

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 11 March 2021

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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Update on Family Safeguarding model

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

This report is a follow up report arising from the former Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 January 2020 when it considered a report on the Neglect Strategy. Lancashire County Council launched the new Family Safeguarding model on the 11th February 2021.

To support the implementation of the Model it was necessary to remodel the whole Children's social care department. This took place on the 4th January 2021 allowing for the staff and management to be in place ready for the full launch on the 11th February. This is the date the evaluation of the Family Safeguarding model began. The evaluation is being undertaken by 'The What Works Centre' who were commissioned by the Department for Education and will conclude in 2023.

Our official launch took place on the 1st March, this was a virtual event that was opened by the leader of the council with several speakers who are both external and internal. The purpose of the launch was to ensure all partners are aware of the implementation and provided staff an opportunity to say how it feels to be in the new structure and what they are hoping to achieve.

Recommendation

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the progress of the Model and how the service will move forward following implementation.

Background and Advice

Family safeguarding is a new way of working with families so that they can stay together, and children where possible can remain safely at home. The Family Safeguarding team is made up of a wide range of professionals, multi-agency teams tackling domestic abuse, parental mental health, and substance misuse to improve children's lives. The teams work with and alongside families supporting them in a strengths-based way, using Motivational Interviewing, which is a new approach to social work that creates sustainable behavioural change in parents. The new teams

are supported by systems that reduce bureaucracy as well as a dedicated team coordinator, this frees up practitioners to spend more time with families.

Family Safeguarding was developed in Hertfordshire five years ago and was evaluated to demonstrate excellent outcomes for families including fewer children coming into care and a reduction in attendances at A & E, and in call outs by the police. Lancashire undertook a bid process and were successful in securing £6.3 million pounds.

A Lancashire Family Safeguarding programme team was established and has ensured that the foundations for Family Safeguarding are in place and that we were able to go live on the 11th February.

Family Safeguarding has been introduced as part of the transformation of children's services within Lancashire that has meant investing significantly in Early Help, developing teams around the school, and moving from Localities to Functions.

We are ensuring that children in care have secure and stable homes and that we invest in our ongoing support for Care Leavers.

The whole service is ambitious to deliver the best quality 'good and outstanding' service, to listen to Lancashire children, young people and their families and carers, and to work in a way that builds on Families strengths.

Developing the Service

A Lancashire Family Safeguarding Partnership Board has been established to have strategic oversight of the development and delivery of Family Safeguarding.

An Operational Lancashire Family Safeguarding Board oversees the development of practice. This Board is comprised of all partners ensuring practitioners from across the spectrum are working in partnership but retaining accountability.

A comprehensive training programme has been delivered to managers and frontline practitioners to equip them to deliver Family Safeguarding. We have worked with the Hertfordshire National Family Safeguarding team over the last year to get staff ready for Family Safeguarding.

To date (February 2021), 339 staff have completed a two-day Motivational Interviewing (MI) training course followed by a range of practice development sessions. 1710 staff have attended practitioner workshops delivered by Hertfordshire County Council, which range from reflective auditing, thresholds and leading multi-disciplinary teams.

Recruitment to the Family Safeguarding workforce has taken place alongside the remodelling of Children's services. The recruitment of a Head of Service, Senior Managers, Team Managers, Consultant Social Workers, Social Workers and Team Coordinators has been successful.

The recruitment of the specialist Adult Workers has been coordinated by the Programme team. We have recruited domestic abuse workers; substance misuse workers and we anticipate that the recruitment of mental health workers will be completed by mid-March 2021.

A Quality Assurance Framework is being developed which will clearly demonstrate the anticipated outcomes of Family Safeguarding.

At the moment, Covid-19 is impacting on the numbers of children being referred to children's social care and there is a national reduction of children entering the care system, and an increase in the length of Care Proceedings. Therefore, findings will not be straightforward. We anticipate an increase in demand as children return to school and as lockdown is ended, we do however believe that Family Safeguarding will reduce the number of children entering the care system, as more children remain safely with their families.

Participation has been an important part of the establishing of the system, recruitment has included children, young people, or people with lived experience to identify questions or scenarios, or they have joined panels or interviewed staff separately.

We are developing The Family Forum a space for families to feed back to us about the services they have received and to shape future services.

A reference group also exists for front line staff to share their experiences with the Head of Service and the Principal Social Worker.

Implementation

On the 11th February 2021, the service went live, with 21 Family Safeguarding Teams in place across the County. The teams sit within the ICS (Integrated Care System) Health Boundaries, within District Council footprints.

Each team consists of a Team Manager, a Consultant Social Worker, 5 Social Workers, a Team Coordinator, and the Adult Specialist Workers in Domestic Abuse, Substance Misuse and Mental Health these posts are available across two teams. The teams are managed by Senior Managers who manage teams in the north, east, central and south areas of the County.

Families will begin to see the difference in the way we work, there will be less emphasis on what families are not able to do and a real drive to support them to understand how they can be more effective parents. There will be less bureaucracy, guiding intervention and the model will support social workers to undertake more relationship based practice.

Families will see that we are changing our behaviour supporting them to understand they can accept the support on offer. We will focus on working with resistance developing parent's strengths.

Multi agency teams will be working together to tackle domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse. We know that addressing these issues and supporting parents to accept support improves children's lives. The teams will have group supervision and group work programmes for families.

Communication

There has been excellent media coverage facilitated by the corporate communications team, with television, radio, and local and national press.

The Lead Member and the Executive Director have given interviews, as well as creating videos for staff.

The Lancashire Family Safeguarding Twitter page, and internal website now exist. We are determined to publicise Lancashire Family Safeguarding and build its profile in order to sell Children's social care as an ideal place to come and work in this exciting and innovative way with reduced caseloads of 15, and in doing so seek to reduce our reliance on agency social workers.

The teams themselves are full of enthusiasm for Family Safeguarding and welcome the opportunity to work in a strength-based way alongside families, and they welcome the training support and additional resources.

The frontline worker group completed an anonymous questionnaire which said that they felt fully supported by their managers they scored their support 9.8 out of 10.

Family Safeguarding is still being implemented, we have a 100-day plan and view Lancashire Family Safeguarding as a service that is being developed and grown. We will be better able to deliver the full model when all the Specialist Adult workers are established in the teams, and the new ways of working are fully embedded, but we are well on the way to ensuring better outcomes for Lancashire families.

Consultations

Finance – Nothing to add

Legal – Nothing to add

HR - The recruitment of the specialist Adult Workers has been coordinated by the programme team; there have been some challenges due to external factors such as changes that are taking place within the Probation Service. Domestic Abuse Workers have been recruited as have the majority of the substance misuse workers. It is anticipated that recruitment of Mental Health workers will be completed by the end March 2021.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

As a County Council we alongside partners have committed to working with families in a very different manner than we have in the past. The new model is strength based and at the heart of the model is the belief that families want to do the right thing for their children. This will include reducing the numbers of children who are admitted to care and being made subject of a child protection plan. For some this may be concerning as the numbers will reduce, we will need to work hard with partners, the judiciary and Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) to support families to remain together and manage risk within the home.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A