

# Public Document Pack



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To:- All Committee Members

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – TUESDAY, 21 JULY, 2015**

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the next Tuesday, 21 July, 2015 meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the following reports that the Chairman has agreed to include as an Urgent Item.

### **Agenda No    Item**

18.    **Delivering Effective Safeguarding Services For Children - Children's Social Care Annual Review (Pages 3 - 32)**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Couldrick', written in a cursive style.

Andy Couldrick  
Chief Executive

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# Agenda Item 18.

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>TITLE</b>                | <b>Children's Social Care Annual Review</b>                          |
| <b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b> | Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee<br>on 21 July 2015 |
| <b>WARD:</b>                | None specific  |
| <b>DIRECTOR</b>             | Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services                      |

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The Annual Review is a process used within Children's Social Care to work together as teams and departments in order to scrutinise the intelligence available. This enables Children's Social Care to formulate clear actions from a sound evidence base. Ultimately the benefits to the community are that Children's Social Care remains a department that is self-aware, that values peer support and challenge, and embrace service improvement. Subsequently the process of the annual review aims to lead to improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Given the nature of the report, and the range of evidence used to triangulate data there are numerous recommendations for the year ahead. These are separated within the report for each team/area of the department. The actions will be monitored as part of the ongoing quality assurance and improvement cycle.

The overall recommendations are as follows;

1. Deliver on the Early Help and Innovation Programme through partnerships
2. Continue with the system wide implementation of the Practice Framework and deliver training where necessary
3. Review and re-design the quality assurance processes
4. Continue to implement and develop the Recruitment and Retention Strategy
5. Consistently apply reflective supervision and group supervision on complex cases
6. Consider how we can use the experience of our service users to help with service redesign
7. Maintain progress towards recruiting permanent members of staff who can be developed to deliver a consistent service. Aim for 100% permanent staff and evidence of retention
8. To inform wider service design for children aged 8+
9. Ensure the take up of the four planks of training, peer to peer, and action learning training is fully maximised
10. A review of the use of section 20 in light of recent court judgements

That the areas for development identified within this report are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Quality Assurance Manager so that updates inform next year's annual review/QA Annual Report. Areas for development will be actively worked on by Senior Managers and their teams

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The report summarises some of the successes and challenges within Children's Social Care. Whilst it recognises there are areas that require improvement, there is also a vast evidence base suggesting Children's Social Care effectively safeguard the welfare of vulnerable children.

**Background**

A review of Children’s Social Care takes place on an annual basis. Carrying out the review involved a team of officers and managers from both Children’s Social Care and Strategic Commissioning. This annual piece of work enables the department to summarise the areas of strength and good practice, whilst also developing a focus for the year ahead.

**Analysis of Issues**

Wokingham caseloads remain low. This is encouraging and demonstrates the Departments commitment to resourcing good quality work with families. Although the complexity of cases determines the capacity of workers, caseload numbers remain a good indicator of a workforce with a manageable workload.

There have been a number of areas of improvement and development in different service areas which is encouraging. Any changes made remain subject of continuous monitoring and future developments identified will be acted upon over the coming year.

Staffing has remained a challenge for Wokingham which reflects a national issue. Locally this is even more challenging due to the set-up of a number of unitary authorities, all of whom are actively recruiting qualified social work staff. We have been successful to secure employment of social workers from overseas and newly qualified workers from the UK. Our current position is that vacancies remain covered by agency workers and our ongoing priority is to reduce reliance on agency workers. Positively, we have seen the turnover rate improve significantly from 33% in 13/14 to 14% at March 2015.

The implementation of the Practice Framework is going well. Additional training has been provided. There is still some way to go until it is fully embedded, but this is not to be unexpected. To successfully embed this model takes time as it involves planned and facilitated practice and culture change. This review has identified pockets of excellence in Wokingham. Children and young people are involved in the strategic developments within the local authority whether that be through formal routes such as the Children in Care Council, or through more innovative projects such as the introduction of Young Commissioners. The review has identified there is a commitment to ‘do things differently’ but likewise to deliver the best possible service.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

|                                 | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) |                               |   |                     |
| Next Financial Year             |                               |   |                     |

|                                   |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| (Year 2)                          |  |  |  |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) |  |  |  |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b> |
|  |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?) |
|   |

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|---|
| <b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b> |
|   |

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| <b>List of Background Papers</b> |
|                                  |

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Contact</b>      | <b>Service</b>     |
| <b>Telephone No</b> | <b>Email</b>       |
| <b>Date</b>         | <b>Version No.</b> |

## **Children's Social Care Annual Review**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

Wokingham has a population of 154,943 (as at 2011) with 44,950 children and young people aged under the age of 19 years old. Of these, 585 (as at May 2015) are in receipt of services from Children's Services and 2600 are in receipt of services from Early Help intervention. These service areas are the focus of this report.

This report presents an overall view on how well the Children's Social Care performed over the past 12 months. It is the result of a process of analysis on a service by service areas provided through a variety of audits, service reports, quality circle sessions and challenges sessions. Gathering a wide range of evidence from multiple sources in order to triangulate findings leads to a more robust sense of quality and service performance. This report and the work involved in the analysis highlights key messages about how well we are operating to effectively safeguard children and promote their welfare and also identifies any areas for development.

This report is also an evaluation of the challenges that were set out in the annual review last year. It provides a view of the service and the challenges that we continue to face as well as recognising the areas that we need to celebrate. The need to focus on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families is at the core of all quality assurance and performance functions within the Department. Throughout the year we have faced some challenges but also opportunities for greater collaboration with our partners. Our partnerships support us to continue to deliver services for children, young people and their families in Wokingham. Many of our performance indicators have improved, and the efforts of our workforce are achieving good results in several areas to meet the needs of children and their families, which are evidenced in the report. Further details are provided throughout the report. Evidence throughout this report suggests that overall we have strong foundations to deliver high quality services. The evidence to support this is captured within the report.

The service is effective in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children but we recognise there are areas that require improvement. Having acknowledged this, we have to understand the aspirational focus of the department. Developments around workforce (particularly around pay, development opportunities, and the recruitment of Practice Consultants, manageable caseloads), the Early Help and Innovations Programme (ongoing implementation of Signs of Safety, Restorative Practice, the Family Star, and Attachment Theory), the participation/involvement of children and young people across the department, and the use of qualified social workers in early help work, are areas where Wokingham have gone above and beyond the 'day to day' business of a social work service. There is appetite to develop innovative practice in all areas of the department with a clear underpinning principle of bettering the outcomes for all children within the borough. This is something that those working within the department should be congratulated for.

