

Cabinet – Supplementary agenda No.2

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on:

Date: 5 March 2019

Time: 3.00pm

Venue: Meeting Room 2 - Level 3, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR

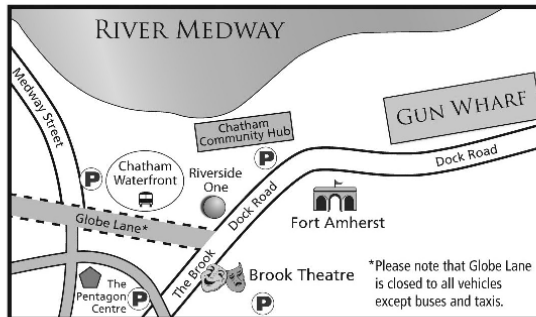
Items

9. ILACS Focused Visit Inspection

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For further information please contact Wayne Hemingway, Principal Democratic Services Officer on Telephone: 01634 332509/332008/332104 or Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk

Date: 28 February 2019



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CABINET

5 MARCH 2019

ILACS FOCUSED VISIT INSPECTION

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Andrew Mackness, Children's Services
(Lead Member)

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of People – Children and
Adults Services

Author: Louise Drury, Head of Service Improvement

Summary

Ofsted undertook a Focused Visit between 5 and 6 February 2019 on the Council's Children's Services Front Door and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). This report sets out the key findings from the Ofsted Focused Visit which was published on 28 February 2019.

This report will also be considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2019.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report is within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- 1.2 This report has been circulated separately to the main agenda. Therefore, the Cabinet is asked to accept this report as urgent to enable consideration of the matter at the earliest opportunity (the next scheduled Cabinet meeting is due to take place on 9 April 2019).

2. Background

- 2.1 The Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework includes a number of activities which includes:
 - an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future;
 - Focused Visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children;

- standard and short inspections where Ofsted make judgements using the four-point scale; and
 - Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).
- 2.2 A Focused Visit evaluates an aspect of the service and will usually happen between standard inspections. Ofsted usually give five working days' notice of the visit. Usually, two inspectors will be on site for two days contained within one week.
- 2.3 Each Focused Visit will cover part of the scope of standard inspections. Leadership is a feature of all focused visits principally through the lens of the impact of leaders on practice with children and families.
- 2.4 A Focused Visit on the front door focuses on the service that receives contacts and referrals (single or multi-agency) and where decisions are made about:
- child protection enquiries – strategy discussions, section 47 enquires;
 - emergency action – liaison with police to use powers of protection, applications for emergency protection order;
 - child in need assessments;
 - decisions to accommodate;
 - step-up from and step-down to early help; and
 - no further action/sign-posting.
- 2.5 Inspectors also evaluate the effectiveness of:
- performance management;
 - management oversight;
 - supervision;
 - quality assurance; and
 - continuous professional development of the workforce.
- 2.6 Inspectors will not make graded judgements at the outcome of a focused visit. Nor will they indicate what the grade may have been if the visit had been a short or standard inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a published letter.
- 2.7 Where inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action.
- 2.8 On 29 January 2019 notification was received to begin the ILACS Focused Visit on Tuesday 5 February 2019. In addition to the front door, the inspectors also wanted to look at the management of allegations against professionals and carers.
- 2.9 The team consisted of two inspectors on site for 5 and 6 February who were then joined by the quality assurance manager mid-day on 6 February 2019.
- 2.10 Prior to their arrival the Local Authority shared the relevant child level data lists, identifying which cases had received an audit in the last 6 months. From

this information, the inspectors identified 10 cases which they reviewed off site in advance of the on-site elements of the Inspection. Key documentation was provided, as appropriate, in relation to these 10 cases.

- 2.11 Inspectors spent most of their time with practitioners, talking about the children they are working with to assess the quality of front line practice and management oversight.
- 2.12 Inspectors also visited a Children and Family Area Hub and met with the LADO and Out Of Hours Service Manager. The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) is responsible for the management of investigations pertaining to Professionals or Carers working with children.
- 2.13 The final report was published on 28 February 2019 and is set out at Appendix 1 to the report. The report may also be found online <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50059044>.

