

SAFEGUARDING SERVICE REPORT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Strategic Priority 4: Learning City

**Corporate Improvement Priority: Delivering Customer Focused Services,
Efficient and Effective Council**

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To advise Children's Services Review Committee of current and planned activity within the Safeguarding Service, and to report on current performance.

2. Background

- 2.1 Previous reporting has incorporated both Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) activity and priority work of the Safeguarding Service within the Children's Services Directorate. It has now been agreed that future reporting will be delivered in separate reports to ensure the independence of SSCB activity.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 Key issues will be highlighted in this report in respect of:

- Case Management
- Services for Looked After Children
- Services for Disabled Children
- Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit

3.2 Case Management

- i. The impact of the death of Baby P in Haringey, and publication of the Serious Case Review Summary Report has had wide ranging impact for Children's Social Care providers across the country. In addition, Sunderland were significantly involved in a Serious Case Review undertaken by Durham LSCB following the death of a baby who had previously been on Sunderland's Child Protection Register.

Over the last two years Sunderland significant levels of training and development specifically focussed on meeting the needs of vulnerable unborn babies and infants has been delivered on both a single and multi agency basis.

Since November 2008 the process of auditing all case files has begun (see below Section 3.5).

- ii. There has not been a marked increase in the level of referrals to Case Management since the publication of the Haringey review, which was originally anticipated. However, since April 2008 there has been a 21% increase in contacts to Case Management and by the end of December 2008 the same number of referrals had been received as throughout 2007 – 2008.

Efforts are continuing to ensure sufficiency of permanently employed qualified social workers within case management. Locum social workers are being used to cover current vacancies to ensure that caseloads are kept to a manageable level.

3.3 Services for Looked After Children

- i. An external consultant was commissioned to: -
- Consider specific recommendations and statutory requirements made by Ofsted in each children's home and ensure that the registered manager in each home is compliant with the relevant regulations and National Minimum Standards (NMS) within the required timescale
 - Audit each home against regulations and NMS and identify any shortfalls in practice or recording
 - Recommend further action necessary to ensure that the homes are compliant with regulations and NMS
 - Work with the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit to devise new audit tools for ongoing monitoring
 - Identify any issues in the wider organisation of Children's Services which may impact upon the capacity of the children's homes to improve

Twenty two recommendations were made by the consultant which were fully accepted by Childrens Services and a resultant Action Plan is now in place.

All re inspected homes have now been judged by Ofsted to be satisfactory or better, within the 'Staying Safe' element and continued improvement is expected as recommendations become fully implemented.

- ii. The Adoption Service was subject to on site Ofsted inspection in August 2008.

In the four areas judged, three were considered to be good, including 'Staying Safe', and the area of 'Making a Positive Contribution' was judged to be outstanding.

Three Ofsted recommendations from the inspection are now being addressed via an Action Plan.

iii. The Children Looked After Placement Strategy summaries progress made over the past four years in shifting investment from residential services into foster care, preventative services and supported accommodation for care leavers. The strategy also sets out plans to improve the fabric of older children's homes, reduce occupancy to a maximum of six and transfer two existing homes - Meadow Rise (see below Section 3.4) and Wendover Close to Health, Housing and Adult Services to accommodated adults with learning disabilities.

Since 2004 the number of residential places for children has reduced from 75 to 45 and the percentage of children in family placements has risen from 79% to 82%. Outcomes for children in foster care are generally much better than for those in residential care and a strategy to increase the number and range of foster carers has been developed with the full support of the council.

iv. The Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been developed over the last year and contains recruitment targets based on the following factors:

- The loss of 6 places within children's homes by April 2009
- The need to reduce exemptions and extensions to foster carers' approval
- The loss of foster care workers who provide de facto permanent placements for children in placement.
- The complexity of some children's needs which requires more specialist, fee-paid carers who can take single placements
- The need for more carers who can meet the needs of children with profound disabilities
- Increased demand for parent and baby placements
- The need to replace foster carers as they either reach an age where fostering is no longer attractive or resign because of other reasons

Targets for 2009/10 are to achieve a net increase of 17 mainstream (i.e. non fee paid) carers and 8 foster care workers.

3.4 Services for Disabled Children

Meadow Rise, a six bedded home to accommodate disabled children, currently accommodates only 3 young people resulting in very high unit costs. Numbers have dropped during recent years due to the significant development of services to support families to look after disabled young people at home.

Future needs of all three of these young people have been fully considered and it is anticipated that one of them is likely to remain in Meadow Rise as Health, Housing and Adult Services are planning to take over the property from 1st April 2009.

3.5 Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit (S&QAU)

- i. Since December 2008 the S&QAU has had responsibility for managing the audit of all current children's case files as identified as a key part of Sunderland's response to the Ofsted findings in Haringey. This is being managed in priority order based on level of assessed risk, and arrangements are supported by the Corporate Performance Improvement Team to ensure effective Project Management of this significant task.

The case file audits are being undertaken by Team Managers within Case Management with some additional external assistance. Outcomes from findings are co-ordinated by the Quality Assurance Officer and will inform any immediate actions necessary, future planning and training needs.

- ii. The S&QAU continues to support the SSCB and provides line management to the SSCB Business Manager.
The work of the SSCB is now subject of a separate report to the Childrens Trust.
- iii. Arrangements are being made to increase the number of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) undertaking reviews in respect of Looked After Children, Children subject of Child Protection Plans and Foster Carer Reviews, alongside a range of other functions including training and conduct of management Reviews.
Work is progressing to increase the establishment within the IRO unit by two officers.
- iv. Ron Hogg is now in post as Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) responsible for the management of allegations against people in positions of trust in relation to children, young people and vulnerable adults. Ron is based in the S&QAU.

- 4. Performance Data for December 2008 is attached (Appendix 1)

5. **Recommendation**

Children's Services Review Committee is asked to note the content of the report.

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Appendix 1

Code	Indicator Description	Dec-08	08/09 Target	Banding	07/08
NI 66 PAF C20 BVPI 162 2034SC NIS DSO2	% Of Children on the CPR who have had a CP review every six-months during the year.	100%	100%	5	100%
NI 65 PAF C21 2036SC NIS DSO2	% Of Children de-registered from the CPR over the year who had been registered for 2 or more years	6.2%	10.0%	4	8.7%
PAF A3 2028SC	% Of Children registered to the CPR during the year who had been previously registered	17.1%	10%	4	7.2%
NI 60 PAF C64 2022SC NIS DSO2	% Of Core Assessments Completed within 35 Working Days of commencement	73.3%	80%	4	72.8%
NI 59 2020S	Initial Assessments within 7 Days of Referral during the year	68.3%	75%		65.7%
NI 68	% of referrals leading to initial assessment	80%	87%		86%