



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
14 February 2022

ITEM
07

Report sponsor: Andy Smith, Strategic Director People Services

Report author: Suanne Lim, Director Early Help & Children's Social Care

Monitoring Safeguarding Practice

Purpose

- 1.2 The report provides a recent overview of how Derby Children Services monitors the quality of safeguarding practice. Given that a stable and competent workforce is the pre-requisite for safeguarding children and young people and in driving forward improvements, this report also outlines current pressures and performance within the service.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the content of the report, current pressures and plans in place to address future challenges.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 Maintaining a safe environment where good social work can flourish is dependent upon having sufficient, stable, competent and an experienced workforce and management.

Supporting information

4.1 Performance and Pressures

Initial contacts have been persistently above 2000 each month since March 2021 and much higher compared with the same months the year before. This is a trend that is continuing. All initial contacts are received by the Reception Service of Early Help and Children's Social Care. Each individual contact is considered by a social worker and manager and a decision is made regarding outcome. This could range from signposting to Early Help or direct assessment and intervention. Systems are in place to ensure all contacts are considered individually. A high proportion of contacts are able to be resolved at this initial stage safely resulting in approximately 15% progressing for further intervention. The total number of open cases across all services are between 3600 – 3800 at any one time with current open cases at of 31 December 2021 being 3750.

The table below captures the volume of contacts over the year compared with the year before.

2020	Total Contacts 2020	2021	Total Contacts 2021	Increase in Contacts
March	1595	March	2499	56.7%
April	1444	April	2259	56.4%
May	1486	May	2460	65.5%
June	2016	June	2703	34.1%
July	1864	July	2417	29.7%
August	1607	August	2052	27.7%
September	2019	September	2597	28.6%
October	2133	October	2433	14.1%
November	2047	November	2293	12.0%

The service continues overall, to maintain strong performance against national Key Performance Indicators and performance is comparative to regional and national averages.

Performance	December 2021	6 Month Average
% Children in Care visits in timescale	93.3%	91.6%
% Children in Care reviews in timescale	100%	99.5%
% Child Protection visits in timescale	87.2%	83.2%
% Child Protection reviews in timescale	88.4%	87.1%
% Children in Need reviews in timescale	96.9%	97.1%
% Single Assessments (first) in timescale	78.8%	83.6%

Performance and pressures are monitored on a monthly basis and senior level scrutiny takes place at the Strategic Assured Safeguarding Board. In terms of overall, there were 3750 cases open to Children's Social Care on 31/12/2021 which was an increase of 86 compared with 12 months ago. Whilst performance remains strong, work continues across the partnership to manage demand. Additional management oversight and governance is in place to ensure that progress is maintained and throughput of work maintains. Regular audit and dip sample activity takes place to provide day to day assurances.

4.2 Safeguarding assurances

There has been significant media attention regarding Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. As a result of this, the service has taken a closer look at current systems to provide assurances that our systems, processes and practice continue to mitigate opportunity for serious incidents. As a result of these tragedies, the anticipated rise in referrals did not occur.

Assurances include;

- Dip sample completed of younger children and ensuring medical investigations are undertaken. Practice guidance was re-issued although no concerns identified.
- Multi-agency front door visit provided assurance that there is good triangulation of information. Recommendations and actions will be taken forward operationally.
- Dip sample completed of locality strategy meetings to ensure multi-agency attendance. No concerns were noted following this piece of work.
- We benefit from steady and consistent leadership and management teams.
- Whilst we have inexperience in our workforce, there is suitable experience within that also. We continue to provide a comprehensive learning and development offer to practitioners in addition to a dedicated Principal Social Worker.
- There is ongoing monitoring of contacts and referrals into the department.
- It is important to note that these sorts of incidents are incredibly rare, and Derby does not have a history of serious incidents. We also benefit from tried and tested practice approaches which are subject of routine audit.
- There is a working group looking at different areas of wellbeing to drive up morale in a context of increased workloads and COVID impact.
- There is a Keeping Babies Safe Strategy that is embedding and gaining partnership momentum.
- All children subject of CP Plans for 2 years or more are being monitored closely through regular tracking meetings involving the Head of Service.
- Any children on the edge of care proceedings (pre-proceedings) will benefit from an additional case management meeting at 12 weeks of this stage of the process.