## **2. The Review Team**

In order to maintain a level of independence from the services within the scope of this review, the review team was led by Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning. To ensure the review was a collaborative process, rather than one 'done to' Children's Social Care, it was supported by the following people from Children's Social Care;

- Felicity Budgen, Head of Children's Social Care
- Priscilla Kurewa, Interim Service Manager
- Jos Axon, Service Manager – Assessment, Intervention and Support
- Anne Randle, Service Manager – Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Utilising the experience and expertise of those within the Strategic Commissioning and the Children's Social Care branch led us to findings that are well informed. Such collaborative style of working supports the quality and improvement cycle by ensuring learning is in real time and that findings are robustly analysed.

## **3. Methodology**

**Planning:** The review process was designed, organised and implemented through a series of planned scheduling sessions by the reviewing team.

**Identifying evidence:** An evidence grid was used to assist the reviewing team in identifying relevant evidence to inform the report. Some of the evidence used (such as reports) already provided substantial analyses, which enabled the reviewing team to rigorously evaluate progress against last year's annual review and recommendations. In addition the other data collated as identified below supported the team to ascertain further learning points.

**Data collection/collected:** Reports, audits, team updates and workforce documents were collated and reviewed. The following were identified within the evidence grid as essential to inform this review;

- Performance data
- Quality Circles records
- External audit reports (Ingson and Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board)
- Other audits over the past 12 months that have taken place within children's services
- Children Missing from Education Report
- Annual Reports: Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board, Corporate Parenting Board, Independent Reviewing Officer report)
- Children's Rights and Advocacy Service reports
- WSCB Challenge session records
- Bridges Ofsted inspection report
- Children's Centre Ofsted inspection report

- Workforce documents, for example the Recruitment and Retention Strategy
- Munro, Turnell and Murphy progress report
- Team updates: Duty Triage and Assessment, Brambles and Ambleside, Here4U, Placements, and Disabled Children's Team.

The data collected focused on a number of operational and strategic areas as identified below;

- Duty, Triage and Assessment
- Social Work teams in neighbourhood offices
- Disabled Children's Team
- Here4U
- Workforce
- Complaints
- Placements
- QA/Safeguarding
- Early Help
- Input from the Principal Social Worker and Children's Services Senior Management Team
- Children's Services Leadership Team

Data analysis: Given the quantity of evidence to scrutinise, a proportionate approach was to use a desktop analysis of the above evidence.

#### 4. Last inspections grades

Over the past year the Ofsted inspection framework has changed on more than one occasion. As part of our cycle of continuous improvement, we aim to be Ofsted ready at all times. As well as the external audits Children's Services commission and those carried out by the LSCB, inspection is another method used to scrutinise social work leadership and practice. We are currently awaiting an inspection; the below captures the grades for the different domains in the different inspections. There is now a single inspection framework for children's services meaning fostering and adoption will no longer be separate.

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Service/area inspected</b> | Bridges Resource Centre  |
| <b>Date of inspection</b>     | 30/12/2014   |
| <b>Grade</b>                  | Overall effectiveness: Outstanding<br>Outcomes for children and young people: Outstanding<br>Quality of care: Outstanding<br>Keeping children and young people safe: Outstanding<br>Leadership and management: Outstanding |

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Service/area inspected</b> | Inspection of Local Authority Fostering, Central Placements Team            |
| <b>Date of inspection</b>     | 08/01/2013  |
| <b>Grade</b>                  | Overall effectiveness: Good<br>Outcomes for children and young people: Good |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | Quality of service: Good<br>Safeguarding children and young people: Good<br>Leadership and management: Adequate |
|--|---|

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Service/area inspected</b> | Inspection of Local Authority arrangements for the protection of children   |
| <b>Date of inspection</b>     | 12-21 November 2012   |
| <b>Grade</b>                  | Overall effectiveness: Adequate<br>Effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers: Adequate<br>Quality of practice: Adequate<br>Leadership and governance: Adequate |

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Service/area inspected</b> | Inspection for Local Authority Adoption Agency   |
| <b>Date of inspection</b>     | 17/02/2011   |
| <b>Grade</b>                  | Overall quality rating: Good<br>Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe: Good<br>Helping them achieve well and enjoy what they do: Outstanding<br>Helping children make a positive contribution: Outstanding<br>Organisation: Good |

## 5. Recommendations from the 2013/14 Annual Review

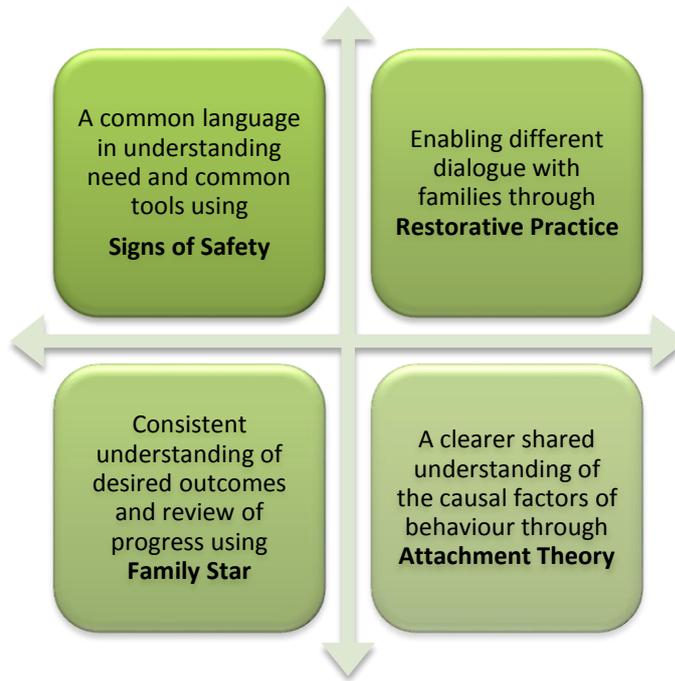
The 2013/14 Annual Review identified key recommendations. Work has been undertaken throughout the year to address these areas and it is the view of the review team that good progress has been made against the 2013/14 recommendations. The below captures those recommendations and the content of the report will summarise progress.

| 2013/14 Recommendations   | Achieved           |
|---|--------------------|
| That senior managers ensure that there is a 'golden thread' from strategy and new developments through to front line teams and 'painting' the refreshed vision and road map to achieve it.  | Partially Achieved |
| That the current strong focus on recruiting and retaining front line social workers is sustained and that managers to help build the workforce for the future. Thinking more about succession planning.   | Achieved           |
| Stronger recognition of the contribution made by long serving permanent staff, finding ways to celebrate and reward these staff who have provided continuity through some challenging times.  | Achieved           |
| That a wider range of 'tools' are made available to assist social workers and other staff in eliciting and recording the voice of the children (examples of those being used in neighbouring authorities were raised by several staff). Senior managers confirmed the work they have completed to give social workers | Achieved           |

