

Priority: Safeguarding Children & Young People

Why is this a priority?

Safeguarding remains a key area for Children's Services and Children's Social Care; it is one of the most important things we can do for our children and young people to keep them safe!

The number of open cases in Social Care is currently approximately 1,800; in May we received 876 contacts – the highest figure since we started recording in April 2011- and 200 referrals. Approximately 25% of referrals are repeat referrals, which reflect average performance in comparison with others.

Contacts received by children's social care from other agencies and individuals are the clearest demonstration of increased demand for services. Between April 2011 and the end of February 2012 the front door of children's social care received just over 7,900 contacts, an increase of 4% from last year.

The rising number of children coming into contact with the social care system is the fundamental driver for the increasing numbers of children becoming subject to child protection plans. Analysis of trends over the past 2 years shows that for every 100 contacts between 25 and 27 will become referrals and require assessment by social workers. Of those becoming referrals on average 3 will become subject to child protection plans. Fundamentally, the more contacts coming through to the front door of social care that are felt to require assessment, the larger the number of children that will become subject to a child protection plan.

Poverty, domestic violence and neglect are key issues we work on as part of our efforts to reduce safeguarding concerns.

Children's Social Care work closely with partners including the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) for the more serious child protection issues and the Children, Young People and Families Trust (CYPFT) around the wider safeguarding concerns.

Sexual exploitation, alcohol abuse and bullying are other safeguarding issues dealt with through our work with partners. In particular, Engage has been successful in helping to reduce young peoples' vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation by preventing involvement, protecting victims and prosecuting offenders. The recent court case in Rochdale has brought this issue more sharply into focus. Albeit Blackburn with Darwen began this high priority work several years ago.

A full Safeguarding and Looked after Children inspection undertaken by Ofsted in January 2012 evaluated the contribution made by relevant services towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for Looked After Children and care leavers. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services was judged as good, as was the judgement for our Looked After Children. Partnerships in Safeguarding were judged to be outstanding.

The following areas for improvement were identified in relation to safeguarding:

For immediate action:

- Ensure that recruitment processes are improved to include the recording of reasons for gaps in employment history and that full information is obtained from volunteers about their previous volunteering and employment history.

Within three months:

- Ensure that all plans are outcome focused and steps to achieve these outcomes are clearly recorded and reviewed.
- Ensure that recording of strategy discussions and section 47 enquiries and investigations fully reflect the activity undertaken.
- Undertake robust analysis of the numbers of minority ethnic children and young people looked after by the local authority so that patterns and trends can be better understood.
- Ensure that all plans are outcome focused and steps to achieve these outcomes are clearly recorded and reviewed.

Within six months:

- Ensure that clear governance, reporting, monitoring and tracking systems are in place to demonstrate the full impact and effectiveness of the role of the local authority designated officer (LADO) in the management of allegations against professionals working with children.
- Ensure effective signposting is in place within the electronic case recording system to locate other records not held on the electronic system.

An action plan is in place to address these areas for development, in consultation with key stakeholders and partners to ensure an integrated, robust response with accurate timescales is implemented. This action plan will be subject to internal scrutiny and review by Judith Wyllie, Head of Service for Policy, Planning & Performance, on behalf of the Director of Children's Services and, Education Department.

What are the implications of this priority?

A failure to safeguard children and young people can have the most catastrophic outcomes. "Safeguarding" covers a wide range of problems and does not adequately reflect the scale of the issue. Damaged children can grow up to become damaged adults – damaging more children, creating a cycle of neglect and poor outcomes. Reviewing a handful of cases to understand the complexity of this issue and the effect on outcomes would be beneficial to any elected member seeking to gain a deeper insight into this work.

How can scrutiny help?

- Monitoring demand through regular reports on contacts, numbers of LAC and children subject to CP Plans during the year.
- Consider the impact of 'early help' services and whether prevention of the problems displayed by adults that harm children can be reduced in the current climate of cuts.
- Monitor the progress of implementing the Ofsted action plan and other Inspection reports.