

People's Scrutiny Committee

Safeguarding Children Task Group

Interim Report

September 2013

Contents

	Preface	3
1.0	Introduction	4
2.0	Recommendations	5
3.0	Summary	6
4.0	Overview of Ofsted's Findings	7
5.0	National and Regional Context	8
6.0	The Voice of the Child	9
7.0	Key Issues	10
	Ofsted Inspection and Action Plan	10
	Quality Assurance	11
	Management Structure	11
	Performance Management	11
	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	12
	Devon Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB)	13
	Quality of Practice	14
	Variance in Social Work Practice	14
	Social Care Caseloads	14
	Social Care Recruitment	15
	Staff Training	15
	Back to Social Work	16
	IT	16
	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	17
	Early Help	18
	Early Help Strategy	18
Appendix 1	Task Group Activities	19
Appendix 2	Contributors / Representations to the Review	20
Appendix 3	Bibliography	21

Downloadable version

This report can be downloaded from:

http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/democracymunities/decision_making/cma/index_scs.htm

Preface



**Councillor Sara Randall Johnson
Chair, Safeguarding Children Task Group
People's Scrutiny Committee**

As a result of the County Council's inadequate judgement from Ofsted, the People's Scrutiny Committee will have sharper teeth in future. We decided not to review the past, but rather to concentrate on how we can improve and whether the Action Plan is fit for purpose. The wellbeing of the child has been central to our work as we prepared this interim report.

All members of the Council are responsible for the protection of the vulnerable people of all ages, especially children and young people, and safeguarding is an integral part of this work.

I am grateful to all those who were interviewed and helped us in our work, for their forthright and valuable evidence. The Task Group were impressed by the candid and open approach adopted during our site visits and investigations. Whilst disappointment in the judgement was voiced, it was clear there is an appetite to improve and resolve the authority's shortcomings. Strong leadership is called for to provide direction and guidance to support social workers' future work.

The next three months are critical to see how improvements have been embedded in the work place. Hence our recommendations are aimed at encouraging continued resolve and are focused on increasing the speed of execution.

There can be no room for complacency. Cabinet members, senior officers and frontline social care staff, in all areas can and must do better.

Sara Randall Johnson
Chairman

Introduction

The Task Group — Councillors Sara Randall Johnson (Chair), Frank Biederman, Christine Channon, Alistair Dewhirst, Rob Hannaford and Philip Sanders — would like to place on record its gratitude to the witnesses who contributed to the review. In submitting its recommendations, the Group has sought to ensure that its findings are supported with evidence and its proposals well informed.

At People's Scrutiny Committee on 18 June 2013, it was agreed that a Safeguarding Children Task Group be formed. The terms of reference for the review were:

1. To evaluate the recent Ofsted report on the County Council's arrangements for the protection of children.
2. To examine the implementation of the Ofsted Action Plan.
3. To make detailed recommendations to the People's Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Task Group.

Time and resources necessitate that this interim report provides a snapshot approach to highlight significant issues relating to safeguarding children. The list of witnesses to the review does not pretend to be exhaustive but hopes to provide insight into some of the central themes highlighted by Ofsted and the County Council's initial response. Members agreed that there was insufficient time within the context of preparing the interim report to meet representatives from the following areas, but they will form an essential part of further investigations:

- Education
- Health
- Police
- GPs

It should be noted it was not within the remit of the Task Group's work at this stage to examine the structure and operation of the Devon Safeguarding Children's Board.

Although work was already very much underway almost from the moment Ofsted presented its findings to the County Council, the Action Plan was not signed off until 13 September 2013, when Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, the Minister issued the County Council with a 12 month Improvement Notice.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the Ofsted Action Plan needs to better reflect that the voice of the child is being considered at each stage of the child's journey. Through strong leadership, clear strategies, appropriate staffing and focused actions and monitoring.

Recommendation 2

That the Action Plan should be used as the definitive document to indicate clear objectives, monitor timelines, identify delivery dates and projected deadlines.

Recommendation 3

That a project manager be appointed to drive the day-to-day delivery of the Action Plan.

