

**AGENDA ITEM 9****CYP/15/09****Committee: Children and Young People Policy & Scrutiny Committee****Date: 2 July 2009**

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**SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN****Enquiries to: Graham Redgwell, Governance Officer**

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**Position at July 2009****INTRODUCTION**

Following the publication during 2008 of the findings of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of the County Council by Ofsted, it was clear that the Council had not been regarded as performing particularly well. It scored very poorly in respect of the services it and partner agencies provided for safeguarding the safety and well being of children.

The Committee decided to undertake a detailed scrutiny of the findings of the APA. It drew up a scoping document to underpin and guide its scrutiny and this is set out below (due to the number of witnesses involved both the April and May 2009 sessions were required for that purpose and the programme had to be changed to reflect this):-

<b>Committee</b>	Children & Young People's Policy Scrutiny Committee	
<b>Topic</b>	Annual Performance Assessment Letter	Ref: CYP-SCR-012
<b>Objective</b>	To scrutinise the APA letter and identify whether the SCF Business Improvement Action Plan adequately addresses the issues raised during the inspection; and in particular those relating to 'safeguarding'	
<b>Reasons for undertaking review</b>	This is an annual action by the Committee to help it prioritise its Forward Look.	
<b>Method</b>	Select Committee style hearings at the Committee's March,	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Initial briefing to define scope</i></li> <li>• <i>Task &amp; Finish Group</i></li> <li>• <i>Commission</i></li> <li>• <i>Full Committee</i></li> </ul>	April & May 2009 meetings.
<b>Membership</b> <i>Only complete if Task and Finish Group or Commission</i>	N/A
<b>Issues to be addressed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas of weakness identified by the letter</li> <li>• SCF Business Improvement Action Plan</li> <li>• Essex Safeguarding Children Board's (ESCB) Action Plan</li> <li>• Partnership working</li> </ul>
<b>Sources of Evidence and witnesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APA Letter</li> <li>• CSF and ESCB Action Plans</li> <li>• 2008 JAR Self-assessment document</li> <li>• Executive Members and Executive Director</li> <li>• Representatives of the ESCB and Children's &amp; Young People's Strategic Partnership CYPSP</li> </ul>
<b>Work Programme</b>	<p><b>March 2009</b></p> <p>0930 - 1120 Pre-meeting with independent social care adviser</p> <p>1130 - 1200 Executive Director SCF</p> <p>1200 - 1230 Chairman of ESCB</p> <p>1230 - 1300 Identification of issues to be raised with partner organizations &amp; other witnesses</p> <p><b>April 2009</b></p> <p>Evidence session with witnesses from partner organizations and others identified by the Committee.</p> <p><b>May 2009</b></p> <p>Discussion of issues with Executive Members and Executive Director.</p>
<b>Indicators of</b>	The Committee will have identified recommendations for

<b>Success</b>	improvement and/or identified areas for further scrutiny.		
<b>Meeting the CfPS Objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Critical Friend Challenge to Executive</i></li> <li>• <i>Reflect Public voice and concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Own the scrutiny process</i></li> <li>• <i>Impact on service delivery</i></li> </ul>	In undertaking this work the Committee will meet each of these objectives by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting as a critical friend to the Executive Members</li> <li>• Scrutinising issues which are of high public concern</li> <li>• The Committee identifying issues it wishes to lead on</li> <li>• Recommendations arising from this review should help drive the improvement plans of all agencies involved in provision of services to children &amp; young people</li> </ul>		
<b>Diversity and Equality</b> <i>Diversity and Equality issues are to be considered and addressed.</i>	The review will cover services provided to some of the County's most vulnerable residents.		
<b>Date agreed by Committee</b>	February 2009.		
<b>Future Action</b>			
<b>Governance Officer</b>	David Moses & Graham Redgwell	<b>Committee Officer</b>	Vivien Door
<b>Service Lead Officer(s)</b>	Graham Tombs, Executive Director: Schools, Children and Families Services  Nicky Pace, Director, Vulnerable Children & Young People		

The subsequent report by the Joint Area Review inspection team (undertaken in September 2008 but not available until after the meeting in March 2009) reiterated a number of comments made in the APA report, particularly in regard to safeguarding, and the Committee added this document to the reports which it would scrutinise.