|  |   |
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| access to research and tools.  |   |
| That further work is done with new TMs/ATMs to get more consistent, quality supervision in the children's teams, building on good practice examples. Also to continue and expand the current leadership programme.   | Partially Achieved                      |
| Embed new Triage, single assessment and thresholds arrangements, which are monitored and reported to the LSCB  | Achieved                                |
| That children's social care and other front line professionals give a higher priority to chronologies and recording significant events in a child's life and that this is available particularly to inform strategy meetings and assessments.  | Partially Achieved                      |
| The increased rate of re-referrals and children having two or more CP Plans needs to be the subject of close monitoring and action taken to address the issues behind these trends.  | Achieved                                |
| Build a more positive and transparent approach to listening and engaging with parents and ensure they have the information, signposting and access where needed to early help services.  | Achieved                                |
| Review the scope for simplifying the process for agreeing and finding placements for children and young people to reduce where possible, duplication and complexity and communicate the pathway for all staff while also ensuring that proper controls are in place.   | Achieved                                |
| Re-commission CAMHs services in a way which clarifies and where possible extends the range of services they can offer and where there is no capacity, signpost social workers and families to other support available in the community, set a target to increase children receiving CAMHs services, at the different levels. | Partially Achieved                      |
| Consult on and develop the new strategy for the Children with disabilities services supported by robustness of SEND reforms and a clear commissioning strategy for services  | Partially Achieved.<br>SEND reforms met |
| Give higher priority to keeping changes of social worker to a minimum, and recording the reasons why when a change is necessitated. Particularly where children are looked after or on a CP Plan. This is being supported by a new performance indicator to monitor this.  | Partially Achieved                      |
| Undertaken more thematic audits, with a focus on sharing learning and delivering more consistent quality for children and families   | Partially Achieved                      |

## 6. The Practice Framework

The Practice Framework provides a structure to deliver the Innovations Project in Wokingham. Alongside this is also a delivery plan that sets out clear and aspirational goals, with evidence of success. Our emergent practice model brings together and combines building blocks from our experience and development journey. The Signs of Safety approach has led to 50 trained Practice Leaders across the service and new approaches to working with children and their families e.g. three houses, words and pictures, and group supervision. This has included key managers from our partner agencies so that we all adopt a consistent professional understanding and framework to operate within. Furthermore we need managers leading change, from frontline managers across the directorate and partner agencies. This is facilitated by Oxford Brookes University and the Institute of Public Care.



## 7. Key findings from this review (2014/15)

### 7.1 Early Help

During a 6 month period (August 2014 to February 2015) the Early Help Hub considered 177 families, totalling 369 children.

Social work is a vital profession that supports some of our most vulnerable children and families at difficult times in their lives. Effective social work is based on early identification and intervention, in order to ensure a child/family receives support before their circumstances reach crisis point.

An Early Help Challenge Session was arranged by the LSCB on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. Recommendations were made regarding the need to capture purposeful data within the Early Help Hub and work to be undertaken to evidence the pathway through Early Help services in order to determine whether early intervention has changed outcomes for children or what impact it has had.

The Early Help Hub (formerly TRIAGE) began on 14th August 2014. The process was reviewed as a multi-agency conference on 5th November 2014 and audited twice by the independent consultants, Ingson (once for children's services and once for Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board). As a result of the audit, Children and their families are 'stepped up' to Children's Social Care Services if their needs assessment requires it. Our processes have been re-visited and re-designed to implement the findings of the audits. We know from the Ingson audits that the Children's Social Work thresholds are appropriate.

For cases that are 'stepped down' (families who no longer require a statutory social work intervention) from Children's Social Care, agencies are notified, and we are developing through our ICT service a mechanism for capturing the information so that these can be monitored and reviewed in a timely manner.

We have further work to do to capture children and their pathway through Early Help services in order to determine whether early intervention has changed outcomes for children or had little impact. This has traditionally been a different area to evidence to children's social care.

An engagement strategy has been drafted to address the gap in building a more positive and transparent approach to listening and engaging with parents to ensure they have the information, signposting, and access to early help when they need. The aims of the Engagement Strategy are to:

- Increase understanding of engagement activities throughout the Council and to ensure that the views of children and young people are better understood and where possible reflected in policies;
- This strategy builds on the existing good work, it serves to centralise the work and include engagement of parents and carers;
- Sets out the context for strategic engagement with children, young people and their family networks; and how the Council will drive forward its commitment to ensuring that services are designed and delivered to respond to their needs, ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people; and
- Provides clear guidance and expectations in relation to how we will seek to engage and enable children, young people and their families to see how their views, inputs and feedback will shape change across work plans.

A Parents Reference Group is actively seeking the input from parents and engaging directly with them. Parents, carers and extended family members were invited to engage in a reference group in January 2015 to share their views of accessing services. To date there has been 7 reference groups with around 3 to 10 parents engaging.

Strategic focus for 2015/16

| Rationale   | Strategic recommendation  |
|---|---|
| With Signs of Safety being embedded across the service, a robust quality assurance framework will enable the department to routinely monitor the quality of practice. With recent editions to the inspection framework, it is important that a QA Framework reflects these changes.                               | Develop a sophisticated system which captures management information and ensures adherence to Quality Assurance Framework for measuring impact in order to inform further service development and support the learning cycle of practitioners. Performance data should be developed in line with changes to the Early Help Hub. |
| Re-referral rates were showing as 'red' in September 2014 and figures were above the national average. In the 2013/14 return our re-referral rates were a little high but nothing to cause concern. It was mid 2014/15 that re-referrals rates peaked and the analysis was undertaken. The 2014/15 return has yet | Continued analysis of re-referrals to Children's Social Care – this is being monitored on a monthly basis by the Service Manager. We are within the national range and we aspire to be better.  |

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| <p>to be finalised, but we are within the normal range. Between April and June 2014 the contact form within FWi had two boxes 'contact only' and 'contact and referral'. The 'contact and referral' box was used without appropriate thought. Resulting in distortion of data.</p>                           |  |
| <p>ICT needs to support practitioners embedding the Practice Framework which includes Signs of Safety, Restorative Practice, the family star, and attachment theory.</p>   | <p>Ensure ICT (including Frameworki) enables the Practice Framework to be recorded and interrogated easily (Signs of Safety) and captures outcomes for Early Help.</p> |
| <p>Wokingham Borough Council intends to develop a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. This will bring together professionals from a range of disciplines to screen and respond to safeguarding concerns. This is in line with emerging best practice with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.</p> | <p>Further development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to compliment the Early Help Hub.</p>  |
| <p>To further ensure that practice and systems enable practitioners to help children and families in the right way and at the right time. The programme includes practice changes in terms the underpinning theory and philosophy. There is a strategy and work plan in place to support this.</p>           | <p>Continue the implementation of the Early Help Innovations Programme.</p>  |

## 7.2 The Duty Triage and Assessment Team

The Duty Triage and Assessment Team have seen significant change and indeed growth over the last 12 months. Alongside the changes and challenges, morale has remained relatively high with the team embracing the Signs of Safety model as a new way of working.