Recommendation 4

That the recommendations in the HR report *Stabilising the Social Work Workforce* be implemented with immediate effect to support the retention and recruitment of social care staff to reduce the number of agency workers and build in greater capacity within its own staffing group.

Recommendation 5

That a business plan for the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) be developed with multi-agency partners which includes a GP presence within the MASH.

Summary

The Ofsted inspection and resulting Action Plan need to be used positively as an opportunity to create a system for child protection in Devon. There needs to be a drive for continuous improvement, as well as embedding consistency of practice. It was remiss of the County Council not to have responded more positively to the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review undertaken in November 2012. A number of issues were highlighted in this report, which if acted upon would certainly have begun to improve Devon's arrangements for the protection of children. Not all the issues highlighted by Ofsted would have been resolved, but the County Council should have heeded this warning and it failed to do so.

There are legitimate questions about the effectiveness of the children's social care management structure and there is a need to keep this continually under review. The Strategic Director People has identified along with her staff the key areas for improvement. No matter what structural changes are made through the *Back to Social Work* model it is essential this change in approach is embedded and supported corporately by all management systems and procedures. There is some recognition in the system that the County Council must move at pace and encourage robust challenge of its own performance and that of its partners. Child protection is not just an issue for social care. The County Council has been left to shoulder a large part of the child protection burden. There have been some fundamental flaws from partner agencies as well as from the County Council's perspective.

The Task Group felt it essential that the quality, hard work and commitment of staff should be highlighted. Criticism of the County Council, as manifested in its inadequate rating from Ofsted, is targeted predominantly at a system that has developed. Staff are working in an extremely challenging environment and often go far beyond the call of duty in undertaking additional hours as a matter of course. With an increasing number of inadequate Ofsted judgments on local authorities safeguarding of children, this inevitably makes working in child protection and the level of scrutiny that it brings, less attractive than other roles within children's social care. The media frenzy that follows an inadequate Ofsted judgment is difficult for staff. Staff feel devalued and given their increased workload this makes for a challenging staffing situation, with a rise in the number of social workers resigning.

It is apparent that there is inconsistency across the County in social work practice. Senior management must provide strong leadership to overcome these problems. This will require comprehensive staff training for both new and existing staff and the capacity for staff to be able to undertake such training.

There has been a significant increase in activity across the children's social work system since the recent Ofsted. The MASH is currently converting many more contacts into initial assessments. When the Task Group visited the site it was apparent that staffing shortages meant existing staff were working extended hours to cope with demand. This is not sustainable in the longer term. It is imperative to have an effective early help strategy in place as soon possible to reduce the volume of referrals into the system. It is vital that there is strong business case for the MASH which includes a communication strategy which ensures feedback to all referrers.

The Task Group are disappointed that the Ofsted Action Plan has not been used as a document to evidence adequately the initial progress to improve. The Plan needs to be project managed to be timeline specific. The Task Group is further concerned that it will not meet the requisite timescales given the staffing pressures. However if the recommendations of the *Stabilising the Social Work Workforce* HR report are acted upon swiftly this should lead to improvements.

The Group has been impressed so far by the commitment of the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills to drive the necessary changes to ensure a first class service for all the children of Devon, particularly those most vulnerable.

Overview of Ofsted's Findings

In April 2013 the County Council received an inadequate judgement from Ofsted following an unannounced inspection under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 on the overall effectiveness of the arrangements in Devon to protect children. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.

Ofsted detailed the following action to the County Council and its partners to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Devon:

Immediately:

- ensure that effective risk assessment and analysis informs decision making and management oversight is fully in place for all child protection work
- ensure that risk is effectively identified, communicated and managed in all early help work
- ensure that the experiences of the child are identified and considered in all help, protection and decision making concerning vulnerable children and young people
- ensure that the individual needs of children as defined by their race, culture, language, ethnicity and religion are actively considered in all work.

Within three months:

- ensure that an effective quality assurance system is in place that enables the council to understand and accurately manage and improve the impact of services delivered
- ensure that feedback from service users, including complaints, and views of children and young people are used to inform training and service development.

