



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 Vale of Glamorgan 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 Vale of Glamorgan 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

- 'Safeguarding vulnerable children and young people' had been identified as a corporate priority for the authority. Elected members and senior officers were well informed and evidenced strong commitment to support looked after children and young people. Corporate parenting arrangements were well established and had directly influenced outcomes for looked after children and young people.
- The authority had effective mechanisms 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 jointly commissioned with Cardiff County Council 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. The workforce had been stable with managers and staff evidencing a strong commitment to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people. There was a comprehensive breakdown on information in respect of performance and workforce capacity.
- The Children's Safeguarding Board (CSB) was in the process of moving to a regional footprint. A self assessment had been completed and a business plan was being implemented. Clear priorities had been agreed which included improving the management and reduction of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The Local Safeguarding Children Board had an action plan in place to follow up and monitor progress in respect of recommendations made following a thematic inspection of arrangements for managing young people who display sexually harmful behaviour.
- The council's improvement plan for 2014/15 had identified as an objective the need to increase sustainability and stability of placements for looked after children and young people. Children's services had a comprehensive commissioning strategy in place which outlined a detailed breakdown of the looked after children's population. A holistic approach to addressing the need to

support more children to live with their families balanced with the need to transform services for looked after children was outlined in the document.

- The authority had arrangements in place to ensure that looked after children had access to education and primary health services. Reducing the number of young people who are not in employment education or training (NEET) was also identified as an object in the council improvement plan.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The authority should give consideration as to whether a more co-ordinated approach to influencing improvements for the looked after population could be strengthened from the development of a corporate parenting strategy. There were a number of mechanisms in place for the views of service users to be communicated to elected members. These could be expanded to allow members to assure themselves that services were making a difference to the quality of looked after young people's lives.
- The authority could improve the effectiveness of service planning and identifying gaps in provision if the profile of vulnerability and risk was included in the profile of the looked after population. The terms of reference for the complex needs panel should be re-visited to ensure membership from partner agencies is at an appropriate level to support timely decision making and avoid delays in providing necessary therapeutic services and placements.
- Concerns had been expressed about the ability of services for 'children and adolescents with emotional and mental health issues' to meet needs. Attempts to develop a sustainable model of service delivery had been challenged by partners differing expectations. A final model was due to be implemented in July 2014. Despite this working engagement 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.

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.

- There were some good examples of risk assessment seen on files which were comprehensive and resulted in clear safety plans. It was not always evident whether young people had been engaged in the process.
- Care plans did identify the services which could meet the needs of looked after young people. A range of provision was commissioned by children's services to provide therapeutic support for those whose emotional well being was compromised by their previous experiences of neglect and abuse.
- 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. Additional residential placements had been commissioned to enable young people to return to or remain in their own communities. Move on accommodation and support so that care leavers could live independently was also being developed.
- Education for looked after children was seen as a priority. There had been a recent improvement in the education support service for looked after young people. Personal education plans had been refreshed and the ability to track individual educational achievement including the progress of young people placed out of county was being further developed. Health assessments seen were timely and information was provided for reviews.
- Care leavers were positive about the support they received from their personal advisors which was timely and effective. They were empowered to have a voice and to engage meaningfully in decisions that influenced their lives. They had been involved in the development of the initiative 'When you are ready' which is a pilot scheme which aims to provide for looked after young people to remain in foster placements beyond the age of 18 years.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Core assessments seen were not consistently well recorded, lacked analysis and were not routinely updated. However there was a programme of training underway for social workers on 'Making analysis central to decision making within core assessments' and plans were in place to ensure that core assessments will be reviewed annually as a minimum.
- The recording of care plans seen was limited, they were not outcome focussed and did not routinely record the wishes and feelings of the child or young person. The authority did have quality assurance mechanisms in place to

address this concern. Social workers did not find the format of the plans helpful to the process and work was in the process of being completed to improve the template of pathway plans.

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 and managers 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. Risk assessments were reported to be reviewed in supervision. There was a range of training and development opportunities which workers were encouraged to undertake, although capacity to undertake training was sometimes an issue.
- Child protection processes were being used appropriately to manage risk in this group of young people. There was evidence that agencies worked well together with good communication and joint planning.
- The local SCB had revised the risk assessment and management tool and there has been a focus on implementing protocols in respect of child sexual exploitation. The board had also commissioned a multi-agency audit of supervision arrangements which concluded that most agencies had arrangements in place for safeguarding supervision. However the audit did not assess the quality and effectiveness of the arrangements.
- The workforce arrangements were configured to promote continuity for looked after children and young people as there were no transition points once a permanency plan had been agreed.
- Workers were positive about the availability and quality of both informal and formal supervision.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The engagement of the police in the implementation of the protocol for missing young people should be revisited to ensure that the arrangements are clearly understood and working effectively.
- There was a reliance on the good relationships between children's services and other agencies with respect to the management of risk. These arrangements

would benefit from a more formalised approach which could better clarify the relationship between care planning and risk management mechanisms.

- The recording of decisions made in supervision seen on case files was limited and did not evidence the consideration of risk which managers and staff were able to report to inspectors. Supervision audits were carried out and the authority had already identified this issue as an area for development.

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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. Independent Reviewing Officer's (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. IROs had completed some work around 'Barriers to Advocacy' which they believed had supported them in their role to ensure that young people have a voice.
- Some 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.
- There were good quality assurance arrangements in place which included feedback to operational teams and senior management. The authority had identified that audit of case files could be more consistent throughout the service.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The I.R.O.s 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 of situations which had not been resolved despite the issues being raised especially around the lack of timely therapeutic services. Consideration should be given to how challenges brought by the service could be evidenced and how outcomes are influenced.
- While significant progress had been made in identifying and commissioning specialist placements for young people with challenging behaviour, the monitoring of quality and outcomes was an area for development. Some concern was expressed about the risks within group living settings as the authority is dependent on the provider to manage this effectively.

QUESTION 5

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

POSITIVES

- There was evidence that direct work or therapy was being carried out with young people to help them understand their lives.
- The advocacy arrangements were well developed and monitored. There was evidence that the service was discussed at each LAC review. All young people seen during the inspection were aware of the service and those who had used it were positive about the outcomes.
- Managers and workers were intent on listening to the voice of the child and were persistent in their efforts to engage with young people. Personal advisors were committed to empowering young people to take control of their lives. This included supporting young people to gain the skills which would maximise their life chances and ability to live independently.
- Inspectors saw examples of how young people had been supported to access leisure and sporting activities with good risk management arrangements in place.
- A Young People's Housing and Support action plan had been developed which outlined a comprehensive approach to address accommodation needs. The plan did appear to prioritise homeless 16/17 year olds as the main beneficiaries although in discussion workers included care leavers; this was not clearly defined in the action plan.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Workers were concerned that at times they were unable to complete planned work with looked after children and young people as they had to prioritise safeguarding cases within their workload.
- The authority had a transition protocol in place relating to young people with disabilities but there were concerns raised about the planning of transition arrangements for those looked after young people approaching independence who did not reach the threshold for adult services.
- Consideration should be given to whether there could be a more consistent approach to support looked after young people to be engaged in participation and the development and improvement of service delivery.