### **Signs of Safety: What is it?**

The Signs of Safety approach for safeguarding practice was developed through the 1990s in Western Australia. It is now an international approach utilised in the USA, Canada, the UK, Sweden, The Netherlands, New Zealand and Japan. The approach focuses on the question “How can the worker build partnerships with parents and children in situations of suspected or substantiated child abuse and still deal rigorously with the maltreatment issues?” This strengths-based and safety-focused approach to child protection work is grounded in partnership and collaboration. It expands the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and Signs of Safety that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child’s and family’s situation. The approach is designed to be used from commencement through to case closure in order to assist professionals at all stages of the child protection process.

The Early Help Hub and joint Signs of Safety, Attachment and Restorative Practice training has significantly changed the way we work with each other across Children’s Services. The review identified that this has improved the journey children and families take in cases requiring Tier 2 services and improved multi-agency understanding of levels of need and thresholds. The Practice Framework has provided us with an evidence based framework in which to change the way we work with families. Specifically it has emphasised the importance of family and other supportive networks, promotes clarity about danger and bottom lines whilst recognising the strengths in family units and highlighting existing strengths to be built upon.

### Achievements

| <b>Date</b>    | <b>Event</b>  |
|----------------|---|
| April 2014     | Berkshire Women’s Aid co-located a named worker for 18.5 hours per week.  |
| June/July 2014 | Team training in Restorative Practice and 2 day Signs of Safety training.   |
| July 2014      | Recruitment of further staff into the Duty, Triage and Assessment Team to ensure sufficient oversight and capacity.   |
| August 2014    | Launch of ‘TRIAGE’ which is now known as ‘Early Help Hub’ following an external audit and their subsequent recommendations.   |
| September 2014 | Team Manager and one Assistant Team Manager attended 5 day Signs of Safety Practice Leader course. To support embedding the Practice Framework together with a group supervision model. |
| October 2014   | Launch of Domestic Abuse Triage which meets daily.  |

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| November 2014       | External audit completed by Ingson focusing on Triage.  |
| January 2015        | Recruitment of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Assistant Team Manager with specific responsibility for Early Help Hub. Early Help Hub meetings reduced to twice weekly. |
| February/March 2015 | Integration of Early Help Hub and Family First operations.  |
| April 2015          | Remaining managers to attend 5 day Signs of Safety Practice Leader Training. 50 managers are now trained.   |
| April 2015          | Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Planning, with an aim of streamlining early safeguarding services utilising the input from multi-agency partners.         |

Staffing remains the most significant challenge facing the front door service. This is not a unique challenge for Wokingham, but reflects the national recruitment challenges for frontline social work teams. Managers have remained stable over the past 12 months, but we have seen significant turnover in agency staff.

Additionally the team have seen changes in Service Manager over the past 12 months. Recruitment and retention initiatives continue to be developed and refined in accordance with demand and as a result we now have a permanent Service Manager in post and a plan in place that means by July/August 2015 we should have a team of permanent Social Workers.

The impact of these challenges are as follows;

- The quality of assessments: It has been difficult to support the development of agency staff in the way we would want given the nature of short term assignments.
- Recording of assessments: In an Ingson audit in October 2014 one of their recommendations was for 'a management rationale as to next steps should be given at the conclusion of all assessments'. Due to agency staffing changes there have been difficulties in recording assessments within defined timescales and delays in progressing next steps. The allocation and reallocation of cases when staff come and go is a difficulty.
- Complaints: There have been an increase in the number of complaints.

The Team Manager, two Assistant Team Managers and a Social Worker are the longest serving members of the team. All have remained in the team for 2+ years. Within 12 months, nine agency workers have been covered a small number of vacancies. Although high agency worker turnover, this is a result of replacing poorer quality agency workers. There has been a reliance on agency staff, for which some have been of poor quality.

The picture had significantly changed for the better, albeit the impact in some areas will not really be felt until August when permanent staff take up their positions. Capacity, recruitment and retention are the key issue facing the team during the coming year.

Analysis work was completed to understand the issues behind increased rate of re-referrals and a practice error was identified and addressed which brought about normalisation in re-referral rates. Between April and June 2014 the contact form

within FWi had two boxes 'contact only' and 'contact and referral'. The 'contact and referral' box was used at times when it should have been 'contact only', which created an increase in figures.

Strategic focus for 2015/16

| Rationale   | Strategic recommendation   |
|---|--|
| So that families receive a consistent service and that their journey through early help and social work services lead to improved outcomes. | Improvement work that ensures a consistent approach for families who need a social work intervention (already open in early help services) |
| To bridge a gap between tier 2 and 3 services so that social work expertise is available at early help.                                     | Embedding social work to improve professional confidence in early help including the investment in Tier 2 social workers and a manager.    |
| Decision making will be clearer, based on service delivery that reflects the needs and urgency of cases.                                    | Clarity of scope of social care intervention in levels 1, 2, 3 & 4 Children in need  |
| Safety planning for children is related to their individual strengths and need.   | Focus on much greater emphasis on safety planning as opposed to 'service' planning.  |

**7.3 Social Work teams in neighbourhood offices**

Brambles and Ambleside social work teams are based within neighbourhood offices. Both are attached to the children's centre sites. This promotes good professional relationships between the social work team and Children Centre Staff. Families use the building for both visiting social workers, attend meetings as well as attending group and nursery provisions, building relationships with services that will continue to support after Social Care have withdrawn. This works very positively for families and children.

Brambles Social Work Team has had a reliance on agency staff but have two social workers who have been successfully recruited to start in the team within the next few weeks. The team has arranged a team away day in the coming weeks. Ambleside Social Work Team is fully staffed with seven Social Workers with the final vacant permanent post having just been filled. Both teams have a settled, well-structured team with a range of skill bases and experience levels. There is a strong commitment to ongoing training with in the team, with Social Workers having particular areas of development that they take extra responsibility for and in turn inform the team. A recent development is that each team member has been linked with a partner agency to develop relationships and ensure that the team is informed of relevant developments within that service, and to ensure that multi-agency working is founded upon strong professional relationships.

The review identified that there is a high degree of peer support and some co-working that takes place within the teams. Ambleside social work team members

take on the responsibility for chairing the team meetings, they demonstrate a very positive 'can do' attitude, and there is good morale amongst the team.

There is a strong multi-agency approach to all of the work undertaken in the teams. The two social work teams are learning and developing the Practice Framework approaches in both their Child in Need and Child Protection work. Danger Statement and Safety Planning, and use of scaling is being used within Child in Need Reviews and Core Group meetings. Both Ambleside and Brambles social work Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager have undertaken the five day Practice Lead course in April 2015, which will bring added knowledge of Signs of Safety and support further implementation of this practice model. This will contribute to the overall strategic intent of the Department to have the Practice Framework fully implemented across all service areas.