Within six months:

- ensure that the early help offer is reviewed, evaluated and an action plan to address areas of weakness is put in place.

National and Regional Context

In terms of inspections of overall effectiveness of child protection arrangements by region the County Council was the only local authority to receive an inadequate judgement in the South West in the period between 1 June 2012 and 30 May 2013 (in July 2013 Somerset County Council also received an inadequate rating).

Table 4: Overall effectiveness of child protection arrangements¹: by region

	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Inadequate
North West	0	0	2	4
North East	0	1	2	0
Yorkshire and the Humber	0	0	3	2
West Midlands	0	0	2	3
East Midlands	0	1	1	1
East of England	0	0	3	2
London	0	2	5	0
South East	0	0	5	2
South West	0	0	3	1

1. Inspections taking place between 1 June 2012 and 30 May 2013, and published by 30 June 2013.

The Voice of the Child

Ofsted found that children and young people's views are not being consistently taken into account to inform assessments and planning. The Task Group also found in discussion with young people that there was one clear message from them that their voice had not been heard and they had not been encouraged to help draw up their own protection plan.

These young people felt there was a lack of empathy and consideration shown by agencies with safeguarding responsibilities for the person involved. For some, their whole life has been in crisis, for others either it happened suddenly or their situation deteriorated slowly. Social workers were criticised for a lack of contact, availability and failing to provide regular feedback. The lack of consistency in not having the same social worker and being able to establish a relationship with their worker was also flagged up, along with a lack of clarity about the status of a case and in some instances the social worker wanting to close it when the young person still needed support. One young person commented; "if you are having a bad day a social worker would be the last person I would call". Another key point raised by young people involved suitable accommodation being unavailable, both at the time of the crisis and subsequently.

The role of the youth workers were seen as vital, as they provide easy access and continued support to the young people as they transfer from a position of crisis or being at risk to one where they begin to make progress with their lives. This provision of support, advice and stability to the most vulnerable children during this critical period of their transition into adulthood is key to ensuring that they reach maturity and live in a safe environment.

Key Issues

Ofsted Inspection and Action Plan

There are systemic weaknesses in managerial oversight and quality assurance that enable inconsistent and ineffective practice to go unchallenged and as a consequence some children and young people are exposed to unnecessary risk of significant harm¹

The Ofsted Safeguarding Improvement Board, led by an Independent Chair, will be responsible for the delivery of the Action Plan. There are three common themes which will form the basis of the Task Group's focus in this interim report:

- Quality Assurance, led by David Taylor, Chair, Devon Safeguarding Children's Board
- Quality of Practice, led by Rory McCallum, Head of Child and Adult Protection
- Early Help, led by Dr Virginia Pearson, Director of Public Health.

It is disappointing that the Action Plan does not seem to be continually updated and is lacking in data. The Action Plan should provide timescales for targets and timescales for delivery. It should also include all the work streams, when commissioned and agreed by partner agencies or County Council departments. This will result in one document which provides evidence that the County Council's service for safeguarding children and young people is improving.

The Action Plan is resourced to £1,450,000 for this financial year, although the Leader of the Council could make no promises that this figure would be available for 2014/15 given the fact that it is anticipated a further £30 million cuts need to be made to the County Council's budget.

Post-Ofsted most local authorities experience a dramatic rise in traffic through the system, because staff tend to be more risk averse, there is a recalibration of thresholds and huge pressure on the whole service. In Devon in April 2013 there were 546 assessments, following Ofsted this had risen by June 2013 to 1047. The number of assessments have now reduced to about 200 per week. There has also been a rise in child protection numbers, which points to a proactive response to child safety.

¹ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 13 (Ofsted, 2013)

Quality Assurance

Management Structure

Leadership and governance are inadequate²

For the County Council to fulfill the requirements of the Ofsted Action Plan, and move out of an inadequate rating it is essential that the management structure of the organisation is fit for purpose. The Ofsted report highlighted systemic weaknesses in managerial oversight, along with poor practice and poor decision making, together with an overall lack of practice supervision. The Independent Review Unit has not been working robustly enough to address this, nor have line managers. Across the system quality assurance has been inconsistent and often weak.

