

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 10th October, 2013.

Present:- Councillors Sohal (Chair), Brooker, Carter, Davis, O'Connor, Malik and Matloob (until 7.30 p.m.)

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor P Mann (until 7.40 p.m.)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Abe and Hussain, and Lynda Bussley

PART 1

11. Declaration of Interest

No declarations were made.

12. Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 July 2013

The minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel meeting on the 1 July 2013 were approved as a correct record.

AMENDMENT TO ORDER

The Chair confirmed, with the agreement of the Panel that there would be an amendment to the order of agenda items so that the items would be taken in the following order: 8, 9, 4, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10.

13. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – to note the current work programme.

14. Attendance Record

Resolved – to note the attendance record for the current municipal year.

15. Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2012/13 and Child Trafficking and Exploitation Progress Report

Paul Burnett, Independent Chair of the Slough Local Safeguarding Children Board, presented the Board's annual report for 2012/13 and an update on the work that had been done to tackle child sexual exploitation.

The Panel noted the priorities for 2012/13 and that these would remain in place during 2013/14 although the actions underneath these priorities would be different. In particular the Board would face three specific challenges:

- the need to demonstrate the positive impact of the Board's strategies and procedures on the outcomes for children;
- to further challenge partners to provide a consistently high quality service; and

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- to improve workforce skills and competencies.

The Panel discussed the fact that financial pressures had not yet impacted on partners abilities to fulfil their responsibilities on the Board. The capacity of Police to attend statutory meetings had been an issue, and there was a concern that some agencies might decrease their attendance and/or the quality of the information they were providing. In order to monitor this situation, the Board was receiving regular reports on partners budget reductions and an assessment of the risk posed to safeguarding work these might pose.

Members also questioned how the voice of the child was being embedded in the practices of the Board, and it was confirmed that this statutory requirement was built into the processes, and that performance in this regard had improved over the previous 12 months. There were three general levels of engagement:

- 1) strategic level
- 2) community of interest
- 3) 'how was it for you'/direct

The Panel was disappointed to see that there were still barriers to the use of eCAF, but noted that a new bespoke local system was being developed which would replace the old system and provide a simpler tool for professionals to use.

Regarding child sexual exploitation (CSE) the Panel noted that progress had been made, and the LSCB was more confident that the data was now providing a fuller picture with 45-47 reported cases. Risk assessments were complete and provided a clearer picture of the likely levels of prevalence for the area allowing the design of appropriate pathways for dealing with cases or those at risk. There had been an conference on CSE held in spring 2013, with 120 partners attending, and targeted campaigns to raise the profile of the issue with hotels, taxi drivers and other licensing organisations. The LSCB had also commissioned a drama to educate social work staff and schools on the dangers of the CSE with mixed results which were being reviewed to see, in particular, how to improve the uptake amongst schools for this sort of educational tool. The LSCB had also secured a funding bid from the Safer Slough Partnership to create a 12-month post of CSE Co-ordinator.

Resolved – that future reports would include the LSCB balanced scorecard.

16. Member Questions

Jane Wood, Director for Wellbeing, provided a verbal response to Councillor Abe's questions regarding the level of understanding amongst the council and its partners of the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice and risk associated with FGM in Slough, and the safeguarding measures in place in Slough to tackle the issue.

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Jane Wood confirmed that FGM is, by nature, often a hidden issue, as well as a culturally-based issue. It was confirmed that there was an understanding of the issue amongst the council social care staff and partners. In 2007 there was extensive partnership working on the issue, a number of practice guides were developed, which included advice and guidance for schools, partners and council staff on FGM, the impact of FGM on young girls and women, and the identification of risk. The multiagency safeguarding children procedures also include FGM as abuse. In 2012, the Council commissioned further training on FGM.

The Thames Valley Police lead the co-ordination of local intelligence gathering of cases. Since 2007 there have been three separate situations raised that have resulted in investigation and assessment of risk:

- two cases where there was an allegation against an adult (male) for which police investigations undertaken could find no evidence to take the matter further; and
- one alert from Maternity Services, where a pregnant woman was found to have undergone the procedure in childhood before she migrated to the UK, and there were concerns of the practice continuing to the next generation. In this instance, an assessment of risk was undertaken and there was no indication of concern.

Jane Wood stated that there have been no new reports to statutory services for some years.