There are some further actions being taken.

- Dip sampling of contacts made by friends/family, particularly multiple times.
- We are exploring the reduction in Child Protection category of physical abuse against an increase of physical abuse seen at referral stage. This may be due to interventions successfully being put in place prior to the need of a child protection plan.
- Further strategy meeting dip sampling for children over 6 months old will take place.
- Child Protection enquiries lasting over 10 days are starting to be monitored and progressed. These are small numbers but additional line of sight on risk is helpful.

4.3 Safeguarding assurance visit

On the 22 November 2021 a multi-agency partnership visit was led by the Director of Children's Services (Strategic Director of People) to seek assurances about the quality and compliance of work within the Initial Response Team and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Senior Officers from Children's Social Care, Derbyshire Constabulary, Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Education and Quality Assurance participated.

The day itself included a range of methods to gather insights including.

- Practitioner focus group
- Live case tracking
- Contact and decision-making audits
- Strategy meeting professional feedback
- Strategy meeting audits
- Interviews with key managers

Evidence found provided assurance of effective safeguarding practices within Derby

- Decision making is timely, and thresholds fairly applied by children's social care
- Referrals into the department can lack detail, clarity for purpose of referral and background. This sometimes leads to assessments that practitioners felt were unnecessary.
- Direct work is part of the rhythm of practice in Reception Teams and practitioners were keen to share this.
- Strategy meetings are well attended and focus on the safety of children.
- Domestic abuse triage can lead to duplication of input where an assessment has been assigned.
- There was good management oversight and grip at each stage of the process.

Recommendations have been placed into an action plan and approved at the Early Help and Children's Social Care Practice and Development Board.

Additional governance and scrutiny has been strengthened through establishment of a dedicated multi agency Strategic MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) Board chaired by the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care. The purpose and function of this board is to ensure continual multi agency improvement is sustained within this area of business.

4.4 COVID Recovery

The service is continuing to respond proactively to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 situation. There is a recovery plan in place which has included visits to children being seen face to face and only in exceptional circumstances will this be virtually and only where safe to do so following of risk assessment. Additionally, most of the supervised family time has reverted to face to face unless there are COVID related risks that have determined virtual family time is the safest. All buildings continue to have a risk assessment in place that is signed off by the council's corporate health and safety team. Social work offices remain open in a COVID secure manner, enabling practitioners to be in the office if needed. Those practitioners who are on duty are based within an office with other duty workers and a manager. Child Protection Conferences and legal meetings continue to be held in a hybrid way and face to face meetings will be held where this is in line with the needs of the child and family. Multi-agency professional meetings continue to be held virtually. Personal Protective Equipment is readily available for practitioners and utilising this on visits with families is a requirement, to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and wider community. These arrangements are working well and are subject of continuous review by Heads of Service.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 There is an ongoing programme of engagement with social work staff and managers to ensure a direct line of sight and communication between senior managers and the front line.

Other options

- 6.1 There is openness to exploring all options to improve safeguarding practice.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 None for this report

Legal implications

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a legal responsibility to provide sufficient social workers to act as key workers to children in care, children subject to child protection plans and to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and to assess children in need.

Climate implications

- 9.1 None identified.

Other significant implications

- 10.1 None identified.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu, Head of Legal Services	20.01.22
Finance	Janice Hadfield, Head of Finance – Service Support	18.01.22
Service Director(s)	Suanne Lim, Service Director Early Help & Children's Social Care	14.01.22
Report sponsor	Andy Smith Strategic Director of People	
Other(s)		
Background papers:		
List of appendices:		