Inevitably, an Ofsted verdict of inadequate brings considerable focus on the County Council's senior officers and politicians ultimately accountable for the safeguarding of children in Devon. The Task Group felt it remiss of the Cabinet to have taken little action to address issues raised in the LGA's Peer Review in November 2012, six months prior to the Ofsted inspection in April 2013. Members were unable to find evidence to suggest direct action in responding to significant matters of concern highlighted in the Peer Review.

The Task Group recognised that the Head of Child & Adult Protection is one of the most difficult roles in local government, and the holder is often placed in the position of taking responsibility for other agencies' shortcomings. There were claims that following on from the Peer Review there was recognition that the team under the Head of Child & Adult Protection was too stretched and appointments were made to address this. However the Task Group felt that the County Council should have reacted earlier to strengthen the operational management structure.

Performance Management

There is an absence of effective quality assurance and performance management systems across the statutory social work teams which senior managers have not addressed. This enables poor and ineffective practice to exist unchallenged for significant periods of time.³

The County Council needs to be convinced that its quality assurance is in order before it can guarantee the quality of its practice. Data has not been used as well as it might and it is vital that those cases where things go wrong are picked up as early as possible within the system. The Quality Assurance Review led by the new Chair of the DSCB should help to provide a framework moving forward. There is a need for continuous cross referencing of performance management in accordance with the demands and stipulations of Ofsted.

² *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 50 (Ofsted, 2013)

³ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 51 (Ofsted, 2013)

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

...professional judgements made by social care managers in the service are of variable quality and are not subject to effective quality assurance arrangements. The experience of the child is not sufficiently taken into account and the rationale for decisions not recorded. Consequently, some children and young people do not receive an appropriate response in relation to their child protection needs leaving them at risk of further unnecessary harm⁴.

Child protection services in Devon are delivered initially through one countywide referral team, the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), where all enquiries on new cases are made and, where appropriate, are referred onwards to four assessment teams covering the county. Within the MASH are a range of representatives including: Police, Children's Social Care, Probation, Health, Education, Adult & Community Services, Mental Health Services, Early Years and the Ambulance Service.

The MASH was set up in 2010, after the case of Baby Peter. The need was seen to improve information sharing by the development of a strategic intelligence hub, focused on identifying harm in target areas across Devon. This idea was then developed further with partners to integrate the referral functions of children's social work. The focus at this point was on co-locating staff and was implemented quickly as work in progress. While it was reported that operationally Devon was ahead of its time with the establishment of the MASH, resources were squeezed out of existing provision and formulated without a business plan. Since the MASH inception there has never been a proper resolution for staffing issues such as holiday cover, overtime, information sharing protocol, etc. Following the Peer Review there was a recommendation that the MASH be reviewed but for various reasons this did not transpire until after Ofsted.

Weaknesses were identified in the variability of decision making of the MASH, along with the auditing regime being insufficient and inadequate in the offer of early help. Ofsted highlighted instances of decisions being made by MASH that were simply wrong. Officers reported that a triage system has now been set up at the MASH to ensure levels of risk are managed. A robust daily auditing process is now in place to review every 'no further action' or 'early help' decision within the MASH. All MASH referrals are also being re-audited outside the MASH. There is now far less variance and much greater consistency than before Ofsted. As a result more cases are now going through to local teams.

A proposal has been put forward that newly appointed social workers will not be placed in a permanent office, which will help to address difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced social workers to the MASH. The MASH is a rather different environment than frontline social work, where there is no opportunity to follow a case through. The Task Group consider that it is not good practice to operate the MASH service with a high volume of agency workers. It therefore may be possible to attract permanent social workers if a rotation scheme was in place which allowed staff to work in the MASH for a time limited period with a planned return at the end of the term. To aid the attraction and retention a market supplement may be offered for any social work qualified post working in the MASH.

There have been persistent difficulties with the way in which GPs are supported to engage. GP records are not co-ordinated with the MASH, and there is an issue with GP disclosure of information. Under law there are no issues about sharing information on child protection, but there are difficulties for GPs about breaking confidence on other family issues. Although there is an information sharing protocol, this is something that should be addressed, possibly by the inclusion of a GP presence within the MASH.

