

## **Children's Social Care Commissioner Malcolm Newsam**

Report to Commissioners' Public Meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015

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As Commissioner with responsibility for Children's Social Care I have the lead for the following areas:

- *Children will grow up in a safe environment. We will ensure a creative strategy is delivered that includes prevention, detection, and high quality care alongside a robust enforcement approach. (Mission outcome 1)*
- *Good, reliable children's care services, well managed within agreed resources. (Mission outcome 2)*
- *Survivors of child sexual abuse or exploitation will have access to a good range of multi-agency support services (Mission outcome 3)*

To support a focussed approach to improving Children's Social Care Services I have articulated seven key priorities. This report illustrates the progress made by the Council so far:

### **1. Strengthen the arrangements for screening through the introduction of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub**

1.1 As documented by Ofsted, the arrangements to receive work into the service were chaotic, uncoordinated and dangerous. I laid down the challenge to partners to put in place a Multi-Disciplinary Safeguarding Hub by April 2015 to ensure effective multi-agency screening of all incoming work. I am grateful for the commitment of all staff in the Council and its partners who successfully met this deadline. Particular mention needs to be made of the commitment of South Yorkshire Police who had to overcome significant obstacles to achieve this in the required timescale including the relocation of several officers. Not unusually, the new arrangements still need to be embedded but our approach is immeasurably more secure and recent audits of practice have validated this.

### **2. Put in place sufficient social workers to ensure caseloads are manageable across the service**

2.1 The Council has made a significant investment in additional social workers and has been successful in attracting some high calibre staff. Caseload sizes which were previously too high have now been considerably reduced and in most areas of the service are manageable. This has led to a demonstrable improvement in the quality of practice and recording. Nonetheless, I remain concerned that the Council is over reliant on temporary agency social workers and a more compelling approach to recruitment and retention is required. I am not confident that the salary scales in Rotherham are sufficiently competitive and this is being reviewed urgently.

**3. Clear up the backlog of out of date assessments and ensure that assessments are completed in a timely fashion**

3.1 By the end of February 2015 there were over 300 assessments that had extended beyond the statutory guideline of 45 days. By the beginning of June this number had been reduced to 18 and all of these were only overdue for a few days. More importantly the performance on the timely completion of assessments is outstanding with 98% of assessments being completed in 45 days. More impressively 88% were completed in 35 days. This allows managers time to quality assure the assessment and ask for additional issues to be explored if that is required

**4. Recruit to a permanent senior and middle management structure**

4.1 The Council moved swiftly to agree a senior and middle management structure. This will put greater senior capacity into Commissioning and Early Help while allowing more focus on Safeguarding. These posts are currently going through the appointment process but it has become clear that in this instance also Rotherham's salary scales are not sufficiently competitive and we will not successfully fill all the required positions. I have asked for this situation to be reviewed urgently.

**5. Strengthen the specialist team for investigating Child Sexual Exploitation and put in place strong strategic and operational leadership of CSE**

5.1 Significant progress has been made in putting in place improved operational and strategic arrangements for the management of Child Sexual Exploitation. A new multi-agency team, the Evolve Team, has been set up as a dedicated child sexual exploitation team working with young people and children who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). This new unit replaces the previous co-located arrangements which were ineffective. There are now four full time suitably experienced social work practitioners in place with another appointed and due to start in July. These staff are working alongside Barnardo's project workers, family support workers, police officers and a safeguarding nurse. There are now more robust multi-agency working protocols in place and these are demonstrating greater effectiveness in the joint approach to operations. Alongside this, the Local Safeguarding Children Board is leading on the development of a refreshed strategy to articulate the way forward in tackling Child Sexual Exploitation. I have also set up an Adult Survivors Board to oversee the expansion and re-commissioning of effective services to survivors.

**6. Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focussed on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers**

6.1 There has been a major drive to ensure all children have an up to date plan as this provides an essential foundation for all the work we do with families. Demonstrable progress has been made on this priority as can be seen from the table below:

<b>Plan Type</b>	<b>Lowest</b>	<b>May 29 2015</b>
Child Protection	73%	99%
Looked After Children	78%	95%
Children in Need	36%	87%
Pathway Plans	63%	84%

Similar progress has been made to ensure all children are visited at the appropriate frequency with 100% of Looked after Children and Children with a Child Protection Plan receiving statutory visits except where this was physically impossible ( children out of the country for example)

**7. Address the severe deficits in the computerised case record system as a matter of urgency and procure a replacement system**

7.1 The Council has made rapid progress in commissioning a replacement case record system for social workers. A full procurement exercise was completed by the end of March and the formal decision to award the contract to Liquid Logic was made in April. A project manager has now been appointed and subject to detailed scoping it is anticipated that the new system will go live early in the New Year. In the meantime, significant fixes have been put in place to work round the current system to mitigate its impact, as far as possible, during this transitional period

**Summary**

This report lays out some of the significant steps that have been made since March 2015. Members must be in no doubt as to the scale of the difficulties within the service that are now being exposed and tackled. The steps I have outlined have, however, begun to correct the worst aspects of what was a failing service and to build the foundations for a successful recovery.

I am grateful for the support and hard work of my fellow Commissioners, Members and council officers in contributing to the progress we have made to date.

Malcolm Newsam  
 Commissioner for Children’s Social Care  
 5 June 2015