Establishing the level of FGM incidence is problematic for all safeguarding boards. FGM is often kept hidden by families and others, and at the present time there is no national data set on FGM. The lack of reporting of FGM to statutory children's services and the police, and the information collated locally from public health, does not identify FGM as a priority issue for Slough. The NSPCC recently provided figures on the number of cases relating to FGM known in London. The total was only 34 cases. This illustrates the lack of available data on prevalence nationally, but this does not mean that FGM does not occur.

Jane Wood confirmed that for the past two years the priority area for development for the Slough Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) has been Child Sexual Exploitation, supported by both national policy priorities and local intelligence, and CSE will continue to be a main programme of work of the Board over the next year. For 2014 the LSCB Executive has also identified FGM as part of the Board's 2014 work and agreed FGM will be the focus of the SLSCB annual conference in the spring of 2014. The conference will consider new ways of increasing awareness amongst professionals, particularly in primary healthcare, include a refresh of the 2007 guidance to staff across the statutory sector in the light of the new *working together* national policy on safeguarding, and consider ways in which there could be closer working with local community groups, for example the Somalian Women's Groups.

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Jane Wood stressed to the Panel that FGM is abuse and a criminal offense, and elected members play an important role in championing awareness in their work. The multiagency children's safeguarding procedures should be used for raising alerts to the police and children's services of concerns in relation to a child. If an elected member has a concern that a child is or could be at risk of FGM, or a concern is brought to their attention by a third party, it is their duty to report the concern and through the appropriate route.

17. Progress Report: Safeguarding and Looked After Children

Jane Wood, Director for Wellbeing, summarised the report setting out the progress made against the five central themes of the Improvement Plan for Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services.

The Panel noted that a primary focus had been improving social work practice on the ground. In this regard progress could be seen through performance indicators, and with monthly audits allowing effective comparisons of quality. Additional areas that the Panel discussed included: casework levels; the impact of the CSE work; a continued rolling recruitment and the need to retain good staff; an improved calibre of agency staff; and measures of listening to staff feedback. The next step would be to ensure that the good quality practice that could be seen would be consistently in place going forward.

Members noted that there had been a number of deep dive exercises, and one in particular had focused on services relating to domestic abuse. There had been Thames Valley-wide training for the Police, establishing a more child-centric approach, with the aim of improving the quality and consistency of information. Following on from this, there would now be a Thames Valley Child Protection Officer co-located within the council social work team five days a week to assist with joint working in this area.

The Children and Young Peoples Partnership Board (CYPPB) work had been progressing well, with the revised Children and Young Peoples Plan being finalised. The revised plan had been carefully reworked in order to ensure that all partners shared the key priorities for the Board. There had also been the development of an engagement strategy and a workforce strategy. The focus of the CYPPB over the next 12 months would be evidencing what difference the work had done had made.

Resolved – to note the report.

18. Early Help in Slough - Getting it right for children

Kitty Ferris, Assistant Director for Children, Young People and Families, introduced the report providing a detailed update on the work to deliver a robust Early Intervention (Early Help) Strategy, a key element of the Safeguarding Improvement Programme.

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The Panel noted the positive feedback that the proposals had received from the Early Help Board. Members discussed the impact of local changes in healthcare on the programme of work, and recognised that both the CCG safeguarding lead and community health teams were engaged at this stage, although there was still work to be done with the wider CCG.

The Panel discussed the difficulties of multi-agency working, and the need to ensure voluntary group engagement in the project. It was noted that there was community and voluntary sector representation on the CYPPB.

Resolved –

- 1) to note the report; and
- 2) to receive a scorecard of Performance Indicators demonstrating sustainable progress at the January 2014 meeting of the Panel.

19. Annual Report of Independent Reviewing Officers Services 2012/13

Kitty Ferris, Assistant Director for Children, Young People and Families, introduced the annual report from the Slough Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service.

The Panel noted that this Service was statutory function, with the team located within the council, although independent of the social work line management arrangements. Members discussed the key issues for the Service over the past year including: the increased number of Looked After Children (LAC); the increased number of older children in system; additional investment into the system which had increased the numbers of IROs which had managed to lead to a decrease in the workload levels. Key performance indicators had demonstrated that there had been a 95% achievement for the timeliness of reviews, and a 93.9% achievement of children actively contributed to their reviews.

Resolved – to note the report.

20. Date of Next Meeting - 5 December 2013

Resolved – that the date of the next meeting would be 5 December 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)

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