## PROCESS ADOPTED

So far, the Committee has held three witness sessions.

That in March 2009 concentrated on speaking to the senior management of the Schools, Children and Families Directorate and going through the APA letter in detail, to prioritise what issues the Committee needed to concentrate on.

In April the Committee spoke with the Cabinet Members about how they proposed to respond to the concerns expressed; with the chairman and administrator of the Safeguarding Board about its role and the nature of its work; and with senior staff about the eligibility criteria used by social work staff.

In May it spoke to representatives from a number of agencies serving on the Safeguarding Board. Further witnesses will be invited to the meeting in July, along with some bodies interested in the well being of children but who are not represented on the Board at present.

Summaries from the minutes of those three meetings are set out below:-

### **MARCH 2009 DISCUSSION**

The Committee considered, in particular, the Areas of Weakness Identified by the APA Letter. Nicky Pace, Director, Vulnerable Children & Young People, Children and Families, was in attendance for this item. The Committee noted that a number of positive comments had also been made and should not be overlooked.

The Committee noted that the self assessment evidence which resulted in the APA letter dated from 2007. Although this was a useful document the evidence had been overtaken by events in some circumstances.

The APA letter dealt with the following topics:-

<b>Overall Effectiveness of Children's Services</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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The Joint Area Review focused on five areas, and inspected all partners involved with the services.

- Safeguarding.
- Looked After Children.
- Children with Complex Needs.
- CAMHS.
- Services for 14 to 19 year olds.

<b>Being Healthy</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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- a. **Waiting times for CAMHS follow-up Treatment were too long**

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a Task and Finish Group looking into the CAMHS provision. The Task and Finish Group would produce an interim report before the election and then would continue this work after June 2009.

**b. There were gaps in service for children with complex needs in the transition to adulthood**

The Chairman and Councillor Dick, Chairman of the Community Wellbeing & Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee, had met to discuss this issue. It was apparent that different services and/or partners class young people as adults at different ages, varying from 16 to 25. In some cases the transition to adult services works well but it was not consistent. The decision was taken that there needed to be a Transition Board at Cabinet level. Cabinet Members have set up the Transition Board to provide a better process for Young People moving from Children's to Adult Services. It has been agreed that some future joint scrutiny work between the two PSCs on specific aspects of Transitions will be undertaken.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- Young People transferring from Children's to Adult services could block beds/accommodation which could mean that younger children were unable to come into the service.
- That there was a large difference between the needs of children and adolescents.

Nicky Pace informed the Committee that there was targeted work in place for vulnerable Young People.

**c. Whilst Progress had been made, the percentage of schools achieving Healthy School status was still below the average for similar councils**

Councillor Durcan was chairing a Task and Finish Group on Healthy Schools.

The Committee **Agreed** that

- I) Councillors Martin and Finch be asked to provide an update report on the Transition Board in September 2009 and then will be asked to be witnesses at the Committee in March 2010.
- II) The Healthy Schools Task and Finish Group will report back to the Committee before June.

<b>Staying Safe</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
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**a. The threshold for referral to children and young people's services was not understood and acted on consistently**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that this point had also been raised in the last APA letter and officers had been questioned about it previously.

Nicky Pace informed the Committee that training in the localities was in place and that the point related to the referral system not being understood and acted upon. There was an issue with some agencies who would like the threshold to be lower. Further training in schools needed to take place. The Directorate had been reiterating the threshold through the CYPSP Board and the Safeguarding Board and training had taken place across the county. The Directorate was changing procedures so that one team would handle all referrals. This would provide consistency across Essex.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- Members were concerned that the assessment could only be as good as the initial report. Nicky Pace informed the Committee that this report would only be one part of the assessment: the team would speak to all parties before forming their judgment.
- That it seemed there were a significant number of frontline staff who did not agree with the threshold and exaggerate the case, as they want Social Workers involved with all cases.
- Resources were limited, and Social Workers work on more complex cases and therefore cannot work with the lower end cases.
- Members were concerned that only eight Local Authorities in the Country had this low grade for safeguarding. Members were informed that the JAR would clarify this point.
- Members requested up to date information as they were concerned that they were working on information that was a year old.

