

TITLE	Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) on neglect May 2017
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Children's Services 12 th September 2017
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Judith Ramsden, Strategic Director of Children's Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Joint Targeted Area Inspection is an inspection of an area by four inspectorates, Ofsted (who led the inspection) the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary and Her Majesties Inspectorate of Probation. Together they look at the arrangements to safeguard children and undertake a "deep dive" into a specific area, which, for this inspection, was children experiencing neglect. The inspection is not 'graded' but its outcomes are published nationally in the form of a letter.

The inspection took place in May 2017 and focused on the multi - agency front door to children's social care, the "deep dive" theme of multi-agency response to abuse and neglect and the leadership and management arrangements as a partnership.

The outcome of such an in-depth inspection provides a window into the quality and functioning of the multi-agency system and the services provided and are a learning opportunity for agencies to identify areas for improvement.

The findings were produced in a letter to the Director of People's Service on the 14th July 2017 and found 'the partnership is well established and partners are clearly focused on driving improvements to ensure appropriate recognition and response to neglect of children'. A range of areas for improvement were identified and a number relate to the early response to neglect, in particular, the multi-agency risk assessment and better engagement between the police and children's social care when risk is first identified.

RECOMMENDATION

Overview and Scrutiny were made aware of the JTAI having taken place in May 2017 and were provided with the Local Government Peer Review assessment from March 2017 which reviewed the Local Authority and partners responses and services to neglect within Wokingham Borough. The governance arrangements for monitoring the multi-agency actions rest with the Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) and have set up a task group to monitor the action plan and submit this to the respective regulators by the 30th October 2017. The action plan is attached to this report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The partnership letter on the outcome of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection into the area of neglect has identified a number of areas for partners and the local authority. This report summarises the outcome of the inspection and its implications for the authority. The report outlines the strengths that the inspectors noted across the partnership and in relation to social care, and describes the partnerships plans to address the areas for development, which were identified.

The “Front Door” to services for children

This element of the inspection looked at how children are dealt with at the first point of contact with all agencies across the system.

Strengths:

- The development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), is ensuring that professionals receive the support and advice they need to refer concerns about children to children’s social care. Most children experiencing neglect have their needs promptly assessed and appropriate services provided, including support for families while social work assessments are being completed.
- The WSCB commissioned a team of external consultants to review the ‘front door’ (MASH) in November 2016. This has resulted in focused work to drive improvements in areas of work such as ensuring the timely management of contacts to the MASH.
- Frontline practitioners across agencies report that the creation of the MASH has had a positive impact, meaning that children experiencing neglect have their needs promptly assessed and appropriate services provided, in the vast majority of cases
- The social work team offers a high level of service, such as advice to parents and professionals, child protection enquiries and brief interventions while assessments are ongoing so that children do not have to wait for a service
- The health professional within the MASH is vigilant in identifying risk and is aware of additional vulnerabilities when assessing neglect,
- There is timely and effective communication between the YOS and the MASH to appropriately share information about children at risk

Areas for development :

- Further work is needed to ensure a consistent, and considered multi-agency approach to joint risk-assessment and decision- making in cases of neglect.
- Joint investigation between the police and children’s social care should have taken place in a small number of cases but were not and CSC completed these alone
- A risk-assessment form should be completed by police in the MASH when a child is referred to children’s social care.
- identifying needs and risk, including risk of neglect among minority populations, is not routinely assessed

Leadership within Children’s Services and the LSCB

Strengths

- strong and visible leadership by the Wokingham director of children’s services is

evident in promoting a clear and shared direction with partner agencies

- Wokingham leaders across the partnership are ambitious for all local children. They actively seek to learn from research and have welcomed external scrutiny of their safeguarding practice.
- Scrutiny and challenge by the WSCB is having an impact and the board recently commissioned the LGA to undertake a Peer Review on neglect
- the senior management team in children's social care clearly demonstrate their commitment to driving improvements in social work practice through investment in staff to develop a well-qualified, skilled and experienced workforce
- Thames Valley Police have made an unambiguous commitment to the development of improved multi-agency working. They have worked closely with the local authority to ensure appropriate staffing levels in the MASH
- Designated and named safeguarding professionals provide strong leadership and direction to help to strengthen the recognition of neglect.

Areas for development

- There is a lack of management oversight and joint ownership of responsibility in partnership working to ensure that situations of neglect improve and a lack of drive by agencies to ensure that plans progress at an appropriate pace
- Across the partnership, supervision is not consistently regular or robust
- the need for the partners to better engage and work together to ensure multi-agency participation in decision making at an early stage
- The WSCB does not have a shared multi-agency data set to enable member agencies to jointly review and oversee performance at the 'front door' of services.
- The neglect strategy action plan is underdeveloped and the action plan is too vague to be measured
- Staff working in substance misuse services do not have the required level of safeguarding training for their work with children and families
- Within NPS, CRC, and the YOS, consideration of neglect is not sufficiently integrated into effective and holistic safeguarding practice. Current training packages for CRC, NPS and the YOS do not explicitly provide sufficient neglect coverage and, in supervision meetings

Moving Forward

The identified Areas for Improvement are collated into a JTAI Action Plan, which is attached in the appendix to this report. The plan is locally developed but then submitted formally to the four inspectorates. The action plan is currently being updated and will be subject to discussion and agreement at the JTAI action group to be held on the 7th September 2017 under the governance of the WSCB and will be subject to ongoing review.

Background

The Joint Targeted Area Inspection process was implemented in January 2016 in response to the need to better assess the quality of the multi-agency work with children and families across the whole of partnership.

Its identified focus is upon “arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection in local authority areas in England”.

Each inspection has two related aspects:

1. The quality of multi-agency work within the ‘Front Door’ to children’s services.
2. The quality of multi-agency work in relation to a specific “Deep Dive” theme, which changes each six months.

Over the 2 year period from January 2016, those specific themes were set out as:

- ◀ *Children at risk of CSE and / or Missing from Care, Home or School*
- ◀ *Children Living with Domestic Abuse*
- ◀ *Children subject to Neglect*
- ◀ *Children subject to sexual abuse in the family*

The JTAI in Wokingham in May 2017 focussed upon the local authority’s multi-agency work within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (The “MASH”, or “Front Door”) and multi-agency work with children living with neglect.

The scope of inspection was wide including: interviews with elected members and senior officers; attendance at and observation of multi-agency meetings; close scrutiny of individual cases undertaken with the workers involved and, importantly, feedback from a selection of children, young people and parents / carers who are the recipients of the services we provide

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years because 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)	Not applicable		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not applicable		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
n/a

List of Background Papers
None

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