

INITIAL RESPONSE TEAM – ANNUAL UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Strategic Priority 4: Learning City

Strategic Priority 5: Attractive and Inclusive City

**Corporate Improvement Priority: Delivering Customer Focused Services,
Improving Partnership Working to Delivery 'One City'**

1. Why has this report come to Committee?

1.1 To update the Children's Services Review Committee with information regarding the purpose and content of the visits made to the Initial Response Team by Senior Management and Elected Members since January 2008.

2. Background

2.1 Following the death of Victoria Climbié and Lord Lamming's subsequent report, one of the recommendations made was that "arrangements must be made for Senior Managers and Councillors to make regular visits to Intake Teams within Children's Services and report their findings to the Chief Executive of the Council and the Children's Services Review Committee."

2.2 The purpose of the visits being to "ensure that systems exist to inform Senior Managers and Elected Members including from first hand experience, of important issues that were affecting teams that provided direct services to children and their families."

2.3 It was agreed that Senior Managers and Elected Members would undertake quarterly visits to the Initial Response Team where they would be given information regarding policies, procedures, staffing and examples of the nature of work undertaken through presentation of live case studies and discuss any other issues.

2.4 It was agreed that the agenda would consist of standard items: Performance Statistics; Team Structure and staffing and there would be a presentation of a piece of work which demonstrated the nature of work undertaken in the Initial Response Team and how procedures are applied through a live case example.

3 Summary of meetings held between January 2008 and January 2009.

3.1 January 2008. Persons Present:

Lynne Goldsmith – Access to Service Manager, Initial Response Team
Ken Hall – Team Manager, Initial Response Team
Keith Moore – Deputy Director, Children’s Services
Rob Gilhespy – Performance and Information Analyst
Coleen Bolam – Business Support
Cllr Pat Smith – Lead Member, Children’s Services
Christine Smith – Co-opt member

Apologies – Phil Barrett

Agenda:

- Introductions
 - Structure and staffing within the Initial Response Team.
 - Presentation – Thresholds for Intervention
 - Quarterly performance Report. Presented by Rob Gilhespy, Performance and Information Analyst.
- 3.2 The presentation demonstrated the process of how threshold criteria were applied within the Initial Response Team to ensure that consistent decision making was applied in relation to ‘contacts’ and assessments of children and their families.
- 3.3 The presentation outlined the procedures and guidance (Chapters 3, 5 & 6, Sunderland Safeguarding Board) and the relevant legislation that was applied to ensure effective and consistent decision making. (Children Act 1989, S17(10) & Children Act 2004).
- 3.4 A case study from a child who became involved with Children’s Social Care was presented to the group to demonstrate how guidance is applied in practice. This involved a case where the first contact with Children’s Social Care was made pre birth, it progressed to a referral and Initial Assessment, S47 investigation (Child Protection Investigation) and then to Initial Child Protection Conference. The presentation demonstrated how different procedures were applied at each stage and contributed to the consistency of the decision making process.
- 3.5 10th April 2008. Persons Present:
- Mick McCracken – Head of Safeguarding
Peter Andrews – Interim Assistant Head of Service
Janet Meek – Locality Manager
Hilary Bagley – Team Manager, Initial Response Team
Rob Gilhespy – Performance and Information Analyst

Coleen Bolam – Business Support
Cllr Pat Smith – Lead Member, Children’s Services
Hilary Phillips – Head of Resources
Christine Hutchinson – Co-opt Member

Agenda:

- Introductions
- Structure and Staffing within the Initial Response Team.
- Presentation - The Customer Journey.
- Quarterly Performance Report
- Any other Business / issues raised by attendees.

3.6 Attendees were introduced to the new personnel within the Initial Response Team as there had been a change in the management structure. In addition to the change in management, information was shared regarding structural changes across case management in relation to the completion of Initial Assessments.

3.7 Members were advised that Initial Assessments were now being carried out by the Locality Teams. The reasons for this being that there were a number of vacancies in the Initial Response Teams and there was a level of inexperience within the team. Consequently IRT 2 was disbanded and staff from this team joined Locality Teams. People at the meeting were advised that managers also believed that this practice would provide more consistency for service users as if an Initial Assessment identified further work was required; the Social Worker who had completed the Initial Assessment would remain involved.

3.8 A presentation was given to the group regarding the ‘Customer Journey’. This took members through the ‘journey’ taken by a child and their family when they were referred into Children’s Social Care, Case Management. The Customer Journey was illustrated through a live case example where a child had sustained a severe head injury. The family were not previously known to Social Care and then progressed through stages of Contact, Referral, Initial Assessment, Section 47 investigation, Initial Child Protection Conference and legal proceedings. Again the case example demonstrated how the procedures were applied to practice.