3. Key findings

- 3.1 The leadership team has secured marked improvements in the Local Authority's response to contacts and referrals since the Joint Targeted Area Inspection in June 2018.
- 3.2 Processes to support social work practice have been embedded and strengthened.
- 3.3 In most cases, children and their families now receive a timely and proportionate response to their needs. The progress that has been achieved has been sustained, despite a significant increase in the number of contacts and referrals.
- 3.4 Multi-agency working and information-sharing in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are increasingly effective and there has been a welcome increase in the range of multi -agency professionals who are based in, or linked to the MASH.
- 3.5 The formation of children and family hubs has provided a sound base for the provision of early help services in Medway.
- 3.6 The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) service has responded effectively to learning from a recent serious case review and the systems for overseeing progression and quality of work are robust.
- 3.7 Senior leaders know the service well. They acknowledge the strengths in the service, but are realistic about where further improvement is needed.
- 3.8 Staff describe experiencing high support and high expectations within a learning culture. They are positive about working for Medway.
- 3.9 The visibility and approachability of senior leaders and managers, and their engagement with staff promotes a whole-team approach that is supporting further progress.

- 3.10 Areas for improvement include the participation and contribution of health partners in strategy meetings, timeliness of contacts and referrals that are sent by the police to MASH and the quality of assessments and timeliness of initial visits to children and their families.
- 3.11 Senior leaders are realistic about what further improvement is needed and suitable plans are in place. No priority areas for action were identified by the inspectors.

4. Impact on Looked After and Adopted Children

- 4.1 Ensuring that effective decisions are made in a timely way at the front door ensure that children’s needs are identified and met at an earlier point thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation in need. Continuing to pay relentless attention to the quality of assessments will strengthen practice and ensure that children are receiving the right service at the right time. The participation of health partners in strategy meetings is an area that requires attention to ensure a comprehensive consideration of risk for all children where there are safeguarding concerns.

5. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 5.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider this report on 7 March 2019.

6. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk Rating
Non participation of health partners in strategy meetings	If the participation of health partners in strategy meetings does not improve, timely and full information will not be available to inform understanding of risk for children.	DCS and Deputy Director have escalated and have met face to face with counterparts to improve practice and resilience of health resource to meet Working Together Guidance 2018.	B2
Timeliness of contacts and referrals sent by police	Impact of new IT System Athena has resulted in there being delays in sending referrals to Children’s Services which can delay provision of services and disproportionate numbers of referrals being received on certain days.	Athena is a new IT system and police colleagues are working to mitigate risks associated with implementation of new IT system.	D3

Quality of assessments and timeliness of initial visits	Variable quality in assessment and timeliness in initial visit can result in drift in planning.	Recruitment campaign ongoing. Programme of workforce development, targeted training, management oversight and audit in place to strengthen practice.	C2
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7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 In building the 2019/20 revenue budget, additional funding was made available for six additional social workers to address high caseloads and £130,000 of temporary resource to ensure that the Council is ready for future inspections. Action is now required to strengthen practice and manage demand back down to sustainable levels.
- 7.2 The recruitment of permanent social workers will reduce the reliance upon agency social workers and deliver savings against the Council forecast overspend on staffing. All recruitment is monitored and approved via Cabinet and in accordance with the Social Care Workforce Development Strategy. In the last six months our vacancy rate has reduced from 38% to 28%.
- 7.3 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 The Cabinet is asked to note this report on the ILACS Focused Visit, the progress and achievements made and the next steps for Medway Council.

9. Suggested reasons for decision

- 9.1 To formally notify the Cabinet of the outcome of the inspection together with the Council's response to the inspection's findings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ofsted Letter

Background Papers

None

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28 February 2019

Ian Sutherland
Director of People – Children and Adults
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Dear Ian

Focused visit to Medway local authority children’s services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to Medway local authority children’s services on 5 February 2019. The inspectors were Maire Atherton, Her Majesty’s Inspector, and Dominic Stevens, Her Majesty’s Inspector.

Inspectors reviewed the local authority’s arrangements for responding to contacts and referrals at their ‘front door’, the First Response Team. This team comprises the single point of access (SPA) and the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Inspectors considered the quality of assessments, the effectiveness of strategy meetings and child protection enquiries, and thresholds for the transfer of work to early help services. Inspectors also reviewed the management of allegations against professionals and carers.

Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, case discussions with social workers, managers and partner agencies based within the MASH, and early help practitioners in one of the children and family hubs. They reviewed the local authority’s performance and quality assurance information, relevant to the area of focus for this visit.

Overview

The leadership team has secured marked improvements in the local authority’s response to contacts and referrals since the joint targeted area inspection in June 2018. Processes to support social work practice, new at the time of the previous visit, have been embedded and strengthened. In most cases, children and their families now receive a timely and proportionate response to their needs. The

progress that has been achieved has been sustained, despite a significant increase in the number of contacts and referrals.

Multi-agency working and information-sharing in the MASH are increasingly effective. Although access to a wide range of health information has recently improved, health partners' participation in and contribution to strategy meetings continue to be weak. Inspectors noted progress in the overall engagement of the police, but there remain some delays in domestic abuse notifications being sent to the SPA by the police, attributed to the introduction of a new information technology system.

