



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

National Inspection Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours

Inspection of The City of Cardiff County Council

August 2014

1.0. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of inspection findings in respect of: Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour, within The City of Cardiff Council.
- 1.2. The inspection was carried out as part of Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) national thematic inspection programme. The methodology for the review included three and a half days fieldwork in each local authority across Wales, between January and May 2014.
- 1.3. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:
 - Supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
 - Identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked after children and care leavers;
 - Promotes rights based practice and the voice of the child;
 - Promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
 - Promotes compliance with policy and guidance
- 1.4. Findings from the individual local authority inspections will inform a CSSIW national overview report to be published later this year.

2. THE INSPECTION

- 2.1 The inspection focused on the work undertaken with looked after children over eleven years of age and care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and/or involved in risky behaviours, against defined criteria.
- 2.2 It is important to recognise that given this focus the case sample reviewed in each local authority encompassed some of the most challenging and complex case management issues and represented only a small cohort of each authority's wider looked after children and care leaving population.
- 2.3 As well as inspecting cases in respect of the assessment, care planning and review systems the inspection also considered the extent to which the corporate parenting, management and partnership arrangements acted to promote improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Also how organisational structures including, workforce, resources, advocacy and quality assurance mechanisms impacted on the quality of care planning.

The inspection considered these areas against the following five questions.

A summary of our findings is presented below

QUESTION 1

Did the authority effectively discharge its corporate parenting roles and responsibilities promoting the stability, welfare and safety of looked after children and care leavers?

POSITIVES

- 'Supporting looked after children to achieve their full potential' had been identified as a corporate priority. Elected Members and corporate officers were well informed and evidenced strong commitment to support looked after children and young people. Corporate parenting arrangements were well developed, and challenged performance. Cardiff has a significantly higher population of children and young people less than 18 years of age than the majority of other local authorities in Wales which had been recognised corporately with an increase in the budget for children's services to support the continued increase in demand. There were a number of mechanisms in place to allow Elected Members to meet with service users and check out the quality of services they were receiving.
- The authority had effective arrangements in place to share information with partner agencies which could support joint planning for looked after children. A needs assessment of the looked after population had been commissioned to inform strategic planning for the future of the service. Senior officers were well informed about looked after children's vulnerability and risky behaviours. Information available including that about 'out of county placements' was timely and comprehensive and systems were in place to support compliance with statutory responsibilities and senior officer oversight.
- There was clear leadership and a positive culture within the management team, which was not at full capacity at the time of the inspection, although plans were in place to address this deficit. A comprehensive breakdown of workload and performance was available which outlined capacity to meet the needs of looked after children. There had been a focus on stabilising the workforce and plans were in place to develop a specialist service for looked after children and young people. Good progress was being made but there was a realistic approach to addressing a legacy of over reliance on agency workers. Arrangements for delivering front line services had been reviewed and senior managers had identified the issues which needed to be addressed.
- A regional Children's Safeguarding Board (CSB) was established in December 2013 with the Vale of Glamorgan. A self assessment had been completed and a business plan was in place. Clear priorities had been agreed which include

improving the management and reduction of child sexual exploitation (CSE). A number of protocols had been developed by the local CSB which specifically related to the most vulnerable.

- The authority had arrangements in place to ensure that looked after children had access to education and primary health services.
- Initiatives to support young people to be involved in recruitment of staff had been developed and efforts had been made to engage looked after young people in giving their views by means of a number of listening events.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- There had been a placement strategy in place since 2011 from which a delivery plan had been developed. The progress of the delivery plan was tracked quarterly but the strategy had not been updated to reflect the current profile of the looked after population. The authority could improve the effectiveness of service planning and identifying gaps in provision if vulnerability and risk was included in the profile of the looked after population. Apart from the monitoring of the stability of placements there did not appear to be any arrangements in place which would provide an overview of permanency particularly for those 11 years and older.
- Despite good working arrangements, the resilience of the authority's relationship with health services remain overly dependent on children's social services providing funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- Given the size of the looked after population the authority should consider the development of a participation strategy which is more systematic and which outlines the outcomes that could be achieved from such engagement.

QUESTION 2

Were care and pathway plans informed by relevant assessments, including explicit risk assessments, which supported a comprehensive response to the needs and experiences of children and young people?

POSITIVES

- Information sharing arrangements were effective between workers and teams, including the Youth Offending Service. There was a clear shared understanding and commitment from staff to safeguard young people and improve their outcomes. Workers interviewed were experienced in managing risk and were familiar with the process in place.