⁴ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council paragraph 14 (Ofsted, 2013)*

Devon Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB)

The Devon Safeguarding Children Board has not been effective in driving forward improvements to services for vulnerable children and their families.⁵

The Devon Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB) is the statutory body responsible for safeguarding children within the system and it should hold all the relevant agencies to account. It was reported to members that the outgoing DSCB chair had tried and struggled to get the relevant agencies on board. The Strategic Director People had previously raised at the DSCB that she needed to be challenged more by the Board. The DSCB structure was unwieldy comprising 30 or so members. Agendas were not always balanced, with performance data being too lengthy and unfocused. Information needed to be used better by all the agencies in order to safeguard the child. The DSCB was trying to do too much, rather than identify and focus on its priorities. There is a need for a more strategic executive board, with sub-groups undertaking that other work. David Taylor is now responsible for restructuring the DSCB having been appointed its new Chair in August 2013.

Quality of Practice

Variance in Social Work Practice

Inspectors found too many cases where the professional judgement exercised by social workers and managers did not reflect the known or potential risks to children and young people.⁶

Ofsted flagged up concern about variance in social work practice included in the presentation of case notes. Some staff need to articulate themselves better, with an emphasis on smarter recording. This is particularly important where another member of staff takes over a case. It was not at all clear to the Task Group why prior to Ofsted management had allowed such an inconsistent approach to case recordings to continue citing a lack of quality control. This is not about writing more, but about identifying and recording what is relevant in a succinct and accurate way that identifies risk clearly, sets out the rationale for decisions and provides clear plans. Officers reported that case recording training for social workers has now been re-commissioned.

Ofsted also highlighted the need for improved engagement with service users and their families. The voice of the child needs to be more clearly heard in the process. Some social workers are very good at getting the views the children and young people, but there is no systematic approach to doing so across the County. There is a need to get better qualitative information on some of the most vulnerable young people.

The Task Group recognises that there will be inconsistencies in social work practice across such a large shire County as Devon. It is imperative that this is within acceptable levels and must not be inconsistent to the extent that it causes risk to children. There should now be a toolkit that can be applied to standardise report formats. The outcome for children and young people is the key aspect of this; creating concise reports that can be easily tested and audited, clearly setting out the journey of the child.

⁵ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 16 (Ofsted, 2013)

⁶ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 29 (Ofsted, 2013)

Social Care Caseloads

In a number of cases seen by inspectors there was undue delay in children and young people receiving services⁷

A number of issues relating to staff workload were apparent on site visits to the MASH and particularly at George Street (the Task Group regrets that time did not allow them to visit our other centres, but we intend over the coming months). There appear to be issues about excessive caseloads, the sustainability of workloads, staff taking on work outside their main remit to cover posts, lack of caseload transition from one worker to another, as well as the unsettling effect of restructures and likely office move to County Hall. Unallocated cases were reported to members, which was cited as being potentially 'dangerous'. The Task Group also noted that there were incomplete records on the CareFirst system.

Members recognised that where any authority goes through an audit like Ofsted, they naturally become more risk averse. Consequently, there has been an increase from 450 to 1000 initial assessments per month. There is a question as to where the level of assessments will sit once this spike reduces. The County Council is reviewing its threshold document to ensure only the cases that need to be going through to initial assessment. The clarity of thresholds needs to be explicit. The current threshold matrix is unwieldy so work is being undertaken to produce a more concise document in line with that used in Torbay, which would be helpful given the staffing overlap.

Social Care Recruitment

There is a coherent recruitment and retention strategy in place which includes a number of incentives for new starters. The council has implemented a strategy to address the reliance on agency staff in some area teams. This has resulted in a more stable and consistent workforce with reducing numbers of agency staff.⁸

Contrary to Ofsted's findings the Task Group was unconvinced there was currently an effective recruitment and retention strategy in place for children's social care staff. There has been an issue with social care staff leaving the County Council, with salaries less than those offered by neighbouring local authorities, such as Torbay and Plymouth. There is also a difficulty in recruiting social workers to safeguarding teams. This is particularly important as these roles might be seen as some of the most stressful in social care. The recent HR report *Stabilising the Social Work Workforce* includes a number of recommendations which should help to ensure the County Council is on a more equal footing with Torbay, Plymouth and other neighbouring authorities in terms of staff incentives.

