

Performance and Scrutiny Committee - 8 January 2015

OSCB Annual Report 2013/14

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) is the local statutory mechanism for agreeing how organisations in Oxfordshire will co-operate and work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and for ensuring that this work is effective. OSCB's statutory basis lies in section 13 of the Children Act 2004.
- 1.2 The work of OSCB is governed by the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013, which sets out how organisations and individuals should work together and the Local Safeguarding Children Board Regulations 2006 which lays down the functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards.
- 1.3 An Independent Chair, in line with statutory guidance, leads the OSCB. The Chair is accountable to the Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Council but works closely with all chief officers across the partnership and in particular the Director of Children's Services.
- 1.4 OSCB is required to publish an annual report including a rigorous and independent assessment by the Independent Chair of the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in its area. The OSCB should present this report to key strategic partnerships and bodies who commission services for children and young people (including the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire Council). These bodies must provide a formal response to OSCB, either through their representation on the OSCB board or their chair of chief executive corresponding with the OSCB Independent Chair.

2. The Child Protection System in Oxfordshire

- 2.1 There have been a number of changes and improvements in the child protection system in Oxfordshire, and in June 2014 Ofsted graded the partnership as performing well. The new Independent Chair has focused on the governance of the OSCB to ensure that it exerts leadership across the strategic partnership and chief officers provide assurance from all agencies that safeguarding children is high priority. Challenges for the child protection partnership are captured below in relation to the child's journey through the safeguarding systems in place across the County as reported through the 2013/14 OSCB Annual Report.
- 2.2 A revised thresholds matrix is supporting practitioners to make the right referral to the right service. The Ofsted inspection commented that there was 'evidence that early help is making a difference and improving outcomes for children'. Work is underway to develop more robust early help to reduce the numbers of children who are escalated to children's social care for intervention.

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- 2.3 During 2013/14 there were 5810 referrals to children's social care. This was 9% lower than the previous year. However, OSCB has noted that more of these referrals have met the criteria for support, which has increased activity levels across the child protection system and continued pressure on the front line. Ofsted inspectors agreed that services demonstrated 'improvements in the targeting of intervention, better decision making and more robust management oversight'.
- 2.4 At the end of March 2014 there were 504 children subject to a child protection plan compared to 430 children the previous year. Nationally there was a rise in numbers on a child protection plan between 2008 and 2011, which has since levelled. OSCB has analysed the local increase in general activity and concluded that it reflects greater identification, recognition and response to signs of abuse and neglect as well as sensitivity to risk.
- 2.5 This increase in plans has created pressures within the safeguarding system for all partners involved in the multi-agency planning of care and for children's social care in particular to maintain close oversight. OSCB routinely scrutinises child protection activity through multi agency audits. Last year this resulted in an update to the thresholds need matrix and improved promotion of safeguarding courses.
- 2.6 There were 463 children in care at the end of March 2014, compared with 416 at the end of March 2013. The majority of children (327) were living with foster families. During the recent Ofsted inspection of Oxfordshire's Children's Services, the experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence were judged as good and the inspectors commented, 'in the large majority of cases, children and young people are settled and thriving in their current placement, with improved outcomes in all or most areas of their lives'.

3. Vulnerable Children in Oxfordshire

- 3.1 The OSCB needs to be confident that it knows who its most vulnerable children are and who are therefore at increased risk of harm. Sharing this knowledge and information will help ensure their needs are understood and their risks reduced; and most importantly their outcomes improved. Oxfordshire's most vulnerable groups are summarised below along with ways in which partners are working together to support them.
- 3.2 There has been a small rise in the number of **disabled children** with a child protection plan (CPP). At the end of March 2014 there were 15 disabled children with a CPP. OSCB has established a disabled children sub group to focus on the needs of this vulnerable group with a particular aim to improve transition arrangements.
- 3.3 The number of **young people who offend or are at risk of offending** has decreased from previous years and there has been a significant decline in first time entrants into the youth justice system. The proportion of young people receiving a custodial sentence rose slightly to 4.2% from 3.5% in 2012/13. This suggests there is a small but significant group of young people that present a high risk of harm to the public and may have additional problems, which make them vulnerable. However, the proportion of young

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people being remanded to custody fell to 4.8% from 8.5% in 2012/13. The decline in numbers of offenders and offences is consistent with a national reduction in the number of young people formally entering the criminal justice system.

