

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 4th November 2014

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

Subject: Progress report on Safeguarding Services

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children's Services

Lead member: Councillor Maxi Martin

Forward Plan reference number:

Contact officer: Paul Angeli, Head of Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion

Recommendations:

- A. That members consider and comment on the developments in safeguarding services in Merton.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This item is intended to assist Panel in its scrutiny of the effectiveness of multi-agency partnership arrangements in Merton to safeguard and protect children from harm.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 Safeguarding activity in the borough is overseen by Merton's Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB). The Board is composed of a partnership of agencies involved in working with vulnerable families in the borough. The Council has a central role in assisting the MSCB in its strategic oversight of safeguarding work for children. Merton has a well established local safeguarding children board with good engagement from the key statutory agencies and the Lead Member for Children's Services. In February 2014 the Board welcomed Keith Makin as its new Independent Chair. Safeguarding Boards are now reviewed by OFSTED as part of the Single Inspection Framework who provide an important judgement about the effectiveness of safeguarding activity in the borough. The role of the Chair in providing challenge to the whole system is seen as critical in any inspection.
- 2.2 In Merton the Board works alongside the Children's Trust and other key strategic partnership groups to ensure that children's needs are effectively met. MSCB works with a variety of partners besides the Children's Trust Board. The Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member attend the Health and Well Being Board, ensuring that there is robust representation of safeguarding issues relating to children and young people. The overarching strategic plan for children's services remains the Children & Young People Plan which was refreshed in 2012 and which MSCB has endorsed and contributed towards. Priorities include Safeguarding and these are also

reflected in the MSCB's Business Plan. A business plan for 2014-15 has recently been published setting out the board's priorities.

- 2.3 The work of the Board is managed through regular partnership meetings. The business plan for the board is laid out on an annual basis and is supported through 6 sub groups which take responsibility in key areas of the Board's work. The key groups are:

- Quality Assurance
- Policy & Communications
- Training
- Human Resources
- Promote & Protect Young People
- Child Death Overview Panel

- 2.4 Each of these groups brings together partners to provide a focus in these areas. They have work plans which are related to the MSCB's Business Plan.

Quality assurance and governance

- 2.5 A revised Quality Assurance Framework has been developed which was shared with the Board in July 2014. This programme of work includes multi agency auditing and reviews of single agency audits of their safeguarding work. Multi agency auditing has strengthened during the year and there is now a regular bi monthly audit programme in place.

- 2.6 All agencies represented on the board submit annual reports (Section 11 reports) outlining how they ensure that their agencies take responsibility for safeguarding. All agencies in Merton have submitted their reports and laid out their ambitions for 2014-15. The priorities agreed by the board following the submission of Section 11 reports and internal monitoring are laid out in the Board's Annual Business Plan.

Performance against key indicators

- 2.7 Safeguarding Boards nationally have been encouraged to develop a performance dataset that provides the Board with information about how agencies are working individually and collectively to maintain the safety of children in the borough. The performance information is composed of already agreed national indicators and MSCB has also developed a number of local measures. The MSCB has developed and refined this dataset and now receives key information from a range of providers and commissioners of services. The Board has used this data to challenge agencies and focus its activity.

Serious Case Reviews and Serious Untoward Incidents

- 2.8 There have been no incidents which have triggered the requirement to undertake a serious case review in the last year. However during the year

- we have initiated an internal learning and improvement review on one child and jointly agreed a learning and improvement review in relation to another child in a neighbouring borough.
- 2.9 Following a serious case review in 2012-13 we have completed the implementation of the action plan surrounding Child A and developed training and a new service specifically aimed at addressing the issue of non school attendance arising from lessons learned in the serious case review.
- 2.10 We have been asked to undertake an internal review into historical involvement with children who have died in a neighbouring authority.
- 2.11 Our Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) which reviews all deaths of children which were unexpected but not necessarily untoward has published its annual report. This has not identified any local trends of significance. The Merton CDOP is hoping to share data with colleagues in the region to consider if there may be patterns of concern across a wider geographical area.

Children's Social Care

- 2.12 The lead service for the management of child protection work within the council is Children's Social Care (CSC). As effective multi agency working underpins the safe management of risk to children, CSC needs to work very closely with other agencies in the borough. In the last year CSC has had to manage a number of challenges and changes. The management of assessments was consolidated into the First Response team to ensure safe and effective practice. This has resulted in improved workflow and performance in this area. Early indications from clients' satisfaction surveys suggest overall that users of the service have been reasonably happy about the way in which the First Response team has managed their case.

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 2.13 The MASH service was established in April 2013 and has been operational for 18 months. The team is composed of managers and social workers from children's social care and representatives from agencies such as Police, Health, Youth Offending, Education, Transforming Families and Probation. The MASH is also supported by a range of voluntary agencies and is supported by administrative staff and systems.
- 2.14 The Team is located on the 12th Floor of the Civic Centre and is the single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns in respect of children and their families. The aim of the MASH is to ensure that safeguarding activity is managed effectively. In particular there is an opportunity to robustly gather information and intelligence from a wide range of agencies and services, thus improving initial responses to concerns. The MASH, through information sharing by agencies in the team, will determine whether to undertake a child protection investigation or consider intervention by an early help service.