**b. Recruitment and vetting of staff working with children were not sufficiently robust**

Nicky Pace informed the Committee that in March 2008 service areas had different databases and that some groups had not had up to date CRB checks. All staff now have up to date and compliant CRBs.

**c. Insufficient priority was given to bringing about improvements by learning from complaints about service and serious case reviews**

The problems in this area needed to be explored further. In Leaving and After Care the learning process was felt to be quite good.

**d. The target for reducing the number of young people who were victims of crime had not been met**

Nicky Pace informed the Committee that this point was due to the lack of staff at the time of the self assessment, as Victim Support Workers were working at 50 per cent capacity. The vacancies have now been filled and the service had improved significantly.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- Young People up to 16 were well looked after but after this age they could become homeless. There was a comprehensive Leaving and After Care service for 16 - 25 years old which was noted in the JAR as good.
- Not all Looked After Children leave care at 16, as some leave at 18.
- The Directorate had bid for a pilot scheme for continuing care for 18 – 25 years olds but was not successful.
- The Directorate works with Districts and Borough Councils to provide homeless young people with accommodation as there was considerable pressure to provide accommodation for homeless Young People from 17 – 25.
- The Directorate contacts and supports Young People at university who want to return in the holidays to Essex with a variety of schemes;
- Foster Carers were unable to foster Young People over the age of 18. The Directorate was working to support Foster Carers who want to continue to care for these Young People over the age of 18.

The Committee **Agreed** that Safeguarding would be investigated as the major issue at the April 2009 meeting.

<b>Enjoying and Achieving</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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The Committee noted the strengths and the good work.

- Outcomes in the Early Years and Foundation Stage were below the averages nationally and for similar councils**
- There were still too many schools below the GCSE floor target**
- Attendance in secondary schools was not improving fast enough and the rate of absence for looked after children was high**

Councillor Riley (as Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel) informed the Committee that now the Virtual School was in place the absence rates of Looked After Children should improve. Attendance for most children was distinguished by authorised or unauthorised absence by the school. For Looked After Children however, the data was recorded as absent and was not distinguished between authorised and unauthorised.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- That the statistics had now reduced from 17% to 14.5% absence for Looked After Children.
- That every half day absent was counted towards the 25 days absence for Looked After Children.

**d. The proportion of fixed term exclusions in primary schools was higher than that in similar councils**

During the meeting the following points were made:

- That schools have to provide cover for pupils on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of exclusion.
- Members were concerned about primary school pupils being excluded and left on their own by working parents.
- Support was required at an early stage to prevent exclusions.
- A reciprocal agreement scheme between local primary schools was set up but was impracticable, as primary schools have little space or staff to separate their own children with behavioural problems.
- The Directorate supports schools and challenges poor practice.
- That, if required, evidence could be taken by representatives from ASHE, to enable the Committee to influence schools.

**e. There was a rising trend in the issuing of new statements against falling trend nationally and in similar councils. Referrals to the special educational needs and Disability Rights Tribunal were twice the national average**

The Committee **Agreed** that

- i) Attendance for Looked After Children would be left in the care of the Corporate Parenting Panel, who would report to this Committee in September 2009.
- ii) That items a, b, d and e above be looked at in relation to the JAR and monitor other Local Authorities benchmarking if required.

<b>Making a Positive Contribution</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
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The Committee noted the strengths and the good work and felt that under this heading these outweighed the concerns expressed.

- a. The percentage rate of re-offending had risen faster than in similar councils**
- b. The proportion of new offenders had fallen much more sharply than in similar councils or nationally**



During the meeting the following point was made:

- That more information was required on both a and b above, for example, geographically and type of offence.

The Committee **Agreed** that it would wait for the JAR report and then the whole Committee would look at baseline data, geographical and offence patterns and then call witnesses from Youth Services.

<b>Achieving Economic Well Being</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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The Committee noted the strengths and the good work, but also the long list of weaknesses.