- 3.4 There has been a significant increase in the number of **young people with mental health issues**. The rate of referrals to Oxford Health Foundation Trust Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has seen a substantial increase. At the end of March 2014 3167 young people and families were being supported by CAMHS. Along with an increase in the numbers of cases there is an increase in the complexity of mental health issues. As a result the numbers of young people requiring an inpatient service increased in 2013/14 to 34. This is a reflection of the national picture regarding insufficient mental health services for children and young people. The OSCB has noted that recommendations arising from national inquiries into CSE emphasise the importance of therapeutic services for victims of CSE, including young adults.
- 3.5 The Foundation Trust continues to see young people in an emergency or who are urgently requiring CAMHS within agreed time frames. However, there has been an increase in waiting times for routine referrals, which the OSCB has noted as a concern and the Foundation Trust is working with partners across the system to reduce so that young people are seen as quickly as possible.
- 3.6 **Self-harm by young people** is an increasingly complex issue with concern that there is a rise in the numbers of cases. It is unclear what direct impact social media has on self-harm. The problem is often hidden, as young people can be worried about talking about self-harming. Oxford Health Foundation Trust is piloting the placement of a mental health worker in a small number of secondary schools, working with teachers, children social services and the school health nurse to increase awareness of mental health issues, reduce stigma and ensure that young people are seen quickly in the familiar surroundings of school. The OSCB Board received a report on suicide reduction at its most recent meeting.
- 3.7 OSCB has a sub group to take forward a strategy and action plan for **children at risk of sexual exploitation** (CSE). Partner agencies have responded swiftly to the early lessons associated with the Bullfinch case. In addition to new policies and procedures, there has been extensive training delivered for front line professionals working with children. A report on progress against CSE by the OSCB was endorsed at the November 2014 Board and will be made available to governing bodies of OSCB partner agencies.
- 3.8 Multi-agency work to identify children and young people who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire is coordinated by the Kingfisher Team. In its first full year the team identified 153 children as being at risk of exploitation. The majority of these young people are female and aged between 15 and 17. All of these children have multi-agency safeguarding plans to reduce the risks of CSE. The OSCB, as part of its review of its action plan in advance of 2015/16 will prioritise a multi agency audit of CSE in early 2015 and is in the process of agreeing an evaluation of the CSE

pathway with Professor Jenny Pearce of the University of Bedfordshire's research centre on CSE. The OSCB takes seriously its role in ensuring improved outcomes for children at risk of CSE across the County.

4. Missing Children

- 4.1 The number of missing children in 2013/14 remained similar to the previous year (636 children compared to 630 in 2012/13). The number who went repeatedly missing (three or more times) however rose by 20 to 97, which is of concern to OSCB. Regular reports on missing children are provided to the child sexual exploitation subgroup of the OSCB to ensure that there is multi-agency action and assurance that there is robust understanding of the partnership of the risks these children face.
- 4.2 Key to this is return interviews with the children when they are found to assist professionals in providing more appropriate support to prevent them running away again. Missing children, particularly those who go repeatedly missing, are at high risk of sexual exploitation.
- 4.3 There is a missing persons panel that tracks and monitors all young people at highest risk within the county, on a monthly basis. OSCB expects schools to report on their safeguarding practice through regular annual audits to OSCB. As part of its work, the Kingfisher team has been holding regular multi-agency forums with schools to raise awareness, develop practice amongst those working directly with children at risk and to gather intelligence on children of concern.
- 4.4 Linked to the work around child sexual exploitation, the OSCB has developed a set of performance indicators. These are used to monitor trends and highlight any challenges or areas of risk. These are in relation to service delivery and interventions as opposed to individual cases. The oversight and risk management of individual cases will remain with the Kingfisher team and the missing persons panel.
- 4.5 Useful indicators to analyse and triangulate with qualitative information from partner agencies are detailed below. The OSCB monitors:
 - a) Number of children missing from home
 - b) Number of children missing from residential care
 - c) Number of children missing from foster care
 - d) Number of children who repeatedly go missing
 - e) Of those who went missing, the number of return interviews completed.

5. Progress of OSCB in 2013/14

- 5.1 The full Annual Report (which can be found on the OSCB website http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/other_sites/oscb/OSCB-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf) outlines progress made during 2013/14 and summarise the key challenges ahead for all agencies to ensure children in Oxfordshire are safe from harm, abuse or neglect. The impact of delivering against the Board's 5 priorities is summarised below.

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- 5.2 OSCB's focus on the most vulnerable groups has led to increased knowledge and improved responses to troubled young people with complex needs; children in care placed out of county; vulnerable learners; children at risk of neglect; and children living with domestic abuse.
- 5.3 Listening to the views of young people, parents and carers has informed the content of OSCB training events, ensured that the learning from serious case reviews has been conveyed appropriately to professionals and improved e-safety training.
- 5.4 During 2013/14 one serious case review known as Child Y was completed and the learning shared. During 2014/14 2 further SCRs have been published (Child N and Child H) and in early 2015 the SCR A-F will be published. The OSCB Annual Report 2014/15 to be published in July 2015 will report on these and other SCRs commissioned during 2014.
- 5.5 OSCB with partners has taken significant and wide-ranging action to address the issue of child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire and share learning of how to deal with this complex issue. Child protection training now includes a designated section on spotting the signs of and responding to child sexual exploitation. The Kingfisher team identifies potential warning signs and provides multi agency support to young people who are at risk. Ofsted commented on the range of communication and awareness raising activity in place across the County.
- 5.6 Looking ahead, OSCB acknowledges the on-going challenge of effectively tackling child sexual exploitation, and this will remain a priority for the Board. Other priorities include tackling neglect, the impact of domestic abuse/substance misuse and parental mental illness and ensuring the pressures to the child protection system are kept under review in light of the on-going resource challenges across the public sector.

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Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board