#### Achievements for Ambleside

- All staff attended Family Star and Signs of Safety 2 day training.
- Both Assistant Team Manager and Team Manager attended five day Signs of Safety training to become Practice Leads.
- Team able to recruit to vacant posts with permanent staff, including permanent Assistant Team Manager.
- Additional social work post agreed to ensure that caseloads remain relatively low for social work time to be related to direct work within the approaches contained in the Practice Framework.
- Quality Circles underway, with the Social Worker able to present and show good casework practice to senior management.

#### Achievements for Brambles

- All staff attended Family Star and Signs of Safety 2 day training.
- Both Assistant Team Manager and Team Manager attended five day Signs of Safety training to become Practice Leads.
- Been able to maintain a relatively low caseload.
- Performance indicators have shown improvement for example recording and ensuring visits are undertaken within timescales. Meetings are held regularly to ensure plans are implemented quickly
- Supervision is taking place on time every 4 weeks, although could be developed further
- Recruitment of a permanent Assistant Team Manager
- Quality Circles underway, with the Social Worker able to present and show good casework practice to senior management.

### **7.4 Family Resource Team**

Wokingham's Family Resource Service helps vulnerable children and their families by providing holistic integrated support and intensive interventions where there are multi-generational patterns of poor outcomes for children, led by a social work team.

This service will endeavour to work with families before the problems become too difficult to reduce the risk of family breakdown. Providing short term and where necessary, longer term solution-focused interventions to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

On those occasions where it is unsafe for a child or young person to remain in their parents care, it aims to provide high quality assessments of parenting capacity by Social Workers and good quality contact with consistent Family Support Workers. The Family Resource Service is a multi-professional team, consisting of Social Workers, Family Intervention Project (FIP) Workers, Family Support Workers, Drug and Alcohol Advisor and a Young Carers coordinator.

### Achievements

- Restructure of early help and amalgamation of parenting team and family support- transition went well.
- Family Resource Team participation in Early Help Hub from the beginning of 'single Front door'.
- All Family Resource Team staff trained in Restorative Practise/ family Star and 2 day Signs of Safety – implementation of these in day to day work
- The Team Manager completed 5 day residential Signs of Safety training and became the first of 6 Practice Leads.
- The Practice Framework started to be embedded into Family Support practise – all supervision completed using Signs of Safety methodology,
- Young carer's protocol and Action Plan in place.
- 3 senior practitioner and 1 front line family worker completed 5 day Signs of Safety training.
- Parenting assessments (PAMs) commenced and now well established in the Family Resource Team.
- Early Help Senior Social worker in post.

### Strategic focus for 2015/16

| <b>Rationale</b>  | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>  |
|---|--|
| In order to achieve a common purpose and language, the multi-agency team have been trained in Signs of Safety so they can effectively support families. | Further implementation of the elements of the Practice Framework within Early Help – Implement Signs of Safety in Team Around the Family meetings  |
| Reflective practice is an essential component of safe practice.   | Embedding of consistent group supervision sessions   |
| To support the delivery of parenting programmes with a strong evidence base and increase departmental capacity to deliver these courses.                | To explore if the Early Help Innovations Programme strategy should include and invest in Triple P parenting training as our evidence based approach.                                     |
| Clarity in roles and responsibilities for individual practitioners but also the scope of service/team level responsibility.                             | To explore the consistent rationale underpinning which work is overseen by a qualified social worker within the area team and which are led in Family Resource Team under the Early Help |

## **7.5 Children with Disabilities Service**

The Children with Disabilities Service has a total of 15 staff members including a Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager. Three Social Workers and two Occupational Therapists have been in the team for more than 10 years. One Social Worker has a part-time secondment to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, which includes undertaking mental health training; this knowledge and experience will return to the team once the secondment has ended. The intention is that she becomes a main link between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Social Workers in Children's Social Care. Another Social Worker works part time for Emergency Duty Service, bringing some added value to the team.

Arrangements have been made for the Transition Worker from Adults' Services to attend the team weekly, to strengthen and develop vital links between the services. There are strong and effective partnership working arrangements and relationships between the Children with Disabilities Service and colleagues in the Short Breaks Services and the Special Educational Needs Team.

In the last year there have been some child protection investigations regarding children with complex needs, which have raised various issues relating to the team's work with colleagues from health disciplines. This led to recent liaison with a Community Consultant Paediatrician and the community nurses which resulted in strengthening the links between the services.

In the last year the team have worked closely with SEN to develop the SEND reforms and have made a significant contribution to the project work, development of processes, and implementation in practice.

To further progress a better service to our short breaks users, the Bridges Short Breaks Service are now undertaking a social work service to those receiving a short break. This has resulted in two social workers being assigned to undertake this work, and being based at the Bridges resource. This reconfiguration has resulted in an enhanced provision to Child In Need 2 children, and a more targeted input from Disabled Children's Team.

The Early Help Hub also came into being in the autumn and the Disabled Children's Team is a key player, with the Assistant Team Manager participating directly at referral stage.

The team has benefitted from additional support provided by the Quality Assurance Team. This has included child protection team training and direct one-to-one support to team members.

| <b>Rationale</b>  | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>   |
|---|---|
| To provide a coordinated service and inform the commissioning strategy. | To further improve the integrated local offer for children with additional needs.                                       |
| To have them as part of an integrated social work service.              | Duty Triage and Assessment and Disabled Children's Team need to ensure greater buy in from our Occupational Therapists. |
| To provide a consistent response to child protection practice.          | Child protection practice will be developed and strengthened within the team  |

## **7.6 Bridges**

Bridges Resource Centre is a residential short breaks facility registered as a children's home with Ofsted. As well as providing a range of services in its own right it is also the hub for the Short Breaks Service which comprise of a range of additional services under the same management structure.

### Achievements

- Bridges awarded Outstanding by Ofsted
- Manager runner up in national Social Work Team Manager of the Year Award
- Re-development of Sensory room
- Friends of Bridges re-launched - charity raising money for the resource centre.
- Regular consultations with young people to improve service delivery

### Strategic Focus 2015/16

| <b>Rationale</b>  | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>   |
|---|---|
| To ensure children with disabilities reach their full potential.  | To establish a social work services at Bridges to ensure children in need 1 & 2 are appropriately supported and enabled to reach their potential. |
| To ensure children with disabilities reach their full potential and to offer alternative forms of respite.                | Development of outreach service to assist families of Disabled Children   |
| To ensure the service remains responsive and develops to enable children with disabilities to reach their full potential. | To develop the leadership capacity in Bridges to improve services for children with additional needs  |

## **7.7 Here4U Team**

Here4U Team currently consists of a Team Manager, an Assistant Team Manager, five full-time Social Workers and three Personal Advisors. Personal Advisors are allocated to young people at the age of 16 years old on completion of their initial Pathway Plan. The team works with those leaving local authority care and children who are subject of care orders where the plan is not for them to return home, this includes permanency planning for all children in care alongside a dedicated Practice Consultant. At March 2015 Wokingham Borough Council were the corporate parent to 74 children. The department continues to care for significantly fewer children per 10,000 than our statistical neighbours, the SE region or England. There is no evidence that this is the 'wrong rate for Wokingham'.