- a. Participation in post-16 work-based learning had fallen over the last three years and remains below the national average**
- b. Whilst the percentage for teenage parents in education had nearly doubled, it was still below the averages nationally and for similar councils**
- c. Over a third of young offenders who were above school age were not in employment, education and training**
- d. Employers were not sufficiently engaged in the 14-19 strategy and not all head teachers were aware of 14-19 developments**
- e. The council does not routinely make use of data on ethnicity to inform 14-19 planning**
- f. The proportion of looked after children with a personal education plan was improving but still low**

During the meeting the following points were made:

- The above points needed to be looked at together as a single package.
- Members were concerned that the above points concerned children and young people who were marginalised and their needs not being catered for sufficiently.
- Members were informed that the proportion of looked after children with a personal education plan was improving but still fluctuates, as these were renewed and updated annually. It was one of the Virtual Head Teacher's objectives to ensure that all Looked After Children have an up to date plan.
- The numbers involved could not be ascertained by these comments.

Members **agreed** that:

- i) points a, c and d could be linked to the downturn and may appear in the JAR.
- ii) Point c required updated clearer statistics to aid Members.
- iii) Point e may be in the JAR.
- iv) Point f would be followed up by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

<b>Capacity to Improve, Including the Management of Children's Services</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
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The Committee noted the strengths and the good work by staff and middle managers.

- a. **There was insufficient monitoring by the Local Children Safeguarding Board to ensure best safeguarding practice across the council**

Members noted that this point would be looked at in detail at the next meeting.

- b. **The delivery of frontline services with continuity and consistency**

Members noted that this point was linked to the threshold points above.

Members **agreed** that the Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Board would attend the April meeting as a witness.

### **General Points**

Members were concerned that some points had appeared in the APA letter the previous year. It was **agreed** that this Committee could play a very important role as a critical friend for officers completing the APA Self Assessment Process. Nicky Pace would inform the Committee of the timescales on the next assessment. The following Members agreed to be part of the sub group to assist in the preparation of the assessment: - Councillors Twitchen, Pearson, Riley, Turrell and Durcan and Mr Richards and Mrs Sadowsky.

### **APRIL 2009 DISCUSSION**

Councillor Peter Martin, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Families and Nicky Pace, Director, Vulnerable Children & Young People were in attendance.

## **Statement by Cabinet Member**

Councillor Martin then made a statement on the following lines: He informed the Committee that, despite the challenges, his aspiration was that the service would become 'outstanding' by 2012. Both the APA and the JAR report concluded that services for safeguarding were inadequate. These judgements applied to all partners involved in delivering services to children in Essex. He informed the Committee that he recognised that this was unacceptable.

The Cabinet Members for Schools Children and Families have since late 2007 identified and addressed weaknesses by setting up two improvement boards; an officer board chaired by Joanna Killian and a Member/officer board chaired by Lord Hanningfield. These boards remained in place until summer 2008 and led to four main outcomes:

- Strengthen the management team.
- Development of new threshold criteria.
- £50m of new investment for SCF over four years with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention and on safeguarding children with a further £40m redirected via efficiencies and grants so that it contributes to service delivery in these areas.
- Strengthen the role of members with a three-way Cabinet member split of SCF in late Summer 2008 as it was recognised that the service was too big for one member and that individual focus and scrutiny was required in each area. The three Cabinet Members were supported by four deputies.

Both the APA and JAR reports identified a number of weaknesses in safeguarding, including unacceptably high social work case loads, inconsistent implementation of agreed service thresholds and insufficiently robust recruitment systems. Councillor Martin informed the Committee that all of these weaknesses were being addressed prior to and during the JAR inspections. The JAR inspection highlighted several strengths, for example, good safeguarding training; support and guidance to schools; an effective strategic response leading to a reduction in bullying; and good work to tackle anti-social behaviour and reduce re-offending. He highlighted paragraphs 28 and 78 of the JAR report which recognise that the Council had good capacity to improve and had already made good progress at identifying and addressing weaknesses. There were both separate weekly and fortnightly meetings for officers and Members and a joint Member and officer meeting to ensure that improvements took place.

