

Agenda Item

Report to Children and Young People Select Committee

24 October 2018

Children in Need – Reporting-in Review

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Children and Young People Select Committee of the plans, processes and progress relating to Children in Need (CIN) since the Joint Targeted Area Inspection in November 2017.
- 1.2 To outline what further work needs to be undertaken and to ensure that the needs of this cohort of children are understood and met.

2. Legislation and Statutory Guidance

- 2.1 A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. Children in need may be assessed under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 by a Social Worker.
- 2.2 Working Together 2018 provides statutory duties on all agencies to work together to provide the most appropriate response to our most vulnerable children.
- 2.3 When assessing children in need and providing services, specialist assessments may be required and, where possible, should be co-ordinated so that the child and family experience a coherent process and a single plan of action.

3. Data

- 3.1 Between the period of April 2017 and March 2018 we received a total of 2334 new CIN referrals.

During the first quarter between April 2017 and June 2017 we received 530 CIN referrals.

During the first quarter between April 2018 and June 2018 we received 628 CIN referrals.

This is an 18.5% increase on the previous year's first quarter on cases referred.

- 3.2 Between the period of April 2017 and March 2018, 2223 CIN cases were closed in total. 1153 CIN referrals were closed in under 3 months, 261 were closed in over 3 months but under 6 months and 187 were closed in over 6 months but under 9 months, 622 were closed 9 months and over.

During the first quarter between April 2017 and June 2017 589 CIN Referrals were closed, 325 in under 3 months, 68 over 3 months but under 6 months, 39 over 6 months but not over 9 months and 157 were closed 9 months and over.

During the first quarter between April 2018 and June 2018 774 CIN Referrals were closed 379 under 3 months, 92 over 3 months but under 6 months, 56 over 6 months but under 9 months and 247 were closed 9 months and over.

This is a 31.4% increase on case closures.

- 3.3 Between the period of April 2017 and March 2018 out of the 2223 cases that were closed 533 24% were identified as having unmet need requiring support from Early Help. This does not mean to say that the case was accepted by Early Help or that the family engaged with this service.

During the first quarter between April 2017 and June 2017 131 CIN cases that were closed were identified as having unmet needs which required support of Early Help.

During the first quarter between April 2018 and June 2018, 224 CIN cases were closed and were identified as having unmet needs which require support of Early Help.

This is a 70% increase in identified ongoing support.

3.4 Therefore these figures continue to evidence an increase in CIN referrals, but also show that in the first quarter of this year we are improving our performance in closing cases and identifying where unmet needs remain and further support is needed by Early Help Services

4. Background

4.1 Year on Year Children's Services are seeing an increase in the number of referrals received into the Local Authority. This has continued to place pressures upon the workforce where staffing figures have remained the same and there continues to be ongoing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, not only in Stockton but across the country. There is a wealth of evidence both locally and nationally that the primary factors affecting recruitment and retention is the increasing workload which in turn causes stress, anxiety and 'burn out'. Additionally there is a direct impact on performance with workers prioritising cases where there are safeguarding concerns, resulting in a poorer service for children in need and often a drift in care planning.

4.1 Between 20 and 24 November 2017, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMI Constabulary and HMI Probation undertook a joint inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect in Stockton-on-Tees. This inspection included a 'deep-dive' focus on the response to children experiencing neglect.

4.2 The joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) included an evaluation of the multi-agency 'front door' for referrals, when children who may be in need or at risk of significant harm become known to local services. In this JTAI, the evaluation of the multi-agency 'front door' focused on children of all ages who were been or had been neglected. For the purpose of this review the findings in relation to CIN children will be noted although a host of findings were often interlinked.

4.3 Inspectors were pleased with the following:

- Graded Care Profile assessment which measures success been rolled out across Children's Services and being embraced by voluntary sector groups and used with confidence by some school safeguarding leads to identify neglect.

- The comprehensive early help offer was well supported by agencies across the partnership. A broad range of professionals were taking on the 'lead professional' role, coordinating 'teams around the family'.
- A form updated with the Children's Hub was helping to ensure that it had relevant information when it received requests for information from the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC).

4.4 However, inspectors found that this oversight was less effective for children suffering from neglect. The following was found:

- There was a lack of understanding about the different roles of the CRC and the NPS, additionally these services were often omitted from the list of invitees to children's meetings, where they could add significant value. Their status as a 'virtual' partner within the children's hub and the lack of clear understanding of their distinct roles by some partner agencies meant that this remained an area for continuing scrutiny.
- The pathway for the Children's Hub to obtain information about adults using mental health services was not working effectively. Adult mental health professionals were not always invited to children's meetings when their presence could add value. As a result, information about a parent's mental health did not always inform children's plans to address neglect.
- Additionally, there was no current systematic information-sharing about domestic abuse incidents with key health providers, such as GPs and community health.
- Some children's plans, in particular child in need plans, were not sufficiently explicit about what needed to change for children. This made them less effective as tools to drive and measure real change in the quality of care for children. Inspectors saw several examples where needs were framed in the context of what services will be accessed, and presenting needs that do not 'fit' with an available service were overlooked or dealt with in a superficial way.

4.5 In response to the inspection agencies responded with an action plan which agreed the following:

- A review of the resilience and capacity of staff from each relevant organisation within the hub will be undertaken.
- Develop a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Children and Young People Plan.
- Improve the sharing of information across all agencies particularly with children in need so that all agencies are aware of the CIN status.
- Improve the quality of supervision on cases involving neglect.
- Improve the quality of SAFER referrals: application of thresholds, quality of information.
- Review approach to flags on NICHE (Police Electronic Recording System) moving from current focus on CP to include CIN.