For people leaving local authority care, the allocated Personal Advisor continues to work with them until they are 21 years old or 25 years old if in higher education. The overall aim of their work is to advise, assist and befriend those who are leaving care. The focus of the team is to assist young people in formulating a transition plan to semi or independent living, accessing further education, training or employment along with support in accessing government benefits, local authority housing or any other additional services.

Here4U Team currently work alongside a variety of multi-agency professionals such as, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, foster carers, General Practitioners, Police Officers, Youth Offending Service, Housing, Semi-independent accommodation providers, local companies that provide apprenticeship opportunities for our young people, and Connexions (Adviza).

Here4U work closely with our young people, ensuring that they remain safe and that their needs remain met. The team follows clear authority and government procedures, ensures that any assessments are child centred, work collaboratively with them when assessing how best to support their needs, ensure that their views are considered, and workers listen to what is being said by the young person.

At the time of the review, caseloads averaged 12 per worker. Currently the strategy in place is that agency workers are covering more duty work to allow permanent workers to work consistently with children so as not to unnecessarily re-allocate cases given that recruitment is underway.

As from beginning of March 2015 an independent agency, the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), was recruited to undertake independent return interviews for the children looked after who go missing. NYAS are also responsible for recruiting and matching Independent Visitors to children; of the referrals made to date they have matched 2 children.

The last 12 months saw an improvement in the working relationship with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. A CAMHS worker attends Here4U every Wednesday afternoon to offer individual case advice to workers and one-to-one focused time-limited sessions with young people.

## Achievements

- Recruited permanently to the vacant Assistant Team manager post
- Increased the size of the team from 3 to 5 Social Workers
- One young person has gone on to university
- We held 4 successful barbeques, a Christmas lunch for all the care leavers, an information session afternoon including sessions on sexual health and the impact of drug use
- Four young people were housed independently and locally enabling more intense support from their Personal Advisers
- Development of the Here4U football team who also won the championship last season
- Set up a regular support group for the 21 year old care leavers

### Strategic focus for 2015/16

| <b>Rationale</b>  | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>   |
|---|---|
| It was recognised within the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report that there is a lack of coordinated alternative provision for people leaving local authority care.   | Continue to work with housing to match available accommodation to appropriate care leavers – managed via monthly meetings.  |
| Improvement work is underway to address the timeliness of health assessments however the Independent Reviewing Officers highlighted this as an area of concern in their annual report.  | Rapidly improve with LAC Health Nurse to ensure that health assessments for looked after children are maintained  |
| There is a national focus on Child Sexual Exploitation. There is statutory guidance around protecting children from sexual exploitation which includes the provision of intelligence sharing and partnership working. This will also feature in Ofsted inspections. | Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Children group by managers in order to ensure that patterns and knowledge is shared within the group to increase intelligence across multiple agencies. |
| To encourage accessing services that children in care are entitled to.  | Contribute to improving the take up of the Independent Visitor Scheme.  |
| Ensure children understand their journey, can process their life history, and so that life story work contributes to improving emotional well-being..   | Improve delivery of life story work.  |

## **7.8 Workforce**

The 2014/15 year has been a critical one for refocusing the development of a new Recruitment and Retention Strategy, using social work feedback as the basis of this work. This strategy has renewed the focus on recruitment processes to improve timescales, and a commitment to an aspiration that Wokingham becomes the destination of choice for children's social work professionals. This strategy has met with significant success with a number of posts being offered to new candidates over the last year.

This is not an area where we can afford to relax our efforts and the test of the strategy will be over the longer term and of its ability to retain those it recruits and to build stability in an ever increasing competitive market. Our staff remain our greatest asset because a skilled and a motivated workforce is essential to support children and families and business continuity. Ensuring that front line managers are well trained in order to have a direct and valuable impact on the performance of their staff is crucial to the success of the service. Our service provides invaluable support to safeguard vulnerable children and adults and, at the same time, promote their independence and this requires a wide range of skills and competencies.

Work undertaken to develop a sustainable workforce

- There is political support within the council for the pilot workforce strategy
- We have achieved an average caseload of 12 cases.
- Support to students & ASYE: A handbook for ASYE's and supervisors has been developed. Progress is now being made with developing an academy and 4 ASYE's have been recruited as part of succession planning.
- Partnerships with Universities: In a partnership with Winchester University, Portsmouth, Southampton, Hampshire & Isle of Wight regarding Step Up to Social Work and as yet we are involved in the selection/assessment and ongoing support to students who come to Wokingham Borough Council. This has resulted in four permanent positions being filled.
- Link with universities to continue to offer student placements.
- Recruitment & retention: Devised Professional Capabilities Framework Career Progression Scheme and linked to pay increase/bonus. Materials also developed for an 'assessment centre' style interview process.
- Principal Social Worker observation of practice and observation of a supervision session.
- Signs of Safety Practice Leader training provided.
- A number of tools have been introduced to support Social Workers with ascertaining the wishes, feelings, and voice of the child. This includes the three houses tool used for Signs of Safety based work.
- We currently have no vacancies. At present there are agency staff in place covering all gaps.
- Recruitment of permanent Practice Consultants to support practitioner development, learning using audit, complaints and family feedback in order to focus learning.
- Overseas recruitment – 6 experienced social workers due to start in June/July 2015
- Recruitment days
- Part of Berkshire and South East regional collaborative approaches

Strategic focus for 2015/16

| Rationale                                | Strategic recommendation              |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Changes in social worker for children in | Continue to implement the Recruitment |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| care remains high.   | and Retention Strategy to reduce the reliance on agency staff whilst maintaining an experienced workforce with the capacity to develop newly qualified workers and those from other countries |
| Attract potential candidates to work in Wokingham.   | Contribution to university seminars and open days to attract potential new Social Workers   |
| Enhance career progression and retention.  | Link job descriptions with the Professional Capabilities Framework  |
| So that the department can learn from good practice and replicate areas of excellence in other areas. Good practice evidence from different parts of the 'system' and for each stage children may take within their journey in children's social care will support our improvement and inspection. | Compile a good practice file of evidence sent by the Team Managers  |

## 7.9 Complaints and compliments

The annual report for complaints covers the nature, type and resolution of complaints at a greater depth than this overview. The following table captures the number of complaints received during 2014/15;

|                                    | Early Resolution | Stage 1  | Stage 2  | LGO      | Out of Scope | Total     |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| Ambleside Social Work Team         | 1                | 2        |          | 0        | 1            | 4         |
| Brambles Social Work Team          | 6                | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 7         |
| Disabled Children's Team           | 3                | 2        | 1        | 0        | 0            | 6         |
| Family Placement Team              | 1                | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 1         |
| Here 4 U                           | 2                | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 4         |
| Referral and Assessment            | 3                | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0            | 4         |
| Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | 2                | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 3         |
| Special Needs                      | 1                | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 1         |
| Various Children's Teams           | 0                | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0            | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>19</b>        | <b>9</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b>     | <b>31</b> |

