



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 City and County of Swansea

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 City and County of Swansea.
- 1.2. The inspection was carried out as part of Care 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 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

- Children's services were recognised as a corporate priority. Elected members were knowledgeable about the issues facing looked after children and care leavers. A Wellbeing scrutiny panel was in place to provide challenge. The authority had an established Corporate Parenting Forum the aim of which was articulated as 'to encourage all agencies and individuals to work together to deliver good outcomes for looked after children'. The forum arrangements included opportunities for children and young people to give their views to elected members and officers through corporate parenting challenge sessions.
- The overall structural arrangements located children's social services within a corporate directorate – people. The scope of these overarching strategic arrangements, which included adult social services and education, were described as facilitating coherence across the departments.
- The authority had benefited from the extensive work they had undertaken to manage the continuing high level of it's looked after population. The authority were progressing work on an overarching 5 year looked after children reduction strategy that included both early intervention but also a focus on improved outcomes for those receiving looked after services. The authority was also in the process of reviewing its permanency strategy.
- The authority had well developed performance information systems in place that supported officers and member's oversight of compliance in respect of the authority's statutory responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. Senior officers were well informed about the vulnerability of individual looked after children and able to direct resources where they were needed. There were systems in place to share this information across partner agencies. A multi agency Stable lives Brighter Futures Panel managed requests for out of authority arrangements and all out of authority placements needed the agreement of the Head of Children's services.
- The authority had arrangements in place to ensure that looked after children had access to education and primary health services.
- The Safeguarding Children Board (SCB) had moved to a regional footprint of the Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board (WBSCB). Although still

relatively new the board had undertaken work to develop shared information and quality assurance systems. The board was live to the need for effective oversight of safeguarding practice in relation to looked after children and had recently completed a review of its arrangements for managing 'risky behaviors'.

- Children's services workforce had been a priority for the authority over a number of years. The current position was viewed as stable with a mix of newly qualified and experienced staff. Looked after children were allocated to qualified social workers, however, some allocation issues were identified in relation to sickness and maternity cover. Staff described caseloads as generally manageable.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Elected members had recognised the significance of both their safeguarding and corporate parenting role members but needed to assure themselves that strategic aims were being translated into improved outcomes for looked after children. The role and challenge afforded by the corporate parenting forum would benefit from greater visibility.
- Despite good information systems the authority did not routinely capture a profile of the lac and care-leaving populations assessed needs or detailed thematic information regarding vulnerability and risk.
- Children's social services were taking forward a number of initiatives as part of its service improvement agenda. The service was changing internal mechanisms for example disbanding its permanency panel, locating placement decisions with principal officers. The service was developing new meeting arrangement such as the 'Fforwm Llais', to promote a greater focus on early intervention and Y Siarad to oversee more complex cases , Managers described these changes as evolving and their strengths and benefits were yet to be determined. Some staff were unclear of the new arrangements.

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

- Referral and information sharing processes between professionals were understood and operational relationships between staff helped support communication. Social workers and their managers generally had a good understanding of the young people they worked with including knowledge of presenting vulnerabilities.

- The authority had invested in whole service training in solution focused and signs of safety practice. Partner involvement in this training had acted to support a better-shared understanding of roles. Staff recognised and were active in relation to identifying risk. However the actions resulting from the assessment and the impact they made were not always well recorded or reflected within the care planning process.
- The authority had successfully increased the number of its in house foster placements as part of its looked after children reduction strategy; further work was on going to extend the range of placements to meet the complex needs of some young people.
- Placement stability had been supported by the availability of a part time clinical psychologist, funded by the ABMU Health Board working with looked after children in relation to attachment difficulties. Evidence was also seen of Children’s social service acting to commission therapeutic assessments and interventions for individual children. However, access to the CAMHS service was raised as problematic and identified as a barrier to effective assessment and care planning for looked after children.
- The work of the Looked After Children Educational Support Service (LACES) was clearly valued including their ability to directly negotiate and resolve issues within schools. Educational attainment was promoted but the underpinning ambition was described more widely as ‘supporting young people to reach their best potential whatever it might be’. This approach was identified in a number of cases reviewed. However, the authority had identified that the format and quality of personnel education plans remained an area for improvement.
- The role of the looked after children’ nurse was valued and health assessments were reported as mainly compliant and available to the IRO through electronic systems. The looked after children health service was also active in providing primary health, healthy eating and sexual health advice to young people. However, the service was experiencing some pressures given the growth in the number of looked after children over the years.
- The high rate of looked after children from the past were known to be impacting on leaving care services and personal advisor caseloads. The quality of pathway planning was identified as variable. Care leavers were generally positive about the support they received from their personal advisors, although they did not always understanding the difference in roles and planning mechanisms. Care leavers found the practical focus of pathway planning helpful but experienced decision making in relation to financial and resource issues as slow and inconsistent.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The care plans, seen, of those young people who remain looked after for longer periods were not routinely informed by a relevant shared written assessment.

