

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 6th November 2013

Agenda item: 5

Wards: All

Subject: Progress report on Safeguarding Services

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

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.

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 Update

Merton's Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) maintains the overall responsibility for ensuring that the multi agency arrangements to protect children in the borough are effective and robust. 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 January 2013 the Board welcomed Kevin Crompton as the new Independent Chair.

- 2.2 In Merton the Board works alongside the Children's Trust and other key strategic partners 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 Director of Children's Services is also a member of the GP Commissioning Group in Merton ensuring attention and focus on safeguarding amongst the range of children's needs. 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 2013-14 has recently been published setting out the board's priorities. This is attached as appendix 1.

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 5 sub groups who take responsibility in key areas of the board's work. The key groups are:

- Quality Assurance
- Policy & Practice
- Training
- Communications and Participation
- Promote & Protect Young People

2.4 Each of these groups brings together partners to improve various areas of multi-agency safeguarding activity. They have work plans which are related to the MSCB's Business Plan.

2.5 **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013**

Revised government regulation surrounding the work of boards was issued in March 2013 through Working Together to Safeguard Children. Some new requirements have been placed on Safeguarding Boards. MSCB has through its Policy and Practice sub group reviewed the new requirements to ensure we are compliant:

- A new relationship strengthening accountability between the Independent Chair and the Local authority Chief Executive is required and this has been established.
- The Board is expected to maintain an overview of the effectiveness of early help for children and families and this has been reviewed and strengthened.
- The board is expected to establish a learning framework to allow it to learn from the activity of the safeguarding partnership and this is in place.
- The MSCB is expected to hold partner's to account for safeguarding activity and MSCB receives Annual (Section 11) Reports of how agencies in the borough have been keeping children safe in Merton.
- The board members are meant to ensure that there is appropriate funding arrangements in place for MSCB to maintain its work and this continues to be the case and will be reviewed for 2014-15.
- MSCB is expected to maintain an overview of the training offered to local professionals. MSCB offers a full and highly rated multi agency training programme. This is developed and reviewed by the Training Sub Group.
- MSCB is required to employ a business manager to ensure the effective administration of the board's work and this is in place. MSCB has a business manager and appropriate administrative support.
- MSCB is expected to work very closely with the Health and Wellbeing Board and in Merton there is close collaboration between the Boards.

- All serious case reviews will now be published and the most recent Serious Case Review was in full and is accessible on the MSCB's webpages.

2.6 **Quality assurance and governance**

A Quality Assurance Framework developed through the Quality Assurance Sub Group. This was presented to the Board and agreed on 12 March 2013, and is being implemented during 2013-14. This brings together Children's Social Care (CSC) and a multi-agency audit programme into a single framework. Capacity has been found in CSC to employ an additional Quality Assurance Manager with the role of developing the whole programme. This programme of work will involve multi agency auditing and reviews of single agency audits of their safeguarding work. This should provide the board with a foundation for learning from front line practice.

- 2.7 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 2013-14. These have been summarised in the Annual Report for 2012-13.

2.8 **Performance against key indicators**

Safeguarding Boards 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 some local measures. The MSCB has developed and refined this dataset and now receives key information from a range of services. It is expected that in time the dataset will become more robust and that fuller interpretations of the data will be helpful in guiding the board to consider what areas require some focussed scrutiny.

2.9 **Serious Case Reviews and Serious Untoward Incidents**

Merton has not had a serious incident regarding the welfare of a child which triggered a serious case review for ten years; however we have undertaken single agency reviews and also reviewed particular cases through the work of the board. In 2012-13 there were three high profile incidents relating to the welfare of children in the borough.

- 2.10 Neither of the first two incidents have led to a serious case review. The third incident related to the tragic death of Child A who was sadly killed by a family member in August 2012. The Board has published a Serious Case Review relating to the death of Child A. The review was published in July 2013.

2.11 Child A, a 12 year old girl, was reported missing in August 2012. Her body was discovered a week later in the loft of her maternal grandmother's home. Her grandmother's partner entered a plea of guilty to her murder. A number of local agencies were known to have had contact with Child A and members of her family. The circumstances of her death and subsequent enquiries suggested that the agencies might be able to learn lessons about the way they had worked, individually and collectively, with the family. This led to the decision by the MSCB that there should be a Serious Case Review (SCR). That SCR was conducted between September 2012 and April 2013. The conclusions of the review were that there were lessons to be learned and areas in which services could be improved. However, there was no information known to any agency which would suggest that Child A's was at any risk of serious harm from her family.

2.12 The Serious Case Review has led to individual agencies reviewing key aspects of their practice and committing to action plans within their own agencies. MSCB has also published its own action plan and this is being progressed.