The proactive approach taken by Children's Services in response to complaints has ensured that Stage 1 complaints are resolved in a timely yet effective manner. This then means that only a small percentage of complaints proceed to Stage 2, or go to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The below table shows the percentage of complaints in each team compared with the previous year.

|                  | Complaints 2013 - 2014 |             | Complaints 2014-2015 |             |
|------------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|
|                  | No.                    | %           | No.                  | %           |
| Ambleside        | 7                      | 25%         | 4                    | 13%         |
| R and A          | 7                      | 25%         | 4                    | 13%         |
| Brambles         | 5                      | 18%         | 7                    | 23%         |
| DCT              | 3                      | 11%         | 6                    | 20%         |
| Here 4 U         | 3                      | 11%         | 4                    | 13%         |
| QAST             | 2                      | 7%          | 3                    | 9%          |
| Family Placement | 1                      | 3%          | 1                    | 3%          |
| Bridges          |                        |             | 1                    | 3%          |
| Other            | 1                      |             | 1                    | 3%          |
| <b>Totals</b>    | <b>28</b>              | <b>100%</b> | <b>31</b>            | <b>100%</b> |

There is a small increase in the number of formal complaints this year and of these, two have progressed to Stage 2 after attempts to resolve the complaints at the early resolution stage.

There has been an increase in the number of complaints to the DCT and Brambles and a decrease in the complaints to Ambleside and R and A. The numbers are too small to be able to ascertain any particular trends and they do not appear to be reflective of any particular problems or issues within the teams.

There has been one stage 3 panel this year which was linked to the resolution of a complaint from 2013/2014. Regrettably following a stage 3 Panel and referral to the LGO by the Service User this complaint is still not resolved.

#### Themes arising from complaints

| Theme                              | Context  | Action taken   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Children's involvement in planning | Some complaints from children were regarding plans being made without their involvement.                   | Managers and Independent Reviewing Officers have been made aware and advised to monitor this in order to reduce the risk of this happening in further cases. |
| Confidentiality                    | Some complaints were regarding the disclosure of confidential information by Social Workers.               | Training has been provided and awareness sessions undertaken to try and address this.  |
| Communication with parents         | Some complaints were regarding communication with parents about Children's Services involvement with their | Training has been delivered to individual teams with an aim of addressing this.  |

|  |           |  |
|--|-----------|--|
|  | families. |  |
|--|-----------|--|

Compliments received by the Department

| <b>Team</b>                               |   | <b>From</b>                      | <b>About</b>   |
|---|---|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Ambleside</b>                          |   |                                  |  |
| <b>Brambles</b>                           | 1 | Children protection chairs/ IROs | Quality of work undertaken with families                                     |
| <b>Disabled Children's Team</b>           | 2 | Parents                          | Support given<br>Help identifying suitable school                            |
|   | 1 | Other professionals              | Quality of work with family  |
| <b>Family Placement Team</b>              | 3 | Foster carers                    | Celebration event for foster carers including recognition of their work      |
|   | 1 | Adoptive parent                  | Clarifying arrangements for birth certificate/ assistance with final contact |
| <b>Family Resource Team</b>               | 1 | Adoptive Parent                  | Support given during reassessment of a child's placement                     |
| <b>Here 4 U</b>                           | 4 | Young people in care             | Support given/Being listened to  |
| <b>R &amp; A</b>                          | 1 | Child Protection chair           | Quality of work of worker who had 3 CP conferences in one week               |
|   | 1 | From parent                      | Support given to her and her child   |
| <b>Safeguarding and Quality Assurance</b> | 4 | Other professionals              | Conduct<br>Management of various meetings                                    |
| <b>Foster carers</b>                      | 1 | Young person                     | Care given   |
| <b>Children's Rights Officer</b>          | 3 | Young People in care             | Support offered  |
| <b>CSLT</b>                               | 1 | Manager of Adopt Berkshire       | Feedback to senior administrator on launch event                             |

The majority of compliments are from colleagues and acknowledge good work. The conference chairs and IROs always ensure that they feedback good practice. Three

foster carers gave positive feedback about the foster carers celebration event and good practice and feedback is always acknowledged in the staff newsletter BUZZ.

Strategic focus 2015/16

| Rationale   | Strategic recommendation  |
|---|---|
| To minimise the risk of data security breaches which feature as a theme in complaints received. | Ensure that workers continue to double check records to be sure they are sent to the correct address. |
| Continuous improvement  | Continue to put action in place to monitor themes   |

**7.10 Sufficiency - Fostering/Adoption and Placements**

The sufficiency portfolio is pivotal to the success of the service because of the very significant range of services it supports. The Assistant Team Manager was recruited into the Team Manager position in May and at present has an agency Assistant Team Manager. A permanent Assistant Team Manager has been recruited.

Adoption teams have been re-commissioned to create the new shared service, Adopt Berkshire. The Post Adoption Support remains within each Local Authority. Post adoption support remains within the Placement Team and there are two 0.6 'Adoption Support Worker' posts both recruited to successfully. One Adoption Support Worker took up post in December 2014 and the other worker in February 2015.

In order to continue to support the recruitment and retention of foster carers within Wokingham, a new post of 'Recruitment and Retention Assistant' was created within the Placement Team and recruited to in January 2015, to support the R&R foster care lead within the team. At present there are not enough foster carers.

Of all teams within the service, the Placement Team is the most stable team and the morale is generally good. The Team Manager is also permanent. Team meetings and practice sessions held on a fortnightly basis provide invaluable opportunities for staff to reflect on issues relating to foster carers/placements and to discuss and reflect on practice issues.

There are plans for all staff within the team to attend the Nurturing Attachment training; three of the team members have completed this training already. This training is also provided to foster carers and managers to develop skills to support repair and re-parenting of children looked after with complex needs, in particular to support the career Foster Carers.

The Signs of Safety model is being used to explore factors during the recruitment of carers, and in particular during initial visits and assessments. The past 12 months have seen the team further develop joint working across the other social care teams and an increase in effective communication.

80% of the feedback from the fostering panel in 2013 to 2014 came back better than good. The Fostering Panel commented that some of the reports have been excellent and of very good quality. Some of the issues the panel have fed back have been that there has been no feedback from the relevant professional network for the child, issues around training for the foster carers to access and some relevant checks have not been included with the reports.

Strategic focus for 2015/16

| <b>Rationale</b>   | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>  |
|--|--|
| There is a need for placements for older teenagers who wish to move to a more independent form of care | We need to increase our number of Supported Lodgings Carers.   |
| To ensure we have sufficient in house foster carers.   | We need to stay focused also on general foster care recruitment to ensure we have capacity. Renew/refresh our approach to recruitment. |
| To ensure we have sufficient in house specialist carers.   | Recruitment to specialist foster care has not been successful; this has been re-launched   |
| To promote fostering opportunities.  | Develop partnerships with the faith community  |

**7.11 Quality Assurance and Safeguarding**

The Quality Assurance and Safeguarding sits structurally within Children’s Social Care. At the time of this review the team is now in a position where all staff (including the Service Manager) are permanent WBC employees.