The Task Group received concerning reports on social care staff vacancy levels. Staff in the locality teams felt overall that there was a shortage of permanent staff with too many agency staff. However Human Resources reported that the County Council's social care vacancy levels were comparable to other local authorities. As at 24 July 2013 centrally the following data has been identified in child protection:

- 12 social work vacancies
- 24 agency staff

Over the past 5 years, the qualified children's social worker population has increased by 37% to meet increased service demands. It is currently at its highest level since 2008. As a result, over the past 12-18 months there has been a rolling recruitment programme for children's social work to keep pace with increased demand as well as replacing for

⁷ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 18 (Ofsted, 2013)

⁸ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 57 (Ofsted, 2013)

turnover. Whilst vacancy rates have been reported annually as averaging 12%, this hides the fact that the numbers that have to be recruited each year has grown to meet the service demands. There is also now in place a strategy to deploy newer technologies through e.g. HTML emails to all social workers registered on the various job sites, Google ads, etc. and to target different, previously untargeted populations such as migrant workers who are qualified social workers.

The County Council is now looking to over recruit social workers, whether permanent staff ideally, or agency staff. An over recruitment policy helps to create capacity within the system for staff training. It is essential that all staff are properly equipped to fulfil the requirements of their post. Initiatives also need to be developed to allow the County Council to grow more Newly Qualified Social Workers, which should include supporting community support workers completing a social work qualification.

Staff Training

Training for more experienced social workers is more limited and workers expressed difficulties in accessing training given commitments to casework. Although there is a training programme in place this is not robustly linked to shortfalls in practice, for example quality assessments.⁹

Staff are willing to learn and grow their skills and experience which is extremely positive. They want to be involved in an improved service, but, obviously they must be adequately supported to do so. The importance of continuous professional development and on-going training for existing staff is paramount. Training for Newly Qualified Social Workers was reported to be excellent – among the best that Ofsted has seen nationally – however the same could not be said for the offer available to existing staff. A change in culture is being shaped with training no longer optional but compulsory for all staff. Staff must be supported and valued particularly in view of the demoralizing impact of the Ofsted verdict.

Back to Social Work

Senior managers have recognised the need to improve services and are in the process of creating a new team structure and are aware of the need to improve quality assurance processes.¹⁰

The Task Group received considerable feedback about the *Back to Social Work* model, designed prior to Ofsted by the Head of Child & Adult Protection in recognition that the system needed to be improved. Although the initiative has been put on hold to an extent because of the Ofsted findings, it was reported that a smaller team structure will allow staff to have a much better understanding of their colleagues cases, with shared caseload meetings an aspect of this model which should build resilience in the system in terms of being able to cover holiday or sick leave. Senior officers concurred that the *Back to Social Work* model could work in principle given it has been successfully implemented elsewhere in the country, but required some amendments in light of the Ofsted challenges. It was also reported to the Task Group that staff were supportive of the new model, however there appeared something of a disconnect with senior management at the George Street offices in Exeter where staff felt unsettled, unsupported and concerned as to the way forward.

⁹ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 58 (Ofsted, 2013)

¹⁰ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 54 (Ofsted, 2013)

IT

The completion of chronologies is also variable, affected by the lack of functionality in the electronic case records to automatically populate a chronology.¹¹

A number of IT issues were reported to the Task Group on their site visit to George Street. Staff expressed frustration with the functionality of CareFirst, the County Council's social care case management system for children and adult's services and TRIM its online document storage system integrated into CareFirst. The Head of Business Strategy and Support advised that there are around 70 other local authorities using CareFirst, which was implemented in 2002. A major system upgrade was planned prior to the Ofsted report, with enhancements scheduled to the chronology and the journey of the child. The system accessibility to CareFirst is over 99.6% over the last 12 months measured against a performance target of 99.5%.