- The authority had identified the need to increase the range of placements available especially for those young people with challenging behaviour and additional needs. There was a commitment to meet the complex needs of young people even when this required the use of specialist placements which incurred significant costs.
- Care leavers were positive about the support they received especially from their personal advisors. They were empowered to have a voice and to engage meaningfully in decisions that influenced their lives. The authority had identified the need to prioritise work on independent living skills. Plans were in place to improve the opportunities for care leavers to maximise their financial independence.
- Education for looked after children was seen as a priority. Education and health support services for looked after children were flexible and effective in promoting better outcomes. The authority had developed a number of protocols to promote better health for young people.
- Staff were engaged in revising electronic templates of assessment and care plans. This was well supported by IT business support staff with knowledge and understanding of the particular needs of assessment, care, planning processes.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The quality of assessments seen was inconsistent, they were not routinely updated and so did not reflect the current needs of looked after young people.
- The recording of care planning was limited and there was little evidence of how young people were engaged in the process. The format of the plans did not facilitate easy access to information or engagement and did not have a specific section to record the views of children and young people.
- There was a lack of primary mental health services available for those young people whose wellbeing was compromised but did not meet the threshold for the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

QUESTION 3

Were operational systems and procedures in place that ensured responsive coordinated action was taken to mitigate risk and achieve safe continuity of care?

POSITIVES

- Workers were clear that safeguarding was a priority and it was evident there was good identification and awareness of the risks to and the vulnerability of looked after young people. There was a range of training and development opportunities which workers were encouraged to undertake.
- Child protection processes were being used appropriately to manage risk in this group of young people. There was evidence that agencies worked well together especially in relation to child sexual exploitation and missing young people.
- Workforce arrangements had been reviewed and plans to restructure so that looked after children and young people would have the opportunity to form good working relationships with social services professionals were in the process of being implemented.
- Workers were positive about access to informal and formal supervision and senior management support.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The format for recording risk assessment did not facilitate good organisation of information or analysis. There was little evidence of how risk assessments were shared between partner agencies working on the case or how young people had been engaged in the process. There was an over reliance on the expertise and experience of the operational manager which could be mitigated by the adoption of a more formalised protocol in relation to clarity and consistency around the mechanisms used for risk management. Relevant risk assessment training which was specific to adolescents would improve consistency in this area.
- Good progress had been made in improving arrangements to manage missing children and young people; however there was little resilience in the service which was essentially co-coordinated by a single post. There did not appear to be any contingency to cover staff absence for a service which is essential and deals with a high volume of referrals.
- Workers raised concerns about their uncertainty around the timing of the planned restructure of field work teams to establish a specialist service looked

after children. Although staff had been consulted in December 2013 there had been no definite confirmation of when arrangements would be implemented. Social workers were optimistic about the planned changes which they believed would improve continuity for children and young people and improve capacity to carry out direct work.

QUESTION 4

Did Independent Reviews and quality assurance arrangements promote safe care and best outcomes for young people?

POSITIVES

- The authority's independent reviewing arrangements were compliant with guidance. Reviews seen were timely and ensured that care plans were updated. I.R.O's were very experienced; well informed and committed to ensuring that young people were involved in their reviews and had an opportunity to have their say, and were aware of the advocacy service.
- Review reports seen were thorough and included consideration of the effectiveness of the plan. There was evidence that reviews were capturing the voice of the child or young person.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- I.R.Os felt confident to challenge arrangements for young people and social workers and managers confirmed this was the case. However this was difficult to evidence and inspectors saw examples around of situations which had not been resolved despite the issues being raised appropriately. Consideration should be given to how challenges brought by I.R.O.s could be evidenced and of how outcomes are influenced.
- The authority has plans to include pathway plans in the formal reviewing process but there was no timescale agreed for implementation at the time the inspection took place.
- There were quality assurance arrangements in place but a lack of capacity had impacted on the effectiveness of the system to influence improvement. A particular concern was raised about the quality assurance of 'out of county' placements of which of necessity the authority had a high number. This had identified this issue and that there was a need to strengthen the approach to monitoring commissioning arrangements.

QUESTION 5

Did care and pathway planning effectively capture and promote the rights and voice of the child?

POSITIVES

- The authority had responsibility for a high number of unaccompanied asylum seekers who are supported by personal advisors. The workers clearly recognised the additional vulnerability of this group of young people and there was active recruitment of additional staff to ensure that there was enough capacity to manage their workloads.
- There was evidence that work was being carried out to help looked after young people understand their lives and although this was sometimes completed by support workers, they were often able to provide greater continuity for service users.
- The authority reports a commitment to listen to the voice of the child and was working on a pledge which would formalise their intention.
- The advocacy arrangements were well developed and monitored. There was evidence that the service was discussed at each review. All young people seen during the inspection were aware of the service and those who had used it were positive about the outcomes.
- A work placement scheme had recently been launched across the council which would ensure that looked after young people and care leaver had the opportunity to access work experience.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- There had been a lack of stability of placement and continuity of workers for young people in the recent past. These issues were being addressed by the authority but the high demand on the service continued to present a challenge.
- Young people reported that although they had experienced good support from schools, there were some barriers to further education. They were also unhappy about the range of supported accommodation available to them although there were a number of joint initiatives with housing working to improve the options.