

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT

1.	Meeting:	Children, Young People and Families Partnership Meeting
2.	Date:	30 November 2013
3.	Title:	Multi-agency Review of Serious Child Neglect Cases
4.	Programme Area:	Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board

5. Summary:

This review was initiated as a result of an Ofsted recommendation after the unannounced Child Protection inspection in June 2012.

Ofsted findings

In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Rotherham, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately: undertake a multi-agency review of cases of serious neglect where children's social care services have been involved for a significant period of time

The question that was posed by Ofsted was fundamentally asking for an assurance that any open cases where serious neglect was the main feature, were not subject to drift, and children were not at risk of / actual significant harm. In simple terms “*Do we know when enough is enough?*” for these children.

A multi-agency audit was undertaken 59 cases (59 children in 41 families) in order to address the following outline terms of reference:

- key trends/themes that emerge in relation to the management of cases of long term serious neglect
- gain an understanding of what should be done to affect safe and timely case management and planning
- identify potential impact changes to improve practice
- identify the factors and circumstances that negatively influence decision making and risk assessment.

Based upon these initial findings 2 of the most serious and long term cases were then subject to a multi-agency case mapping exercise, which were utilised in different partnership forums to share the findings of the review at an early stage.

A number of recommendations were made in order to improve multi-agency practice in relation to neglect cases. These are detailed in Section 7 below.

6. Recommendations:

- The partnership notes that 60% of all Rotherham children subject to a Child Protection Plan have neglect as the main category. However, prevalence is actually higher as neglect is a co-feature of other categories (eg physical abuse).
- Future commissioning of services will need to take account of the increasing number of children who are neglected and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will be key to understanding the assessed needs of the Rotherham child population.

7. Proposals and Details:

The Ofsted 2012 Inspection identified that a review of serious neglect cases was required. The LSCB Quality Assurance officer facilitated an individual file audit of 59 files to establish baseline information. The findings from the review identified a number of themes which were translated into the following recommendations.

- **Risk assessment**

The lack of an adequate risk assessment framework across children's services is a weakness. It is an omission that has been criticised within serious case reviews and Ofsted inspections. Risk should be a considered part of all assessments. This review has found that the understanding of risk, management of risk and review of risk is not as effective as we would wish. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given to the;

1. Development of a Rotherham Risk Assessment Model. For example the Safeguarding Analysis Assessment Framework (SAAF) is currently used by numerous Local Authorities and LSCB's, including Islington and Liverpool. The LSCB to develop a consistent approach to risk assessment across partner agencies that is linked to essential guidance on thresholds.
2. Consideration of the Strengthening Families Model for Child Protection Conferences. This is based on the "Signs of Safety" framework it has been tested in practice and is part of many LSCB procedures. It has clear guidelines and provides a framework that produces clearer, smarter and workable child protection plans based around risk and protective factors.
3. The use of Graded Care Profile was initiated in this review as it is frequently mentioned as an example of good practice development in the multi-agency assessment of Neglect. The positive feedback from

practitioners during the review combined with national evaluation (2012) provide a strong rationale for the continuing development of the Graded Care Profile in Rotherham as a fundamental tool to aid the assessment of need and risk. We recommend that the GCP is developed by the LSCB as an assessment tool for all the children's workforce.

4. Use of multi-agency chronologies on cases of significant concern. The use of the "ChronoLater" software that enables chronologies from different agencies to be merged has been effective in identifying and demonstrating patterns of care that a single agency record or chronology may not reveal. Consideration should be given to establishing a protocol when this approach should be considered.

- **Care Planning**

1. It is recommended that as a high percentage of care plans reviewed did not follow SMART principles the local authority should look at the development of in-house resources that clarify SMART principles and aide practitioners incorporating them into their practice.
2. The current care plan template used by CYPS is not operationally effective. Feedback from practitioners is not positive in terms of it being a working document. It is recommended that a task and finish group is established to review and develop a new more appropriate template for Child Protection and Children in Need plans.
3. The LSCB should, in light of "Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013" and this review, refresh the multi-agency training "Case Conferences and Core Groups" to ensure that practitioners fully understand their individual responsibilities, the process of professional challenge and the function of the core group.

- **Supervision**

1. The frequency of social work case supervision is good, however the evidence that demonstrates that it is reflective and influences the outcomes for children and families is limited. CYPS should initially through the use of the team manager action learning sets, establish whether it is felt that this is an issue about recording or about reflective practice itself.

- **Consistency in cases**

1. There is clear evidence that frequent changes of social worker and CP Conference Chair increases drift and contributes to poor care planning. Therefore it is recommended that the number of changes of allocated social workers to children and their families is minimised and this becomes a local safeguarding children indicator.
2. That the work already started to introduce an allocation system to CP Conference Chairs to families' continuers and this also becomes a local safeguarding children indicator.

8. Finance:

There were no financial implications for the undertaking of this review. A financial impact assessment has not been undertaken with regard to the implementation of the specific recommendations.

9. Risks and Uncertainties:

The likelihood of increasing poverty and deprivation and its correlation with childhood neglect, will continue to present challenges and place demands on services across the partnership. It is therefore key that children who are neglected are identified at an early stage and that early help is both available and delivered. The best long term outcomes for children who are neglected are achieved through effective multi-agency intervention before problems escalate and children's welfare is impacted negatively.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications:

The LSCB is now required to evaluate the effectiveness of Early Help services and will be seeking assurance that the partnership is working effectively in all aspects of Early Help outcomes for children and young people.

Future commissioning of services will need to take account of the increasing number of children who are neglected and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will be key to understanding the assessed needs of the Rotherham child population.

11. Background Papers and Consultation:

"In the eye of the storm: Britain's forgotten children and families"

A research report for Action for Children, The Children's Society and NSPCC

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