2.13 **Children's Social Care**

The Lead Agency for the management of Child Protection 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 Merton. In the last Children's Social Care has had to manage number of challenges and changes.

1. The re-organisation and re-structuring of services was effectively completed between October 2012 and March 2013. These structural changes are still being embedded and will take a few months to be consolidated.
2. Revisions were made to Working Together to Protect Children. This is the statutory regulation surrounding the management of Safeguarding of Children. Merton is reviewing its compliance with the new regulations. Revisions to child protection processes and the introduction of a new approach to assessment have been key areas that have changed.
3. The development by OFSTED of a new and more challenging framework for Inspecting Children's Social Care Safeguarding and Looked After Children Work was introduced in September 2013.

2.14 **Structural Changes**

One of the main changes to the structure of Children's Social care was the development of a (MASH). The MASH service was established Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub in April 2013 and has been operational for 6 months. The team is composed of managers and social workers from

children's social care and navigators from key agencies such as Police, Health, Youth Offending, Education and Probation. The MASH is also supported by a range of voluntary agencies and is supported by administrative staff and systems.

- 2.15 The Team is located on the 12th Floor of the Civic Centre and is designed as being the single point of contact for all contacts and referrals in relation to safeguarding concerns in respect of children and their families. The aim of the MASH is to ensure families who require help are identified at an early stage by the multi agency professionals and signposted or referred to the appropriate service in order to receive early help.
- 2.16 The First Response Social Work Team is also based with the MASH and this team undertakes all of the child protection investigations in respect of those children who have no allocated social worker or whom were previously unknown to the department. In the last year key activity has included the establishment of the MASH, the development of Information Sharing Protocols and Partnership agreements and the development of the MASH database which has been live since August 2013.
- 2.17 All referrals received by the MASH are given a rating by the Team/Duty Manager and this dictates the urgency of the response from the MASH. Partner Agency navigators from Health, Police, Probation, and Education & Youth Services check their agency databases to see what is known on their respective agency databases regarding families referred to the MASH so that informed decisions can be made in respect of the disposal of referrals/contacts.
- 2.18 Agencies such as Jigsaw4u who provide a range of services within Merton to vulnerable children and their families also provide a worker who offers advice to the team regarding the suitability of some of the referrals and contacts to their services. These include services such as domestic violence support, help for children at risk of sexual exploitation and support children missing. The MASH team has also developed strong relationships with Early Help commissioned services. A firewalled MASH Database has been developed in order for Multi Agency information to be kept securely and confidentially.
- 2.19 More information is available to partner agencies that should enable a joined up – coordinated response to the needs of children and their families within Merton.
- 2.20 In the first few months of the MASH there has been an increase in the conversion rate of referrals to assessments and the volume of Child Protection Investigations; this trend is common across areas where MASH's have been set up as improved information sharing can assist the decision making process.
- 2.21 The MASH has transformed the way in which the partner agencies work with one another and there is improved information sharing within the

MASH and each agency that is represented has learnt about the thresholds of intervention across each service. The MASH should also lead to an increased awareness of how prevalent issues such as substance misuse, parental mental ill health and domestic violence are within cases referred and this should lead to improved multi agency support plans to be implemented to safeguard children and their families.

2.22 **Child Protection Assessments**

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 300 investigations each year in the past 4-5 years each year. As MASH has become embedded we have seen a rise in the number of child protection investigations. There has been an average of 40 child protection assessments initiated each month between April and August 2013. As responsibility for single assessments has been passed to other teams in Children's Social Care more assessments have been commenced in teams with longer term responsibilities.

2.23 Close co-operation with colleagues in the Police is particularly required and arrangements to ensure we work well to assess risk at the commencement of investigations is very robust in Merton. Performance monitoring is being tightened to allow us to achieve the regulatory requirement of holding a child protection conference within 15 days of a child protection conference.

2.24 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. In 2013-14 to date we have seen a rise in the use of the Police's use of powers to protect children to 18 in the first half of this year. This may be connected with heightened awareness and anxiety about risk in the light of Merton's recent and National SCRs. Discussions with colleagues in the Police about these matters are taking place through the safeguarding board.

2.25 **Children Subject to Child Protection Plans**

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 300 children in need, and about 197 children subject to child protection plans. All children subject to a child protection plan in Merton have an allocated social worker.

2.26 The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan in the London Borough of Merton remains relatively high compared with our local comparators but in line with the national average. The average number of children subject to a plan across 2012-13 year was 171 with a peak of 181 in August and a low of 162 in March. Between June and September 2013 there has been a gradual rise in the number of children subject to a child protection plan. The current number of children subject to a plan is 197 and while this peak is in line with a seasonal high consistent with last year this is a matter that needs to remain under review. This current peak appears to be connected with a number of factors.