- 2.15 The First Response Social Work Team is also based with the MASH and this team undertakes child protection investigations and the majority of the borough's single assessments. In the last year key activity has included the development of Information Sharing Protocols with Health and an increase in the number of agencies involved with the MASH. Work to strengthen data analysis is underway. The MASH team continues to develop strong relationships with early help commissioned services. A firewalled MASH Database has been developed in order for Multi Agency information to be kept securely. In 2013-14 the team received referrals on 1745 children and this led to assessments of 1696 children. Not all of these referrals would have raised issues about safeguarding matters.
- 2.16 Voluntary agencies have a key interface with MASH and the First Response team. Organisations such as Jigsaw4u and Barnardo's play a key role currently around such issues as missing children and the management of child sexual exploitation.

Child Protection Assessments

- 2.17 Local Authorities initiate child protection investigations of children at risk under Section 47 (S.47) of the Children Act 1989. The London Borough of Merton has initiated approximately 500 investigations each year in the past 4-5 years. In 2013-14 there were 593 assessments undertaken. This is slightly higher than previous years and there has been an average of 40 child protection assessments initiated each month in the last year.
- 2.18 Close co-operation with colleagues in the Police is particularly required and joint working with our colleagues is generally very positive in Merton. There has been a focus on achieving the regulatory requirement of holding a child protection conference within 15 days of a child protection referral and this has resulted in improved performance.
- 2.19 When considering risk to children one of the determinations by the Police and Local Authorities is the use of emergency action to protect children. Such action to protect children is undertaken by the Police using Police powers of protection or by local authorities using Emergency Protection Orders. These have remained steady during the course of this year.

Children Subject to Child Protection Plans

- 2.20 Many children assessed as being at risk of significant harm require a child protection plan. Where this occurs the lead agency for managing the plan is children's social care. Child Protection cases are primarily managed by the Central Social Work Service, with some held by the Children with Disabilities team. When the social work teams were re organised the teams managing long term work were given responsibility for children in need, children looked after as well as child protection work and so practitioners in these teams now manage a range of work. This allows children and families to receive a continuity of service from the same worker. Currently

the Central Social Work teams currently work with approximately 240 families in need, and about 170-200 children subject to child protection plans. All children subject to a child protection plan in Merton have an allocated social worker.

- 2.21 The number of children subject to a plan at the end of 2013-14 was 182. 229 children were subject to an Initial Child Protection Plan in the year with 212 children becoming subject to a plan.
- 2.22 The number of children who have been subject to a child protection plan has seen a gradual rise. This is connected with demographic changes in the borough. The rate of children subject to a child protection plan per 10,000 continues to be in line with the national average.
- 2.23 When children become subject to a child protection plan for a second time this can be a major cause for concern. In comparison to national averages fewer children in Merton have become subject to a Child Protection plan for a second time in the last 3 years. Between 2010 and 2013 8-13% of children were subject to a plan for a second time. Good performance is generally regarded as being between 10-13% in this area. Last year this was 11.3% and this was below the London and national averages for previous years.
- 2.24 The number of children who were subject to a Child Protection plan for more than 2 years remains low in Merton at 3.6% and this is below the London average of 5.8%.
- 2.25 The concerns that lead to children being subject to Child Protection Plans vary. The vast majority are subject to a plan because of concerns about child neglect and emotional abuse with domestic violence being a key factor. The majority of children subject to a plan remains the under 5 group with the next largest group being adolescents over 12.

Child Protection Conferences

- 2.26 Merton has for the last two years been using the Signs Of Safety approach to managing Child Protection Conferences. This approach has been helpful in engaging parents when their children are subject to Child Protection Plans. The ability of child protection conferences to manage risk is dependent upon the availability of all agencies to attend conferences. When agencies are not available Child Protection Conferences are regarded as inquorate. The number of inquorate conferences in Merton is not high.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

- 2.27 The role of the LADO in the management and oversight of individual cases of allegations against staff and volunteers working with children was set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children, HM Government, 2010* and this remains a key aspect in the recently published revision *Working Together 2013*.

- 2.28 Referrals to the LADO have continued to rise. There has been an increase in the numbers of strategy meetings held following LADO referrals from 19 in 2011-12 to 38 in 2012-13 and 44 in 2013-14. This increase is a reflection of wider understanding of the LADO role as a great deal of training and promotional work has taken place through the Board to ensure all agencies are aware of the need to inform the LADO where there are concerns about professionals and volunteers working with children.
- 2.29 The LADO has investigated matters relating to a range of concerns. While many concerns are not substantiated it is appropriate that concern raised about conduct towards children is thoroughly investigated.

