

**COUNCIL SEMINAR
19th April, 2016**

Present:- Councillor (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Astbury, Atkin, Elliot, Jones, McNeely, Pitchley, Russell, Sansome, Taylor, Watson, Whelbourn and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Currie, Fleming, Hoddinott, Jepson, Lelliott, Reeder and Roddison.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES - QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Councillor G. Watson, Deputy Leader, welcomed Mrs. Sue Wilson (Head of Service, Performance and Planning) and Mrs. Vicky Schofield (Head of Service, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance) who gave a presentation about the Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Young People's Services. The presentation highlighted the following information:-

(i) The importance of Quality Assurance

- Management oversight, checking and challenging practice of staff in Children and Young People's Services Social Work teams;
- Feedback and learning;
- Senior Management accountability – line of sight from strategy to operations;
- Drive up practice quality, procedural compliance and use of professional judgement;
- Understand practice trends, thematic areas for improvement and impact, show improvement journey;
- External scrutiny and service ownership.

(ii) Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reporting in September 2014 -

- Senior managers do not ensure that they have sufficient oversight of the quality of practice;
- Poor performance management and limited quality assurance processes have contributed to the Council's lack of effective action to address deteriorating performance;
- Managers are not sufficiently involved in the oversight and quality assurance of practice;
- Subsequently, Ofsted recommended that the Council should undertake effective performance management and quality assurance arrangements and ensure that they are well understood; the previous quality framework was not sufficiently embedded into the organisation.

REPORT FOR INFORMATION - 19/04/16

(iii) The Council's actions taken since the Ofsted report (of September 2014)

- A Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Young People's Services was launched in September 2015;
- This was underpinned by a specific framework for children's social care;
- Recruited Interim Auditors to provide capacity and experience to begin to undertake routine audits;
- Appointed to the permanent post of Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

(iv) The Quality Assurance Framework

- Making secure positive outcomes for this Borough's children, young people and their families;
- Deliver quality services for this Borough's children, young people and their families;
- Comply with external frameworks and regulations (ie: Ofsted / Working Together to Safeguard Children);
- Embed agreed service standards across Children and Young People's Services ; ten key standards have already been established;
- Monitor and evaluate this Council's quality and performance against the agreed standards;
- Ensure workforce development impacts directly and improves the quality of practice based on the findings of the monitoring and evaluation being undertaken;
- Make lasting improvements across all services.

(v) Elements of the Quality Assurance Framework

- Monthly Team Manager Audits;
- Monthly Senior Manager re-audits (use of the Ofsted service definitions);
- Beyond Auditing;
- Safeguarding Quality Assurance visits;
- Observation of Practice;
- The role of the Young Inspectors;

(vi) Team Manager Audits and Re-audits

- Monthly audits are undertaken by all team managers within Social Care and the Early Help Service);
- These are rated in line with the 4 grading criteria from Ofsted;
- The results of these will be published in a monthly Quality Assurance report;
- A sample of these audits are then re-audited by a senior manager, this approach is to establish the joint understanding of "good" case work – the process examines whether good judgements are being

made; issues of concern and learning needs are identified in this audit process.

(vii) Safeguarding Quality Assurance Visits

- Every two months the Director of Children's Services, the Deputy Director, the Lead Member and the Head of Safeguarding undertake a joint visit to an operational front-line staff team;
- Talking with staff, observing practice, audits of cases are examples of activity undertaken; there are now five auditor posts.

(viii) Beyond Auditing

- Six key areas of practice – what makes the difference; 3 ways to practice “how” to get right outcome for children and families; 3 areas to identify “what” the Council is achieving for children families;
- Focus on working with teams to improve practice - learning conversations;
- The pilot phase concluded during March, 2016;
- Proposals to adjust the current approach – particularly around records, reporting and moderation of audits;
- Launch of a new programme approach to Beyond Auditing, early in May 2016.

(ix) What information is available from the Audits ?

- There is inconsistency in the improvement journey across the service (eg Duty and Assessment, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and child sexual exploitation); other areas are less good,
- Compliance with statutory and local guidance is an improvement (visits, assessment timescales);
- Although performance is improving, it is acknowledged that the quality of practice now needs to improve further.

(x) The Next Steps

- Routine monthly reporting shared with stakeholders;
- Links to training and development and the broader workforce developments;
- Principal Social Worker to work with staff and develop further their practice;
- Improve and embed the Beyond Auditing Programme Approach;
- Improve consistency of auditing approach across Managers and Services.

Members raised a number of specific issues during discussion:-

REPORT FOR INFORMATION - 19/04/16

(a) The importance of the audit process and the depth of investigation; it was noted that Ofsted performs both an inspection function and also a process of improvement visits to aid in securing improvement in service performance; there will be peer reviews of various aspects of Service performance taking place at different times in June 2016 (leadership, management and governance) and in October 2016 (Looked After Children services);

(b) Audits and reviews of the Services take place on a frequent and regular basis, although the specific arrangements and dates are not usually announced to staff beforehand; whenever children and families are to be included within the visiting process, they will receive appropriate prior notification of the arrangements, in order that their consent may be obtained;

(c) Action to be taken in respect of concerns arising from an audit and/or inspection; cases are audited by managers (eg: 27 cases were scheduled for audit in February 2016 and 24 audits were completed; the three remaining cases had to be scheduled at a later date); this detailed auditing process ensured that any issues of concern became apparent and were identified at an early stage and corrective action could be taken quickly, with the safeguarding of children and young people as the paramount consideration;

(d) Members asked for assurance that the Senior Leadership Team within Children and Young People's Services were aware of the disadvantaged circumstances of some families resident in the Rotherham Borough area;

(e) The importance of the assessment process itself being of the highest quality; the quality checking will include bench-marking the performance of this Council against that of other similar local authorities; the systematic collection of information from the auditing process will be used to inform future practice and the training and development of professional staff;

(f) Elected Members will continue their scrutiny role, principally via the Improving Lives Select Commission; Service Directors continue to be challenged to improve Service performance by the Government-appointed Commissioners to the Council; a new Performance Board is being established during May 2016, to be chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services;

(g) The improvement process for Children and Young People's Services continues and will ultimately lead to the return of powers to the Council; the extent of improvement will be assessed as part of Ofsted's re-inspection approach to those local authorities which had been assessed as inadequate during the original inspection.

Resolved:- That Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Schofield be thanked for the very informative presentation.