In other areas of the JAR report outcomes for children were judged adequate or good, including a level 3 'good' for outcomes for children with learning difficulties and / or disabilities.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) had issued an Improvement Notice which sets out the areas where the County Council and partners were expected to make progress by March 2010. These steps have been agreed jointly between the DCSF, the Government Office of the East of England and Essex County Council. A similar notice had gone to other authorities judged 'inadequate.' Councillor Martin stressed that the level of intervention from DCSF was light touch, with the emphasis on monitoring rather than direct intervention. An Improvement Board was being set up to oversee the improvement programme, which would be chaired by the Director of Learning at Go-east and would include a representative from DCSF, as well as the Audit Commission. Councillor Martin, Joanna Killian (Chief Executive) and Graham Tombs (Executive Director: Schools, Children and Families Services) and the independent chair of the ESCB would be Members on this Board. The DCSF required monthly progress updates. The County Council would provide the secretariat to the Board.

The Committee had a copy of the high level SCF Business Improvement Action Plan but the full plan was more detailed. Some of the actions in this plan were due to be delivered by September 2008, whilst the JAR inspection took place. This Action Plan was a working document.

Key elements of the SCF Improvement Plan include:

- Ensuring robust action planning to address practice deficits in children's social care.
- Reducing social worker case loads.
- Updating procedures and policies manual and ensuring policies and practice guidance were in place.
- Having in place effective social care audit /monitoring.

All case files of children on the Child Protection Plan have been audited by an external agency. We also have independent consultants reviewing our practices and procedures.

This Business Improvement Action Plan requires action by all partners; the expectation was that the partners would commit to this Plan to ensure delivery. The Directorate was currently in consultation with its partners to develop a new Children and Young People's Plan for 2009 - 11.

Councillor Martin highlighted the impact of the recent Baby P tragedy in Haringey, which came to media attention in November 2008; the tragedy had had three main impacts in Essex:

- A rise in referrals and an increased cost pressure on Looked After Children Services (i.e. Cabinet approved in January 2009 an additional £8.9 million to fund costs pressures in SCF of which £4.3 million of the pressure related to the costs of Looked After Children due to an increased number of placements being made with external agencies). The additional funding package in July 2008 was therefore timely but it was important that we continue with measures to contain cost pressures. This highlights the importance of the current campaign to recruit an additional 100 foster carers in Essex.
- Media coverage of this case had had an adverse impact on the morale of existing social workers and had created a more difficult climate in which to attract new people in to social work as a career. The improvement Action Plan includes recruitment of 90 social workers to help reduce case loads and add capacity. The Directorate was currently undertaking a concerted recruitment drive for experienced social workers in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and the United States. The preference was for Essex social workers but we have to recognise the reality that there was a shortage of social workers across the UK.
- Lord Laming reviewed the implementation and impact of the 2004 Children Act since the Baby P tragedy. Lord Laming's report and 58 recommendations were published on 12 March 2009 and were accepted by Government. Some recommendations have been implemented by Essex, for example, the need to have an independent chair of the local safeguarding children board and many of the other recommendations were currently being implemented. All the recommendations from the Laming report would be incorporated into the Action Plan.

## **Discussion by the Committee**

During the meeting the following points were made:

- The Committee would like an update on the Foster Care recruitment campaign.
- That the process to become a Foster Carer could take a considerable time, and would it be possible to streamline this to quicken the process?
- The Directorate was producing a recruitment DVD for Foster Carers and would provide full information on children and young people's needs so that prospective Foster Carers could make an informed decision.
- When Social Workers from abroad were recruited there would be a buddy system in place which includes support outside work and over weekends.
- That the Directorate was working with children and young people to include their views in the consultation process.
- Members asked for a copy of the full detailed Business Improvement Plan, to enable them to make considered judgements. It was acknowledged that the Business Improvement Plan was a working document and would therefore continue to evolve.

- Members were concerned that Safeguarding Children processes were weak and that improvements had not been in place earlier.
- Members asked if the Directorate had links with Animal Welfare Societies as people who were cruel to children were also cruel to animals and this linked information may help to spot children at possible risk.
- The amount of work involved in setting up TASCCs may have diverted attention from Safeguarding Children.
- Members were concerned regarding the transformation of services and how this would affect the Schools, Children and Families Service but were informed that there should be no detrimental changes to service delivery.
- How were the recently agreed Laming recommendations to be implemented in Essex?