Children with Additional Needs

- 2.30 Difficulties faced by parents can be a major challenge in children's lives. Problems such as parental disability, mental health problems, learning difficulties, substance misuse and domestic violence can all create risks and challenges for children's development. Domestic Violence is a particular concern for the MSCB as indicated above. The partnership has completed a review of domestic violence and this will lead to a revision of the governance of domestic violence with leadership in this area moving to Children's Services. Indications are currently that parental mental health or substance misuse features as a concern in about 25-30% of the households assessed in the last 6 months. We have completed a review of our joint working protocol with Adult Mental Health to ensure closer working with these particularly vulnerable families.
- 2.31 Other smaller cohorts of children in Merton remain at particular risk and MSCB during the course of last year has continued to review children at risk of Female Genital Mutilation, Child Trafficking and Forced Marriages. The MSCB and the Corporate Parenting Committee also retain responsibilities to consider how Looked After Children are protected from harm.

Private Fostering

- 2.32 Children who are privately fostered can have heightened vulnerability as children are living apart from their parents and they may have few familial or community supports. While most arrangements can be benign some children can be at heightened risk of abuse in these arrangements. There are National Minimum Standards surrounding Private Fostering and the local authority is under a duty to promote awareness and raise understanding of the requirements to notify when such arrangements are being made. During the course of 2013-14 the private fostering team received 13 notifications. This was an increase on previous years and is in contrast to national trends where there has been a decline. 9 new arrangements were made and 8 ended. At the end of the year 11 children were subject to a private fostering arrangement. This is likely to be an underestimate of the number of children living in such arrangements.

- 2.33 Like many local authorities in London many of the children who have come to the notice of the team have come from overseas and it has not always been possible to contact parents. It has therefore not been possible to clarify some of the required aspects of the regulations in all cases.

Young Carers

- 2.34 Young carers are children who because of the ill health or disability of their parents need to take on caring tasks to support their parents. These children are particularly vulnerable as they may live with parents with poor mental health, substance misuse problems or physical needs which mean children's own needs can be compromised without the right support. Support for young carers is co ordinated through the commissioned young carers project. The project supports young carers and ensures they do not take on inappropriate levels of care. A range of support and activities is provided that enable young people to identify their own needs and find ways to meet those needs. In 2013/14 the project supported over 300 young carers in Merton.

Children who are missing from Home

- 2.35 In 2014 revised guidance for local authorities and partners was issued by the Department for Education (DfE). Local partnerships were asked to review and revise their local protocols and procedures. The Police and Children's Social Care have refreshed the protocol and have established a group to review children who are missing from home. Children missing from home or their placement are clearly an extremely vulnerable group. Children go missing for a variety of reasons relating to difficulties within their families and often may be attracted or coerced into dangerous activity outside of their homes.
- 2.36 Approximately 400 children go missing from home and care each year. Many children reported as missing to the Police in Merton are children in care to other boroughs. The new missing children group will monitor these children and raise concerns with home authorities where there are on going concerns.
- 2.37 Missing children in Merton are supported through the work of the missing persons team based at Wimbledon Police Station, Children's Social care and by the commissioned Jigsaw4U project whose workers visit children who are reported missing where there is believed to be heightened vulnerability.

Children missing Education

- 2.38 The local authority has particular responsibilities in relation to children who are not in education. Children missing education (CME) and who have a chronic attendance problem are clearly a cause of concern but may also have heightened vulnerability if their parents are also experiencing problems related to mental health, substance misuse or learning difficulties. Chronic non attendance may also be an indicator of neglect.
- 2.39 Schools work alongside the Education Welfare Service to address the most problematic families. Key to the CME process is a multi agency panel which reviews all children who are missing education and tracks actions to return them to full time education. The Panel reviews between 180 and 200 cases

per academic year. The S2S (school to school) database is a national database where schools can place information securely for pupils who leave school and have no forwarding school address.

- 2.40 Education Welfare staff follow up cases on S2S to seek forwarding schools. A high use of S2S is encouraged by the Local Authority. In addition EWS support the home education process where families opt to educate children other than at school (EOTAS) Alternative education is a key method for ensuring that young people are in education.
- 2.41 Non school attendance was an issue identified as a potential concern in our most recent serious case review (Child A). A distinct project team to work with children in primary schools who have chronic non attendance has been established. This has been funded and will be supported by the Transforming Families Team to ensure intensive work with the families of these children can take place.

Key Challenges 2014-15

- 2.42 The MSCB reviews activity and priorities on an annual basis and produces a Business Plan. The Business Plan for 2014-16 is attached as appendix one.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. None for the purposes of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. N/A

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. No specific implications.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. No specific implications.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. No specific implications.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. No specific implications.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No specific implications.

**11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE
PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

11.1 MSCB Business Plan 2014-15

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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