- The high number of assessments and Child Protection investigations taking place between March and June 2013.
- The sudden rise in the referral rate particularly in July 2013.
- A disproportionate number of Initial Child Protection Conferences of large families (4 and over children)

2.27 A fuller investigation of this has commenced but it is anticipated that this upturn in figures is related to the impact of recent changes and that the numbers are likely to reduce in line with previous years.

2.28 In spite of the recent upturn the rate of children subject to a child protection plan per 10,000 continues to be below last year's figures and remains in line with the National Average.

2.29 Some children become subject to a child protection plan for a second time or remain subject to for more than 2 years. While in some circumstances this may be appropriate this is an area that can indicate that children may have had their plan removed too early or that the child protection plan is not being effective in reducing risk.

2.30 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. In the first half of 2013-14 this figure has risen to 14.7%. This has primarily been the result of 3 large sibling groups becoming subject to a plan and we are on target to be below the national average for the end of this year.

2.31 The number of children who were subject to a Child Protection plan for more than 2 years remains low in Merton with a declining proportion of children being in this category. In 2012-13 0.25% of children subject to a

plan had been so for more than 2 years and this is an area that has remained under close scrutiny.

2.32 The concerns that lead to children being subject to Child Protection Plans vary. The vast majority are subject to a child protection plan because of concerns about child neglect.

2.33 The majority of children subject to a plan under 5 with the next largest group being adolescents over 12.

2.34 Child Protection Conferences

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. An internal evaluation of the approach is underway, but parental feedback has generally been very positive about this approach. 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. Until September 2013 100% of Review Child Protection Conferences were held on time. 3 conferences were held late in September by a few days. No child was left in a position where they were not protected.

2.35 Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Nationally due to several high profile cases there has been heightened awareness of the need to protect children who may be involved with professionals or adults working with children in a position of trust. The Local Authority Designated Officer has a specific role in the local authority in being the first point of contact where there is an allegation against a professional who is working with children and young people. The role and function of the LADO is a key aspect of the overall safeguarding activity of the Local Authority and its partner agencies under the auspices of the MSCB. One of the priorities in the last year has been to raise awareness of the role of the LADO and there have been briefings and awareness raising events throughout the year.

2.36 Referrals to the LADO have significantly increased during the course of the last year with an overall 100% increase. There has been an increase in the numbers of strategy meetings from 19 in 2011-12 to 38 in 2012-13 and a 14% increase in the numbers of LADO consultations from 28 in 2011-12 to 32 in 2012-13.

2.37 On-going awareness raising has been incorporated into the training and development plans for the year. There have been six LADO awareness raising briefings to staff during the year 2012-13 and 113 staff members attended these from a wide range of multi-agency partners. There remain

a number of partner agencies that need to engage with this programme more effectively e.g. health sector, and police.

2.38 The most striking aspects of the increase in LADO referrals is the fivefold increase in referrals under the Sexual Abuse category and the eightfold increase in Neglect referrals. The increase in relation to allegations related to sexual abuse is primarily associated with internet related concerns and offending. In the context of the raised national awareness of this issue this is unsurprising.

2.39 **Children with Additional Needs**

Some children in Merton live in circumstances where the risk of harm is heightened by parental difficulties. These include problems related to parental mental health, learning difficulties, substance misuse and domestic violence. Domestic Violence is a particular concern for the safeguarding board as indicated above. Evidence suggests domestic violence feature in the lives 60-70% of children open to CSC. We are currently reviewing the range of provision available to support parent and child victims of domestic violence through a review of Domestic Violence Services in the borough. This work is being undertaken in partnership with colleagues in Safer Merton. Indications are currently that parental mental health or substance misuse features as a concern in about 20-25% of the households assessed in the last 6 months (545). Work with Adult Services is underway to look at improving collaboration and co-operation between Children and Adult services. We are currently reviewing our joint working protocol with Adult Mental Health to ensure closer working with these particularly vulnerable families.

2.40 Other smaller cohorts of children in Merton remain at particular risk and MSCB during the course of last year has given consideration to children at risk of Female Genital Mutilation, Child Trafficking and Forced Marriages. The Board's work also incorporates the needs of children who may be involved with gangs or youth violence. These matters have been given consideration by Scrutiny Panel and the MSCB will continue to exercise oversight.. The MSCB has also some responsibilities to ensure that Looked After Children are protected from harm and their needs are met and has oversight of key matters relating to this group of children.

2.41 The MSCB has initiated and been involved in developmental work focussed on the specific needs of children as outlined below.