There is an issue about IT training, where feedback from staff engagement events suggests a lack of understanding of what functionality is currently available. The upgrade of CareFirst needs to be used as an opportunity for staff training. There are issues about the quality of the IT intelligence that the County Council holds in relation to social care. It appears that there is something of a mismatch between the social care IT system and the business process, and a review has been commissioned with a report due at the end of September 2013. The outcomes of this will influence any changes that need to be made in relation to the IT support system.

It is problematic that there are referral forms for all the different parts of the system, with time being wasted on duplicating this data. The number of forms a practitioner has to fill in has been an issue for some time prior to Ofsted.

Given that most local authorities have similar IT systems, the Task Group consider that the main issue here is about staff being motivated, trained and empowered. Complacency needs to be removed and staff must be encouraged to take responsibility to produce clear, focused, consistent reports.

Social workers have not been routinely provided with laptops or smartphones. A Blackberry roll out has been launched, but most recording is currently undertaken in the main offices. Technology for mobile working would be extremely useful for staff. It would be particularly helpful for social workers to be able to write up notes in their cars in between visits and to upload remotely onto the system. Any investment in smartphones and tablets could feasibly be recouped in a few months on fuel and travel costs. Before giving staff any mobile devices, it needs to be ensured that they are given adequate support to maximise the technology and that business processes support the use of mobile devices.

It was a concern to members that the Strategic Director People does not have an IT system at present which allows her to have an immediate overview of her 5000 strong staff group to see how many people are on sick leave, the number of agency staff, appraisal completions etc, which is a significant handicap to her role.

¹¹ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 41 (Ofsted, 2013)

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

In some cases seen there were lengthy delays in accessing child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)¹²

Access to mental health services is a critical issue. Waiting lists are still lengthy for CAMHS, and often other arrangements have to be made as it is not feasible for an extremely vulnerable young person to wait for support. This is also an issue with other services such as the Youth Offending Team, where there can be significant delays within the system.

Early Help

Early Help Strategy

...in the absence of a strategy the delivery of early help is inconsistent¹³

An early help strategy has been in existence for some time but it was reported that little had been done to implement it across the multi-agencies. In addition at present there is no single assessment framework which is fully signed up to by all DSCB partner agencies, nor an audit strategy. It is vital that the new Early Help Strategy drives accountability across the system with all the partners and multi-agencies, including children's centre, nurseries, schools, Devon Youth Service, district councils etc. committed to early help. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) works only where the various agencies participate. Professionals also need to know that they have a single point of guidance to get the help and advice they need. A functioning Early Help Strategy would realise a decline in the escalation of high cost cases such as child protection investigations and care proceedings.

Ofsted provides an opportunity to move the Early Help Strategy forward. It is essential that there is a firm process in place for determining how early help is provided to a child. The Task Group felt reassured that the Director of Public Health, who is leading on this area of the Action Plan, has the requisite drive and expertise to deliver. It is without doubt an uncomfortable position for all concerned to have to undertake this work within 3 months, but it is necessary. The Director of Public Health advised that all partners now recognise that a way of managing and reducing budgets is to have an effective Early Help Strategy, as people are aware of the risks of not having it in place. There is a joint statutory responsibility for these organisations for safeguarding and in addition to the legal imperative there is the "hearts and minds" issue of ensuring all the relevant agencies come together to make this change. The Early Help Strategy will be approved by the DSCB in September 2013.

It is vital that the Early Help Strategy links into the Troubled Families model. There are about 1000 families identified under the Troubled Families program and children's services are now working with 300 of these. The aim is to stop generational families repeatedly presenting through improved multi-agency working. A key element is about teaching families how to be good parents, as early help initiatives can improve issues around neglect for example. Families do not always need a huge amount of support for them to feel empowered. It is essential that any social work model is not just about being compliant with the regulator but creates a system where families are understood. There is a positive commitment from professionals to the project across seven locality forums in the County.