Members **agreed** that they should receive the full detailed SCF Business Improvement Plan for the next meeting.

The Chairman reminded Members that the Council collectively is a Corporate Parent. The Committee accepted this role but not all Members felt that they were able to influence Corporate Parenting Policy.

### **The Role of the Essex Safeguarding Children's Board (ESCB)**

Paul Fallon, Chairman of the Safeguarding Board and Nicola Park, ESCB Business Performance Manager, Essex Safeguarding Children Board & Essex Vulnerable Adults Protection Committee gave evidence to the Committee. Nicky Pace was also in attendance.

Paul Fallon informed the Committee that he was contracted to work 30 days per year as Chairman and had been in post since December 2008. He was appointed as an independent Chairman due to his previous work in Local Government and in particular in Children's Services. The Safeguarding Children's Board scrutinises and holds the Schools, Children and Families Service and its partners working in Child Protection and Safeguarding to account. It meets quarterly. The Safeguarding Children's Board operates independently from the Directorate. Its support staff were situated in the Legal and Registration Service. The Board had statutory responsibilities as a critical friend to add value for the children in Essex by working with all agencies involved with Children. There were six full time staff supporting the Board. The Board was comprised of statutory Members as set out by the Government.

The Laming Report had just been published and the Board would need to look at how to implement its recommendations. Essex was large and diverse, with partners having different boundaries.

The Board uses procedure guidance and had an Action Plan with six key questions:

- Is the children's workforce fit for purpose?
  - Safe recruitment
  - Supervision/appraisal
  - The 6 core competencies
  - CP Training
  - Complaints/allegations
- Is safeguarding really everyone's business?
  - Community awareness
  - Confidence
  - Do we know what to do if we think a child is being abused?
- Do the right children have protection plans and are they being fully implemented in a timely way?
  - Performance management system/PIs
  - Audits
- Are we sure that no two children will die as a result of the same system failure/s?
  - SCRs
- Are we doing all we can to reduce the risk of avoidable child deaths?
  - Child death review panels
- Are we satisfied with the quality of care for any child not living with its parent, a close relative of someone else with PR?
  - Private fostering
  - Runaways

There were four key areas of concern regarding the ESCB identified in the JAR and APA reports.

- The Board had taken an insufficiently strong lead in driving the safeguarding agenda and had lacked focus on Social Care. The Chairman of the Board was determined that the focus of the Board should be on the deficits of the Child Protection, specifically in Children's Social Care which would be reflected in the Board's new Business Plan. Paul Fallon would like to update the Committee on its progress at the appropriate time.

- Unacceptably long delays in undertaking and completing Serious Case Reviews and in implementing the Action Plans. Every time a child dies a Serious Case Review Sub-Group was convened to see what lessons could be learnt from each case. The findings were submitted to Ofsted who assess each case; this could take time. Due to the large number of Serious Case Reviews taking place (seven at one point) the Board had difficulty monitoring the implementation of the actions from these cases. The backlog of reviews had now been cleared. Currently there were two Serious Case Reviews outstanding. An improved monitoring system had now been implemented and extra support staff has been recruited.
- Lack of sufficient oversight of recruitment practices, and recruitment and vetting of staff working with children were not sufficiently robust. A new sub group had been set up with the first meeting taking place in May 2009 to develop safer recruitment standards and monitor policies and procedures.
- Lack of identification of areas of concern and lack of follow up regarding audits of agency safeguarding responsibilities. Most Board Members were bound by section 11 of the Children Act 2004. The Board asked all its Members to complete section 11 audits to ensure that all partners were complying with their statutory requirements. The Board now had a system for section 11 auditing which encourages agencies to take responsibility for reviewing their own performance and reports to the Board on a frequent basis.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- That, whilst Ofsted was looking at the Serious Case Review Action Plan, each agency was implementing the findings in the Action Plan.
- Each Local Authority with responsibility for children was required to have a Safeguarding Children's Board, but currently these Boards were not accountable to any other body.
- The independent Chairman of the Safeguarding Children's Board was appointed by a multi-agency group, and the ESCB would decide if the Chairman's contract was renewed.
- That Young People who were homeless were potentially to be housed by District and Borough Councils.
- Members were concerned regarding the transparency of the Board as the meetings were not publicised and minutes not published. The Chairman of the Board would investigate having the Board's meetings mainly in public with a private part if required.
- Members were concerned that only 1 in 9 children who were identified as causing concern were referred by GPs and teachers.
- The ESCB would like all agencies to refer all children causing concern before they become very serious, but understands the resources thresholds;
- Training for agencies was good but there may be more training required;