2.42 **Child Sexual Exploitation**

At the moment there is a national focus on Children at Risk of sexual exploitation. MSCB endorsed Merton's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy in November 2012. The Promote and Protect Group has led the development and coordination of the multi-agency response to Child Sexual Exploitation. This model has been incorporated in to the development of the pan London Police protocol that has been recently piloted in two authorities. To date there have been 64 referrals to the

Promote and Protect group and currently 34 remain open. The commissioning cycle this year identified the priority to commission on a longer term basis work to identify and support Young Runaways and victims of sexual exploitation. The role of the voluntary sector has been crucial in establishing effective relationships with the young people and their families and the evidence below shows the beneficial impact on young people's outcomes as a result.

2.43 Our analysis of the outcomes for the cohort of young people that received specialist support shows that:

- Satisfactory school/college attendance baseline has improved from 17% to 83%
- Episodes of missing from home/care have reduced from 77% to 11%
- Family has access to support services has been maintained at 100%
- Stable and secure accommodation has improved from 6% to 89%
- Remains in regular contact with the service has increased from 61% to 89%
- Reduced association with risky peers/adults has increased from 39% to 83%
- Recovery from sexual abuse/exploitation has increased from 33% to 83%
- Able to identify abuse/exploitative behaviour has increased from 39% to 94%
- Reduced/safer consumption of controlled substances has increased from 11% to 89%
- Knowledge of sexual health strategies has increased from 33% to 89%
- Enhanced parent/carer/adult – child relationships has risen from 22% to 78%

2.44 The work to continue to proactively address issues of CSE in Merton has been strengthened by the development of a MOPAC 3 year funded post to aid CSE awareness and prevention; work to avoid gang entry and exploitation; and map victims, perpetrators and locations.

2.45 As the police roll out their CSE protocol across all London Boroughs agreement has been reached locally for the Promote and Protect Group to be jointly chaired between the CSC Service Manager and the DI from Borough Policing in liaison with the local CAIT.

2.46 Merton's CSE service has been shortlisted for the London Safeguarding Children's Board annual Awards which will be announced in December this year at the Annual Conference.

2.47 **Private Fostering**

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 regulatory requirements surrounding Private Fostering. These require that children who are privately fostered are notified to local authorities. During the course of 2012-13 the private fostering team received three new case referrals. At the end of the financial year seven private fostering cases were open to the team and four cases had been closed. The service continues to visit the seven arrangements in place and provide regular advice and support to the children, young people and carers. There were nine notifications received in the year 2012-13, of these three were confirmed as new private fostering.

2.48 100% of children notified to the private fostering service in 2012-13 were seen within seven working days. All assessments were signed off by the Team Manager and QA Manager (Permanency). None of the private fostering arrangements coming to the notice of the service were referred in advance of the placement being made.

2.49 It is difficult to compare the Merton data with national data as the Statistical First Return for Private Fostering presents the data by region not local authority, and the data is not broken down per 10,000 population. Our main priority in 2013-14 is to raise awareness about private fostering through a communications strategy to improve notifications about children who may be privately fostered.

2.50 **Young Carers**

Young carers are children who live with adults who because of ill health or disability take on additional physical, mental or emotional 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 young carer's project.

2.51 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 Carers to identify their own needs and work with us to find ways to meet those needs. In 2012/3 the project supported 333 Young Carers in Merton by providing a range of activities. As a result of this work

- 90% of Young Carers felt their attendance at school had improved
- 80% of Young Carers felt more able to talk to an adult about their concerns
- 80% of Young Carers had made new friends through our service
- 70% of Young Carers felt they have been given a voice by our service

- 50% of Young Carers felt they had learnt new skills within our service
- 30% felt better able to deal with bullying through our service

2.52 Wirth partner the project reviewed the Young Carers Strategy for Merton which was published in late 2012 and endorsed by the MSCB in March 2013. The focus of the project's work remains on the safeguarding aspects of support for Young Carers.

2.53 **Children who are missing**

Children who are missing from home are at particular risk. We have worked closely with the Police to monitor this area. Our work with the local Police is supported by the Jigsaw4u project who will interview children who are returned home to explore the reasons why children run away.

2.54 **Children missing Education**

The local authority has particular responsibilities in relation to children who are not in education. Some children who are not in education may be arrivals in the borough whose parents have not secured a school placement, children who are absent or excluded from school or children who are home educated. Work through the education department to monitor the risks for these children is robustly managed.

2.55 **Challenges for Safeguarding Services in Merton**

The multi agency partnership in Merton is robust and operates effectively on an operational and strategic level to keep children safe. There are likely to be number of challenges during the year and the attached business plan outlines the vision for the MSCB.

2.56 The new OFSTED inspection requirements surrounding safeguarding and looked after children's services which were published in September 2013 are particularly challenging and will require a stronger focus on the quality of direct practice with families.

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 2013

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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