Senior leaders know the service well. They acknowledge the strengths in the service, but are realistic about where further improvement is needed, for example in the quality of assessments. Suitable plans are in place to address these weaknesses. Leaders and managers use performance information and the findings from quality assurance activities to target resources and deliver training in a timely way. Overall, this approach is proving to be effective in securing positive changes in practice. Staff describe experiencing high support and high expectations within a learning culture. They are positive about working for Medway. The visibility and approachability of senior managers and their engagement with staff promote a whole-team approach that is supporting further progress.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- The participation of health partners in strategy meetings, to ensure that timely and full information is provided to facilitate the comprehensive consideration of risks to children.
- The timeliness of contacts and referrals that are sent by the police to the MASH.
- The quality of assessments, and the timeliness of initial visits to children and their families.

Findings

- Decisions about contacts and referrals to the SPA, including those that are received out of hours, are made in good time. Initial threshold decisions are proportionate and take account of relevant multi-agency information. Suitable consent is obtained.
- Inspectors identified delays of between four days, and, in one case, four weeks, in the sharing by police of domestic abuse and relevant crime notifications. Although no children were found to have suffered further harm as a result, these delays potentially leave children in situations of unassessed risk.
- In the cases sampled, managers in the SPA had provided clear direction and oversight in a timely way, with a focus on the needs of the children. In a minority

of cases, the record of the next steps that were being recommended was not comprehensive enough.

- There has been a welcome increase in the range of multi-agency professionals who are based in, or linked to, the MASH. This includes the recent appointments of an education lead, a domestic abuse officer and a missing and exploitation coordinator. MASH outcome meetings, held twice daily, are effective and facilitate good information-sharing and discussion. This encourages appropriate challenge and professional curiosity, informing timely decision-making and recommendations that are matched well to risk and need.
- When children are at immediate risk of significant harm, this is quickly recognised, and referrals are progressed to child protection strategy meetings and assessment teams, so that protective action can be taken. Strategy meetings, although not always informed by the presence of, or full information from, all relevant agencies, are held promptly and lead to appropriate decisions about threshold and next steps. The full-time deployment of a police sergeant in the MASH to participate in strategy discussions has been positive.
- At the time of the visit, a process for enabling the MASH health professional to access a wide range of health information had very recently been implemented, supported by a new information-sharing protocol. A substantial challenge remains in ensuring that health agencies participate in, and contribute meaningfully to, strategy meetings and assessments.
- Although there has been a recent improvement in the timeliness of assessments, there is considerable variability in their quality. Some make good use of research, history and multi-agency information to inform analysis, recommendations and decisions. Direct work with children is increasingly used well to provide a sense of children's lives in the recording of home visits and in assessments. However, some assessments lack rigour and do not provide a consistent consideration of history and children's experiences. Some do not evidence that the tasks identified in initial management guidance, such as completion of chronologies and agency checks, have been completed. In these cases, the information that is needed to conclude the assessment or to inform next steps is incomplete or delayed. The use of evidence-based tools, such as the graded care profile and specific risk assessments, is not well embedded within the assessment teams.
- The local authority is taking well-focused action to address the areas it has highlighted for development in the assessment teams. This includes the recent appointment of three permanent practice managers. A key challenge to the pace of progress is the continuing high caseloads in these teams. Although efforts to improve staffing levels to address this are appropriate, the impact of high caseloads is that some initial visits to children are delayed.
- The formation of children and family hubs has provided a sound base for the provision of early help services in Medway. There is a firm commitment to the

provision of services tailored to children and their families, and the local authority and partners in the statutory and voluntary sector are working well together to achieve this. Thresholds for cases moving between early help and statutory services were well understood and appropriate in cases seen by inspectors.

- The designated officer service, responding to concerns about adults in positions of trust, is now fully staffed, and the quality and timeliness of work is progressing. The service has responded effectively to learning from a recent serious case review linked to the Medway secure training centre. Systems for overseeing the progression and quality of the work in the designated officer team are robust.
- The local authority has worked hard to recruit and retain permanent staff and managers, and this is an improving picture. At the time of this visit, 75% of staff were in permanent positions. Vacant posts were filled with agency staff. Despite high service demand and high caseloads, social workers are positive and optimistic. Staff talk about good levels of support, both formal and informal. Group supervision with external facilitators is valued, and staff describe how they have put learning from this approach into practice. Management oversight and direction, which makes use of case audit outcomes, is increasingly effective.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Maire Atherton
Her Majesty's Inspector