

Children's Standing Overview Group

Recommendation(s): that the two principal social workers to the next CSOG to get their perspective on improvements in social work practice and safeguarding arrangements.

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The Children's Standing Overview Group of the People's Scrutiny Committee meets bi-monthly to review performance/service matters relating to children's safeguarding and social care services respectively.

At the last session on 8 December 2015 the following issues were discussed:

- Measures are in place to minimise the use of institutional care where there are positive alternatives.
- Succession planning for the Head of Children's Social Work and Child Protection post.
- Embedded practice standards and the positive impact of the appointment of the assessed and supported year of employment social workers (AYSEs).
- The number of schools that have had the Chelsea's Choice child sexual exploitation training. Barnardo's are rolling out a training programme to the night-time economy such as hoteliers.
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provision in Devon. A summit meeting has been arranged in January 2016. Currently CAMHS do not hold comprehensive data on Looked After Children they are supporting. CAMHS are fulfilling parts of their health contract, but not the high end, vulnerable children with a social care need.
- Child protection referrals are currently being over emphasised. Schools are also over referring, but where there are instances of this an officer from children's social care and / or Babcock will go to the school to discuss.
- The Devon Safeguarding Children's Board is in better shape, but is still a work in progress.
- The quality of DAFs are not always where they should be, but progress is being made in this regards. Early Help locality forum meetings for practitioners are starting to take off and has impetus now.
- There has been a reduction in the percentage of children adopted from 73.5% to 42.6% to date this year. This is due to a change in case law, however children's social care is using foster to adopt more to offer early permanence placements. Ofsted were critical of the County Council's introduction arrangements but are now an example of best practice with the Department for Education.
- There remains an issue in terms of variation in social worker caseloads. As well as reducing caseloads, there remains a focus on reducing agency staff. Less uses of agency workers not only brings a cost benefit but reduces social workers moving around and results in less change for the children involved.
- Performance data and management information is now improved and a more accurate picture of Devon is now available to senior management.