- A Member was concerned that the Armed Forces representative on the Board was not the appropriate person;
- Fostering Services have a good relationship with Dr Barnardos, although Barnardos does not have a place on the ESCB;
- The Chairman and the Vice Chairmen would like to attend an ESCB meeting. Nicola Park will arrange with Members.

The Committee **agreed** that Paul Fallon be invited back in 12 months time for a progress report.

## **Referral Thresholds**

Nicky Pace, Director for Vulnerable Children attended for this item.

A multi agency group was set up to establish the criteria for Referral Thresholds. The guidance on Referral Thresholds was agreed by all agencies working with children. Training had been rolled out across the county for all agencies. There would be a single point of entry to the service to ensure that all referrals were treated fairly and appropriately.

The windscreen was explained (which illustrates the four levels of vulnerability and need shown as a continuum). Child Protection was Tier 3, high intervention work, it was hoped that the child would be reassessed as the case continues and that the intervention was reduced as the child's needs were lessened and so the case moves down the windscreen. Looked After Children receive services from all four levels. Professional work also took place across all four levels.

During the meeting the following points were made:

- That the professional who referred the child takes ownership of the case whilst involving other professionals/agencies. If the case was given to a Social Worker then the Social Worker takes ownership of the case.
- The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) should only need to be filled out once, if completed correctly.
- That CAMHS initial assessments seem to take a long time.
- Members were concerned that the TASCs seemed to have 50% vacancies. Members were informed that a review of TASCs was currently being undertaken to look at capacity, function and resources.
- The single point of entry would not be held by TASCs but would be in Social Care.
- If a referral was urgent it by-passes the system without a CAF which then had to be filled in within five days.
  - The CAF form was a national format, which could be accessed by all agencies, although some agencies do not always want to share information.
  - The single point of entry would inform appropriate agencies about the CAF on individual cases.

- The Chairman felt it was important that staff understood that, if they make a wrong judgement call, as long as the correct process had been adhered to, then Members would support them.
- An audit on 96 cases would take place at Easter, to check the referral threshold system.
- Members asked if they could track a couple of cases, (with full anonymity, to both protect the child and family) and also to have a true picture of the complexities of any individual case. These two cases would periodically be presented at Committee for an update on their progress.

## **MAY 2009 DISCUSSION**

This meeting was a witness session only. Witnesses were asked a range of set questions and then some questions specific to their role.

### **General issues for all Witnesses**

- How are you appointed to the ESCB?
- What is your remit from the appointing body?
- How connected is your agency to the ESCB?
- How do you report back?
- How much support to you get when you report back?
- Are you authorised to act on their behalf (for example, all PCTs, Schools etc)?
- What is your agency's role under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004?
- What is the interaction of your agency with Essex County Council, Schools, Children and Families Directorate?

### **Specific Issues**

- Has your agency any concerns?
- Have you any good practice you would like to share?
- Is there anything you would like to tell the Committee?

The answers given are set out in the minutes of this meeting, which have been circulated with the agenda for the PSC meeting on 2 July 2009.

#### **FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED**

At the Committee meeting in July evidence will be received from the Probation Service, the Youth Justice Service, the YMCA, and the Salvation Army. This will complete the evidence gathering process already agreed by Members.

The Committee will then need to decide whether it wishes to seek evidence from any other organisations or individuals and, if so, how to go about doing this.

The next meeting will be on 2 September. The Cabinet Member will attend on that occasion. The Committee will then be expecting to finalise its recommendations to forward to the Cabinet Member and Directorate Management Team.

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