuse is the common factor of concern, and as highlighted above due to increased awareness of child sexual exploitation, in part reflect the reasons behind this increase. However further analysis is being undertaken with respect to the progress of children remaining subject to a plan beyond 18 months, to better understand the factors as to why children are remaining subject to a CP plan for so long.
23. As at October 2015, however, only 2% of the on a child protection plan were subject to such a plan for the second or subsequent time. This figure is lower than the all England and West Midlands local council average (15.8% and 9.5% respectively) and indicates that children are at least not being stepped down from a CP plan precipitately.

### **Community impact**

24. Delivering the corporate plan is key to the council achieving the positive impact it wishes to make across Herefordshire and all its communities. Given the decreasing financial resources available to the council, monitoring performance is likely to become even more important so as to ensure that resources are best directed to meet the council's agreed priorities and statutory obligations.

## **Equality duty**

25. This report is to provide an update on performance for safeguarding and the equality duty is not applicable.

## **Financial implications**

26. This report has no financial implications and is for information and comment only.

## **Legal implications**

27. This report is required to allow the health and social care overview and scrutiny committee to perform its statutory duty to ensure that local public services are delivered effectively and efficiently. Service performance should also be monitored and suggestions for improvements made.

## **Risk management**

28. There are no risks associated with this report which is for information only.

## **Consultees**

29. Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board. Any actions arising from these consultations are incorporated into the main body of the report and any actions are also picked up as part of the overall improvement programme.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Safeguarding performance data

Appendix B – Safeguarding performance presentation

## **Background papers**

None identified.