3.9 18th September 2008. Persons present:

Mick McCracken – Head of Safeguarding
Peter Andrews – Interim Assistant Head of Service

Janet Meek – Locality Manager
Hilary Bagley – Team Manager, Initial Response Team
Rob Gilhespy – Performance and Information Analyst
Coleen Bolam – Business Support
Cllr Pat Smith – Lead Member, Children’s Services
Hilary Phillips – Head of Resources
Christine Hutchinson – Co-opt Member

Agenda:

- Introductions.
 - Structure and Staffing levels with the Initial Response Team.
 - Presentation: IRT – The Work Flow.
 - Responses to the areas of challenge.
 - Presentation by Lynne Goldsmith – The Child and Family Support Service.
 - Presentation by Peter Andrews – MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference)
 - Quarterly Performance Report – Presented by Rob Gilhespy, Performance and Information Analyst.
 - Any other business/any issues raised by attendees.
- 3.10 The presentation at this meeting reported on the process every contact made with Social Care goes through and the challenges that can arise during the process.
- 3.11 During this meeting there was discussion about decision making at the ‘contact’ stage. Particular focus was around ability to make effective decisions within 24 hours and the information that Social Workers did (or did not) have available to them. Information was also shared around the challenges that this presented to Social Workers in terms of gathering information to inform their decisions.
- 3.12 Lynne Goldsmith, Access to Service Manager gave a presentation on the Child and Family Support Service, based within the Children’s Centre and the links that had been established with case management. Information was shared that some Assistant Child Care Workers from Case Management had been relocated within this Service and they were undertaking lower level Child in Need work with families who met this criteria.
- 3.13 Peter Andrews, Interim Assistant Head of Service shared information with the group regarding the MARAC process. The group were advised that the purpose of MARAC is to identify high risk victims of domestic violence and

multi agency information to be shared and strategies to be identified as to how best to ensure the victims safety.

3.14 22nd January 2009. Persons present:

Mick McCracken – Head of Safeguarding
Peter Andrews – Interim Assistant Head of Service
Hilary Bagley – Strategic Service Manager, Initial Response Team
Julie Brady – Team Manager, Initial Response Team
Rob Gilhespy – Performance and Information Analyst
Emma Neal – Business Support
Cllr Pat Smith – Lead Member, Children’s Services
Hilary Phillips – Head of Resources
Christine Hutchinson – Co-opt Member

Agenda:

- Structure and Staffing levels within the Initial Response Team.
- Presentation – The Contact Journey.
- Presentation – Section 47 investigations. Statistical analysis of outcomes.
- Quarterly Performance Report, presented by Rob Gilhespy, Performance and Information Analyst.
- Proposed agenda items for future visits.
- Any other business / Issues raised by attendees.

3.15 Julie Brady was introduced as the new Team Manager in the Initial Response Team as Hilary Bagley had taken up the post of Strategic Service Manager with responsibility for the Initial Response Team.

3.16 The group were informed of the number of agency workers in the team, but that this was a stable arrangement. A discussion took place regarding the national recruitment issues for Social Workers and the impact that agency workers had upon the work force and service delivery.

3.17 It was noted that there had been particular discussions around decision making at the ‘contact’ stage during the previous meeting. Consequently the presentation during this session focussed upon what information Social Workers had available to them when making decisions regarding future actions at the point of contact. Information was also shared regarding what information Social Workers could access; issues of consent; analysis and management oversight. This information was presented by a Principal Social Worker from the Contact Team.

- 3.18 The management group believed that it would be beneficial for attendees at the meeting to have the opportunity to meet Social Workers based in the Initial Response Team and to put any questions or queries they had to Social Workers directly.
- 3.19 Feedback from the Social Workers was positive as they thought it was beneficial that Senior Managers and Elected Members had the opportunity to receive information directly from 'front line' staff about relevant issues. Senior Managers and Elected Members welcomed the opportunity to meet with front line staff.
- 3.20 Issues for discussion at future meetings were identified. These included the possibility of unannounced visits to IRT by Ofsted; how families who move around different areas are tracked; and training: how does philosophy underpin practice and thresholds.

4 Summary

- 4.1 Senior Managers and Elected Members have made four visits to the Initial Response Team over the course of the last year. There have been certain standing items on the agenda at each visit.
- 4.2 Attendee's have been appraised of any structural or procedural change since the previous visit and they have also been given information on current staffing levels and impact this has had upon service delivery.
- 4.3 During the visits, there has been a focus upon giving attendees examples of the work undertaken in the Initial Response Team and to demonstrate how the team is compliant with the safeguarding procedures.
- 4.4 The visits have also attempted to highlight some of the challenges that are faced within the Initial Response Team and how Social workers and Managers have responded to these.
- 4.5 More recently, Social Workers within the Initial Response Team have been involved in the preparation and presentation of some of the information. Feedback from the Team has been that they have found this a useful process to discuss and share issues and points of view.
- 4.6 The content and frequency of the visits made to the Initial Response Team by Elected Members and Senior Managers are compliant with the recommendations made by Lord Lamming.

5 Future Steps

- 5.1 Dates for the next years' meeting have now been identified and suggestions have been made for information to be discussed at future visits.

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