5. Links to other Strategies/Plans/Reviews

- Early Help Review
- Children's Service Review
- Children's Service strategy 2017 - 2020
- Children's Improvement Plan 2018 - 2020
- S Work

6. Current Offer

- 6.1 All referrals that meet Child in Need (CIN) threshold have an assessment. Following the assessment the case will either be worked as CIN by one of the 6 Fieldwork Teams or the Disabled Children's Team. If after assessment it does not meet Children's Services threshold the case is either closed or stepped down to Early Help services.

- 6.2 Care plans are developed and evaluated by families and professionals no less than 6 weekly.
- 6.3 A Signs of Safety approach has been included in documentation which has been updated to ensure clearer plans with exit strategies. This approach is based on building relationships with children and their families through the use of relationships, restorative and strength based practice. The Single Assessment, Care Plan and Supervision document are some of these documents although these only went live on the 1 September 2018.
- 6.4 There are 3 support workers in the Assessment Team that focus on joining up services during the period of assessment. This is to support cases closing or stepping down at an earlier point and to encourage continued parental engagement with services identified.
- 6.5 During the period of April and July 2018, a Service Consultant and Early Help worker audited all CIN cases across Fieldwork and Assessments Teams and made recommendations for cases identified that could close or step down. The Early Help worker then assisted with these closures and step down resulting in a significant number of cases closing to Children's Services and a change in culture across the service with key question being asked 'what is the social workers role'.
- 6.6 Partner agencies such as 2 X Department of Works and Pension workers (FT) 1 x Citizen Advice Bureau worker (F/T), Safer Families worker (1 day), Blossom Project worker (1/2 day). Harbour worker x 1 (F/T), Youth Link Co-ordinator (4 days) all based within the Fieldwork, Assessment and Disabled Children's Team building. These agencies are regularly sought out for advice and support.
- 6.7 The Service Manager Fieldwork is involved in the Early Help Review to ensure the Early Help offer also meets the needs of Children's Services and both services are closely aligned.
- 6.8 There is a current review of Children's Services to provide a more seamless service for our Children in Need.
- 6.9 We are developing a new outreach befriending service via Youth Link

- 6.10 There is investment in Safe Families for Children to provide support to families.
- 6.11 We continue to use Specialist Assessments including Graded Care Profile, Parenting Assessments, PAM's Assessments, Risk Assessments, AIM Assessments.
- 6.12 CRC and NPS attended the Operational Development Group. Roles and responsibilities for both services were discussed with Managers who in turn cascaded this to their own workers.
- 6.13 A Family Group Conference (FGC) team came into effect in November 17 early indications are evidencing that this service is actively preventing children coming into our care, children being placed on a Child Protection Plan and is supporting cases closing or stepping down following assessment. Workers in this team work closely with the whole family using a restorative approach in order that the family are able to identify their own solutions and formulate their own safety plan. Evidence nationally highlights that where families compile their own safety plan there is a significant increase in their engagement and commitment to this.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 Continue to prioritise Graded care Profile 2.
- 7.2 Further development of the Stockton Information Directory. Improving communication for families and professionals with Children's Services. Provide more effective support and information to Social Workers on community based resources (speak to Cheryl).
- 7.3 Report/evaluation regarding recent closures and step downs.
- 7.4 Evaluation of Signs of Safety documentation once embedded to ascertain that they are impacting positively on practice.
- 7.5 Expand the Family Group Conference Service to include Child in Need Cases, Early Help cases and Reunification cases for Children in our Care.
- 7.6 Ensure that there is a process in place for the exchange of information from and to CRC and NPS.

- 7.7 Improve partners' knowledge of threshold so there is a better understanding of the Early Help Offer.
- 7.8 Ongoing reviewing our numbers of CIN cases and either 'stepping down' or closing those where it is safe to do so.
- 7.9 Better use of our Family Workers with more emphasis on bespoke parenting packages.
- 7.10 Consider/review other commissioned models of support i.e. 'fresh start families' and AMAST, Unborn Babies Team.
- 7.11 Focus on therapeutic interventions.
- 7.12 Evaluation of review of Early Help Services. Reshaping family support into a new Family Solutions Service and offer. Introducing a flexible model of working with young people and families who need more intensive support. Continuing to develop a 'secondary prevention' approach to reduce risk in target communities. Streamlining systems and processes for early help, working with the Children's Hub.
- 7.13 An audit tool will be developed with the purpose of auditing cases that have recently stepped down to Early Help or stepped up from Early Help to Children's Services with an aim to identify any learning. This is to commence on a monthly basis from November 2018. Any learning will be disseminated to the workforce.
- 7.14 Evaluation of review of Children's Services, including where workers are based and what teams would function the most effectively to provide support to families. What additional support is needed externally via Early Help and other agencies and professionals to support statutory engagement and progress?

8. How this Success will be Measured

- 8.1 Reducing the levels of referrals coming into Children's Services.
- 8.2 Improved relationships with families via restorative practice techniques.

- 8.3 Increased knowledge of families problems from key agencies prior to threshold decision making been reached. Preventing inappropriate referrals and informing assessments.
- 8.4 Outcome focused care planning preventing drift.
- 8.5 Sharper focus on care planning during supervision preventing drift.
- 8.6 Families following assessment being supported by the most appropriate service/professional .

9. Reporting Timescale

'The next steps are:

- Report – in to Children and Young Peoples Select Committee – 23 January 2019.
- Report to Cabinet – 14 February 2019.

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