This service area carries a number of statutory functions in relation to monitoring both child protection plans and care plans for looked after children. As a service they also have a responsibility to quality assurance practice at both a micro and macro level, contributing to service improvement as well as influencing/challenging plans for individual children.

Operating within a range of statutory frameworks, the service has been pivotal in the implementation of the Practice Framework and in being involved in audit activity across the department.

Over the past year there have been a number of achievements. Given the diversity in core functions of the service and individual and collective responsibility, there are also a number of areas for development over the coming year.

Achievements within the team

- The team is now fully staffed with permanent employees
- Regarding quality assurance, a number of externally commissioned audits have taken place over the past year covering the following areas;

- Review of Child in Care and Child in Need Practice (December 2014)
- Review of Practice (September 2014)
- Children’s Services Triage Review (November 2014)
- Review of Social Care ‘Front Door’ (April 2014)
- Review of Social Care ‘Front Door’ (August 2014)
- Early Intervention Review: A Review of Thresholds and Quality (June 2014)
- Independent Reviewing Officer audits and notifications have supported identifying issues and for action planning to take place
- Independent Reviewing Officers now liaise with contracts and commissioning to raise any issues about providers
- Independent Reviewing Officers are key stakeholders in the use of the newly commissioned Independent Visitor service
- Implemented formal monitoring to reduce unnecessary drift in care planning
- Re-launched the Dispute Resolution Process
- Increasing uptake of advocacy at Initial Child Protection Conferences
- Response rate to the child in care consultation improved as a result of reviewing admin
- Child in care consultation documents re-designed

Strategic focus for 2015/16

| <b>Rationale</b>   | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>   |
|--|---|
| Continue to ensure we develop people and services to meet needs of vulnerable children and families. | Develop a more robust system of monitoring progress of notifications and escalations  |
| As above.  | Make better use of children and young people’s feedback to improve services   |
| As above.  | Improve the timeliness of review reports  |
| As above.  | Address the lack of provision of appropriate schooling for children in care   |
| As above.  | Monitor the lack of timely health assessments   |
| To ensure permanency options are identified early.   | Challenge examples of delay in permanency planning and/or family-finding  |
| To improve the understanding children have of their life story.                                      | Contribute to challenging the provision of life story work where this has not been carried out  |
| To ensure that children in our care receive a good quality service.                                  | Challenge drift in carrying out requirements of care plan   |
| So that learning is shared consistently across agencies.   | Service Manager Quality Assurance - to link with Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board to ensure continuity of training delivered e.g. learning from Serious Case Reviews |

**7.12 Leadership of Change**

Leadership has been good in bringing complex planning, partnership and delivery streams together to enable change and strong performance in key areas.

We have recruited five permanent service managers however three have subsequently left. This is largely to do with the distance they needed to travel to get to Wokingham and/or for personal reasons.

Through strong leadership, service transformation and effective stewardship within all teams, we have seen the past 12 months ending with clear strategic plans in all areas of business. The challenge for the coming year will be to do more with less and we will explore further opportunities as well as building on existing arrangements for collaboration where that adds value and improves service efficiency.

## **8. Conclusion**

Wokingham caseloads remain low. This is encouraging and demonstrates the Departments commitment to resourcing good quality work with families. Although the complexity of cases determines the capacity of workers, caseload numbers remain a good indicator of a workforce with a manageable workload.

There have been a number of areas of improvement and development in different service areas which is encouraging. Any changes made remain subject of continuous monitoring and future developments identified will be acted upon over the coming year.

Staffing has remained a challenge for Wokingham which reflects a national issue. Locally this is even more challenging due to the set-up of a number of unitary authorities, all of whom are actively recruiting qualified social work staff. We have been successful to secure employment of social workers from overseas and newly qualified workers from the UK. Our current position is that vacancies remain covered by agency workers and our ongoing priority is to reduce reliance on agency workers. Positively, we have seen the turnover rate improve significantly from 33% in 13/14 to 14% at March 2015.

The implementation of the Practice Framework is going well. Additional training has been provided. There is still some way to go until it is fully embedded, but this is not to be unexpected. To successfully embed this model takes time as it involves planned and facilitated practice and culture change. This review has identified pockets of excellence in Wokingham. Children and young people are involved in the strategic developments within the local authority whether that be through formal routes such as the Children in Care Council, or through more innovative projects such as the introduction of Young Commissioners. The review has identified there is a commitment to 'do things differently' but likewise to deliver the best possible service.

## **9. Recommendations**

Recommendations from this report will be monitored by the Quality Assurance Manager on a quarterly basis so that improvements are frequently captured and barriers to improvement swiftly identified.

Ofsted has a set of comprehensive criteria for what 'good' may look like in the new single inspection. This review has identified a number of achievements and strengths across the different service areas and teams within Children's Services. As already identified within the report, we recognise we effectively safeguard and promote the welfare of children and their families but we do require improvement.

The below captures some of the service wide recommendations to be monitored on a quarterly basis;

| <b>Rationale</b>  | <b>Strategic recommendation</b>   |
|---|---|
| To continue to change the way we work throughout the journey of children and families from early help through statutory services. | Deliver on the Early Help and Innovation Programme through partnerships   |
| As above.   | Continue with the system wide implementation of the Practice Framework and deliver training where necessary   |
| To ensure that improvements are monitored and that learning is disseminated.  | Review and re-design the quality assurance processes  |
| To contribute to developing a permanent workforce.  | Continue to implement and develop the Recruitment and Retention Strategy  |
| Reflective supervision is pivotal in providing effective social work practice.  | Consistently apply reflective supervision and group supervision on complex cases  |
| Feedback from service users should influence service design and delivery.   | Consider how we can use the experience of our service users to help with service redesign   |
| To provide a consistent service and minimise the number of changes in social worker.  | Maintain progress towards recruiting permanent members of staff who can be developed to deliver a consistent service. Aim for 100% permanent staff and evidence of retention  |
| There is a need to look at services that respond to the needs of children early so that we reduce accommodating children later.   | To inform wider service design for children aged 8+   |
| To support embedding the implantation of the Practice Framework. This will also enable practitioners to learn from experience.    | Ensure the take up of the four planks of training, peer to peer, and action learning training is fully maximised  |
| To ensure that section 20 is being effectively and appropriately used.  | A review of the use of section 20 in light of recent court judgements   |
| So that progress can be monitored against actions identified within this review.  | That the areas for development identified within this report are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Quality Assurance Manager so that updates inform next year's annual review/QA Annual Report. Areas for development will be actively worked on by Senior Managers and their teams |

Brian Grady and Felicity Budgen

28/05/15