- Although the format of the care plan was helpful the quality of the planning was variable. Most plans included broad overarching statements but did not always clearly articulate the objectives and how the desired outcomes for the young person were to be achieved.

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

- Staff had access to key policies and there were well-developed information systems in place to support oversight of compliance in respect of statutory child protection procedures. Workers were clear that safeguarding was a priority and felt confident in the child protection training provided including where the risks resulted from the young persons own behaviour.
- Child protection processes were being used appropriately to manage risk for this group of young people.
- The authority and the Safeguarding Children Board had acted to heightened awareness of the vulnerabilities of looked after children and care leavers, including children missing from placement. Training in respect of a sexual exploitation risk assessment framework (SERAF) had been incorporated into core child protection training. The chair of the WBSCB had written to all partner agencies in respect of individual agency compliance regarding child sexual exploitation. The intention being that the analysis of responses would be used to inform the boards future work plan.
- There appeared to be good working relationship with the police. Staff described a proactive response to children missing from placement, the police routinely undertook return to placement debriefings and the role of the misper coordinator was said to support better information sharing.
- The authority had a strong commitment to training. Staff reported that they were provided with good support and development opportunities including mentors during the first and second year of practice. The frequency of supervision was formally monitored through performance management system.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The statutory child protection procedures and thresholds were well understood, however, the management pathway for looked after young people and care leavers exhibiting 'risky' behaviours needed greater clarity. The introduction of

the new 'Risk Taking Behaviour Practice guidance was seen as an opportunity to ensure that the interface between risk management and care planning mechanisms were clear.

- The progress made in mitigating risk was not always well, evaluated or recorded. It was not always apparent the extent to which that young people were directly involved in the process.
- Staff reported that they lacked capacity to undertake planned work with young people and some viewed support staff as having more experience and expertise to undertake this 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 were generally timely and convened to reflect the presenting circumstances of the young person. However there were concerns that reviews were sometimes cancelled without good reason.
- IROs routinely sought to meet with the young person prior to or following the review, although time constraints were said to impact on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Looked after children reviews appeared overly focused on the immediate needs of the young person and gave insufficient weight to securing better outcomes over the longer term.
- The IROs and managers were not confident that IROs were routinely made aware of changes or events that potentially impacted on the relevance of the care plan. Also there was concern that the significance of the role was not well understood by staff. The IROs role in monitoring cases between reviews lacked clarity.
- Some staff experienced reviews as providing challenge, but this was not always evident. IROs were concerned that they were unable to exert the necessary influence to promote stability of placement. A greater focus was now being given to raising the profile of the IRO service and to extend their quality assurance function but this development was relatively recent.

- Although young people told us they were encouraged to attend their reviews, and some knew that advocates were available to support or represent them attendance was variable. Young people often described the review process negatively and did not view it as their meeting.
- The authority had undertaken significant work regarding the commissioning of services. The authority had reconfigured in house residential provision and commissioned specific Swansea based independent residential providers with the ambition of returning Swansea children to the region where appropriate and safe to do so.

QUESTION 5

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

POSITIVES

- The authority had formally adopted the United Nations Rights of the Child.
- The authority had commissioned independent issue based advocacy arrangements in place there was evidence that advocacy was discussed at LAC reviews.
- There are strong operational relationships between children's services and housing and 'move on housing' is seen as a shared agenda.
- There is a participation officer in post who facilitates the opportunities for looked after children and young people to have a say in the way they are looked after.
- Despite some mixed views children and young people generally experienced professionals as persistent in their efforts to engage them and try to ensure their voices were heard.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Some young people said they liked their social worker'. However, general feedback from young people was that they didn't see their social worker enough, found them hard to contact and slow to return calls. Care leavers were able to compare this level of service with what they felt was the better communication and responsiveness they currently experienced from their personal advisors.
- Young people felt they had little ability to influence the choice of placements or accommodation. Some had positive experiences but raised the significant impact changes of social workers and placement had on their ability to form trusting relationships. Young people also raised issues regarding speed of

consent and inconsistent funding decisions.

- Young people highlighted the importance of ensuring consultation in meaningful and expressed exasperation about repeatedly being asked about 'wishes and feelings' but not feeling listened to.