

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 7 JANUARY 2016

OSCB Annual Report for 2014-15

Report by OSCB Independent Chair, Maggie Blyth

Summary

1. The attached annual report from the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board provides an independent analysis of the safeguarding services provided to the County's children over 2014/15, and outlines the challenges ahead over the next year.

Introduction

2. This report presents the 2014/15 Annual Report endorsed by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) in July 2015.
3. This report identifies the progress made by the County Council's Children's Services Department and partners across the NHS, Thames Valley Police, Probation organisations, district councils, schools, and the voluntary sector during 2014/15 in improving the child protection system. It also identifies areas of vulnerabilities and outlines what action is being taken to address challenges where they remain.
4. The Annual Report includes lessons from management reviews, serious case reviews and child deaths, as well as findings from multi-agency audits and staff surveys within the reporting period.
5. It is important to note that over the reporting period and before, the number of referrals into children's services has continued to increase and the overall activity within the child protection system continues to rise. There are increasingly larger numbers of older children on child protection plans. As the report indicates this places pressure on front line services across all sectors and has required a shift in focus to the needs of adolescents. Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to play an important feature of integrated front line working and receives all referrals through its systems. MASH were able to resolve a significant number of initial contacts by providing advice and signposting to other agencies but this still leaves an increasing number which are further progressed to referrals, assessment and investigation where appropriate within the child protection system.
6. The Annual Report also outlines in detail the number of activities and work streams to increase understanding and identification of children at risk of sexual exploitation. This area of work has remained a priority for the OSCB during 2014 /15 and members will be aware of the CSE Stocktake report published in July 2015. The number of children vulnerable to CSE has continued to increase over previous years and is a reflection of greater

understanding, and strategic approaches to tackling crimes across the partnership.

7. Indeed, the Stocktake report reflects the progress made in Oxfordshire in tackling CSE and other underlying problems that exacerbate the vulnerability of older children. There is evidence that other challenges such as FGM, the increase in the numbers of children self harming and facing neglect have been addressed through more effective partnership working across policing, social care, education and health.
8. Specific challenges are highlighted in the Annual Report around action taken to learn lessons from cases when things go wrong and where children are the subject of neglect, harm or abuse from their carers or other adults around them.
9. OSCB is committed to publishing the findings from all Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). There has been a significant increase in the numbers of SCRs commissioned across Oxfordshire in line with new government guidance and during this reporting year 3 SCRs have been published including the high profile case of Children A-F.
10. The lessons from all of these cases have influenced the focus of OSCB's multi-agency training programme and a series of Learning Lessons workshops were implemented in 2014/15, resulting in the training of nearly 8,000 front line professionals from all partner agencies. The feedback from front line staff has indicated these multi agency events are well received. OSCB has also started a more in-depth evaluation process to fully ascertain the value of training provided and what positive impact it has on professional understanding and practice over a longer period. This work is in its early stages and will be reported on in more detail next year.
11. During the reporting period OSCB completed a number of multi agency audits. The results of these audits have informed the Board's priorities for 2015/16.
12. The numbers of child deaths considered by the Child Death Overview Panel in Oxfordshire for the year was 40. The OSCB through the Child Death Overview Panel is required to ensure that a proportionate review is undertaken of each death of a child under 18 irrespective of the cause of the death. The purpose is to understand if there are any lessons to be learnt, and whether there are any wider public health or safety concerns to prevent further deaths. If abuse or neglect is suspected then a serious case review must be undertaken and the findings from this about how agencies worked together to safeguard children must be published.
13. Engagement with Education in relation to safeguarding across all schools has been a strong focus. OSCB, in conjunction with the County Council has engaged with all state sector schools and Independent settings requiring completion of an annual s175 or s157 safeguarding assessment. 100% of Schools responded to the self-assessment which is a significant achievement based on previous years. The more worrying concern during the reporting

year has been the number of language schools, including pop up schools that do not comply with safeguarding policies and procedures. The Independent Chair has escalated this issue to the Children's Minister as it may be indicative of a trend in other towns or cities where language schools are common.

14. During 2014 and 2015 the Independent Chair met with the chief executives of the different NHS Trusts, the OCCG, the District Councils, the Local Authority, the Thames Valley Police, Cafcass and probation services. Ensuring engagement at the OSCB from the appropriate senior executive from all commissioners and providers across Oxfordshire is essential and this must include public health involvement. Concerns remain about the availability and waiting lists to access appropriate support for children with mental health needs and the absence of therapeutic provision for adults disclosing child abuse or exploitation was outlined in the CSE Stocktake report. Whilst the overall picture in Oxfordshire reflects the position nationally, CAMHS have seen a significant increase in the number of urgent and crisis presentations requiring immediate assessment. The OSCB will monitor and review this in next year's report. Meanwhile, the OSCB is seeking assurances.
15. OSCB will also require further assurances that the proposed restructure of children's services by the local authority will mitigate any risks to keeping children safe. OSCB will monitor this carefully.

Financial and Staff Implications

16. None

Equalities Implications

17. There are no additional equalities implications that are not covered in the report

Conclusions

18. Oxfordshire agencies are working hard to ensure that the child protection system is working. This Annual Report outlines the achievements of OSCB 2014/15 and provides assurance that the child protection partnership across the County is effective. However, challenges remain to ensure that there is a multi-agency strategic response to the increased activity and complexity of cases within the child protection system; that all schools, including language settings are fully compliant with their safeguarding duties including awareness of how to tackle risks relating to children missing and CSE; and health organisations across Oxfordshire are fully engaged at an executive level to provide maximum assurance that there are appropriate interventions in Oxfordshire to support children and young adults who are victims of child sexual abuse/exploitation.

Recommendations

19. Members of the Performance Scrutiny Panel are recommended to:

- Note that the child protection partnership is working effectively across Oxfordshire but there are severe pressure points in relation to the increased complexity of cases and activity in the system
- Consider the implications for the partnership in relation to the deficits in appropriate provision for those children that require access to CAHMS provision

MAGGIE BLYTH
Independent Chair OSCB

Background papers: Annual report 2014-15

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