¹² *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 21 (Ofsted, 2013)

¹³ *Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council* paragraph 20 (Ofsted, 2013)

Councillors Sara Randall Johnson (Chair)
Frank Biederman
Christine Channon
Alistair Dewhirst
Rob Hannaford
Philip Sanders

Copies of this report may be obtained from the Democratic Services & Scrutiny Secretariat at County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QD or by ringing 01392 382232. It will be available also on the County Council's website at:

http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/decision_making/scrutiny/taskgroups.htm

If you have any questions or wish to talk to anyone about this report then please contact:

Dan Looker
01392 382232/ dan.looker@devon.gov

Appendix 1:

Task Group Activities

- A1.1 The first meeting of the Task Group took place on **28 June 2013** to discuss the Ofsted report, the draft Action Plan and the scope of the review with the Strategic Director People and Head of Child & Adult Protection.
- A1.2 On **9 July 2013** members attended the MASH at Pynes Hill, Exeter and met with the Operation Manager MASH. The Task Group then undertook a site visit to the George Street, Exeter Social Care offices where they met with Operation Manager - Permanence & Transition Service, staff from Permanence & Transition Service; staff from the Child Protection and Wellbeing Team and a Practice Manager, Assessment Team.
- A1.3 On **15 July 2013** the Task Group met with the Cabinet Member for Children and the Quality Assurance Lead / Interim Chair Devon Safeguarding Children Board.
- A1.4 On **31 July 2013** members met with the Director of Public Health; Head of Business Strategy and Support; Senior Systems Officer (Development); Leader of the Council; Head of Human Resources; HR Manager – Performance and Head of Child & Adult Protection.
- A1.5 On **3 September 2013** the Task Group received evidence from the Chief Executive; Strategic Director People; Senior Manager, Safeguarding & Children's Specialist Services; Former People's Scrutiny Chair and a former Member of People's Scrutiny Committee.
- A1.6 On **9 September 2013** members met with a number of young people and youth workers, along with the Service Development Manager, Devon Youth Service.
- A1.7 On **11 September 2013** the Task Group met to discuss their findings and recommendations.

Appendix 2:

Contributors / Representations to the Review

Witnesses to the review (in the order that they appeared before the Task Group / provided written evidence)

Witness	Position	Organisation
Jennie Stephens	Strategic Director People	Devon County Council
Rory McCallum	Head of Child & Adult Protection	Devon County Council
Felicity Baldwin	Operation Manager - MASH	Devon County Council
Ian Stewart Watson	Operation Manager - Permanence & Transition Service	Devon County Council
Corrina Bryant	Practice Manager, Assessment Team	Devon County Council
12 Staff	Permanence & Transition Service; Child Protection and Wellbeing Team	Devon County Council
Councillor William Mumford	Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills	Devon County Council
David Taylor	Quality Assurance Lead / Chair Devon Safeguarding Children Board	Devon County Council
Dr Virginia Pearson	Director of Public Health	Devon County Council
Rob Parkhouse	Head of Business Strategy and Support	Devon County Council
Jan Hart	Senior Systems Officer (Development)	Devon County Council
Councillor John Hart	Leader	Devon County Council
Paul Jones	Head of Human Resources	Devon County Council
Anne Barnett	HR Manager - Performance	Devon County Council
Dr Phil Norrey	Chief Executive	Devon County Council
Nicky Scutt	Senior Manager, Safeguarding & Children's Specialist Services	Devon County Council
Maria Kasprzyk	Principal Child & Family Social Worker	Devon County Council
Karen Morris	Senior Manager for Early Help and MASH	Devon County Council
Vanessa Newcombe	Former Member Devon County Council / Chair People's Scrutiny	
Saxon Spence	Alderman / Former Member Devon County Council	
5 Young People	Service Users – Devon Youth Service	
4 Youth Workers	Devon Youth Service	Devon County Council
John Calvert	Service Development Manager, Devon Youth Service	Devon County Council

Appendix 3:

Bibliography

- Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Devon County Council (Ofsted, 2013)
- Munro review of child protection: final report - a child-centred system (Department for Education, 2011)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Department for Education, 2013)
- Safeguarding Peer Review (LGA, 2012)
- Stabilising the Social Work Workforce HR Report (Devon County Council, 2013)