

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Response by Children's Partnership to the recommendations of C&YP Select Committee	
Key Decision	No	Item No. 5
Ward	All	
Contributors	Director of Children's Social Care, Chief Executive of PCT, Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police Lewisham, Chair – Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board	
Class	Part 1	Date: 13 July 2010

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a response from the Children's partnership to the recommendations which the C&YP Select Committee made to the Mayor and Cabinet on 3 March 2010.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Mayor to come to a considered view of the recommendations of the Select Committee.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Mayor is recommended to:
- agree the comments by partnership officers on the 32 recommendations made by the C&YP Select Committee and refer the response to the CYP Select Committee.

4 Policy Context

- 4.1 The protection of children is a priority for the Council and its partner agencies. The Council is the lead agency and all organisations and staff who work with children have a clear responsibility to ensure the protection of all children in the borough.

5 Narrative

- 5.1 After the tragic death of Baby Peter in Haringey, the elected members of the Children & Young People Select Committee decided that their in-depth review 2009/10 would focus on safeguarding so that they could assure themselves and the public that safeguarding responsibilities were being robustly discharged in Lewisham.

- 5.2 The Committee carried out a detailed investigation of the Council and its partner agencies' arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable children and made 32 recommendations to the Mayor and Cabinet. In addition to recommendations which were directed to the Council, there were also specific recommendations directed to the Metropolitan Police, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), schools and the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board.
- 5.3 The Committee found a real commitment to robustly meeting safeguarding responsibilities across all levels of staff the Council and all partners agencies. Chief officers from all partner agencies demonstrated a clear organisational commitment to meeting their safeguarding responsibilities, however all accepted that embedding a culture of awareness and information sharing through to every single member of staff at every level of every organisation in Lewisham was a challenge that they had to continue to prioritise.
- 5.4 Staff from all organisations confirmed that progress was being made in improving communication and joining up services and practices to develop a truly multi-agency approach, although all agreed that there was still room for improvement in the way in which agencies communicated and worked together.
- 5.5 It was evident to the Committee that there is a genuine desire at all levels across all agencies to continue to improve practices and communicate more effectively to safeguard children in Lewisham and that work is being done to implement previous Serious Case Review recommendations. Upon consideration of the evidence gathered, the Committee identified a number of strategic and practical recommendations to support continued improvements in communication and safeguarding practices in Lewisham.
- 5.6 The Mayor received the report of the Select Committee on 3rd March 2010 and requested that the Executive Director of C&YP comment on the recommendations. The Select Committee's report is attached at Annex 1. This response includes the comments of relevant partnership agencies.
- 5.7 The Committee made recommendations in three areas which correspond to the 3 areas of inquiry that the Committee identified at the outset of the review and which also correspond to Lord Laming's framework as outlined below.

Recommendations	Committee Key areas of enquiry	Lord Lamings' review framework
Promoting understanding below the strategic level	Structure / Strategic – Partnership Working	Leadership and accountability

Mechanics of Communication	Communication – Process / Operational	Interagency working
Organisation Specific Recommendations	Research / Case studies	Organisation

6 Promoting understanding below the strategic level

Recommendations of select committee:

1. *The co location of services should be prioritised and promoted as far as possible.*

Comment:

The Council is committed to promoting and extending co-location of services.

- The Kaleidoscope building exemplifies this intention. It includes the whole range of health, education and social care services which are devoted to children with additional needs.
 - As part of the Worksmart programme in Laurence House, there will be the opportunity to relocate attendance and welfare staff beside staff in the Referral and Assessment (R&A) team. In addition, a team manager in R&A and a Missing children's worker have been temporarily relocated to Lewisham Police Station for a part of the week to try bring about a reduction in inappropriate referrals to the Council. It is intended that this will be a temporary secondment and that together we will be able to direct children with additional needs to appropriate agencies, thus reserving children's social care services provided by the Council, for children who need assistance which can best be provided by the Council.
 - Children Centres already host staff employed by different agencies who provide specific services in the Children's Centre.
2. *Opportunities for joint training across all partnership should be actively sought out*

Comment:

- The Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board offers multi agency training in safeguarding to all partnership agencies.
 - PCT offers free access to social care staff on its internal training courses. The Council offers a reciprocal arrangement. There is currently an inter-agency working party which is seeking to explore the possibilities of a jointly commissioned training service for all children's staff in the partnership.
3. *Opportunities for shadowing between different professionals and organisations should be developed to foster a better understanding of organisations' practices and cultures*

Comment:

- This recommendation is welcomed. This already happens on an ad-hoc basis but there is no doubt that it could be extended.

4. *Listening to the direct experiences and views of children and parents who have been through the child protection system should happen regularly, and what is learned from that dialogue should directly inform practice*

Comment:

- It is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to inform the child protection conference about the child's and the parents' views. Parents are also present and are encouraged to express their view. Additionally, the Council provides an advocacy service on behalf of parents who are in the child protection system. Feedback is provided by the Advocate on behalf of the family. This feedback is shared with the service involved in the case. The advocate also seeks to meet regularly with groups of parents who have child protection plans for their children and to inform the Council of their experience and suggestions for service improvements. Ensuring children's views are heard is also the focus of the case file audits which take place regularly. There are a number of additional ways in which the Council receives the views of children. Council Members share membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel with Looked After Children and there is a Children in Care Council which makes recommendations to the Council. Looked After Children also sit on the appointment panels of social workers and managers. Looked After Children complete a consultation form for their reviews and their own parents can attend and comment. There is always more that can be done and it is our intention to carry out future consultations with children and parents who have had Child Protection Plans and to report on their views to the relevant Council Committee's within the next twelve months.

5. *Clear escalation procedures for urgent safeguarding concerns should be published by each organisation, so practitioners and all organisations are aware of heightened escalation issues that they feel have not been dealt with adequately.*

Comment:

- There are extensive child protection procedures for all agencies. Most front line staff are aware that if dissatisfied with actions they can request the opinion of management in the specific agency. An escalation procedure for all agencies is being developed by the LSCB.

7 Mechanics of Communication

Recommendation of Select Committee

6. *As and when organisations need to replace and upgrade their IT systems and processes, the possibility of harmonising systems or sharing systems should be looked into (i.e. joint commissioning) to ensure that partnership organisations systems are at the very least compatible, if not the same system*

Comment:

- Work is underway within the Council to promote more integration of systems. The recommendation has been forwarded to the ICT departments in the contributing agencies.

7. *A protocol for sharing confidential information between all partner organisations, including schools, that provides practical guidance for staff should be developed.*

Comment:

- There is a guide on information sharing for staff which has been developed by HM government. This 20-page document gives information sharing and practical guidance. Most staff in the partnership have received these guides but we will ensure that people are reminded of their existence.

8. *Guidance on how and when to communicate with families and professionals and the best method used in each circumstance, should be included in guidance for staff*

Comment:

- Professional training addresses how to communicate with families and professionals. The best method to use in each circumstance is dependent on a wide variety of factors. Safeguarding training organised by the LSCB seeks to assist in this. Further consideration will be given to this.

9. *The lead officer, social worker or social work assistant should ensure that clear contact details of all involved parties, and the best method of communication, are noted and agreed at each case conference and recorded as being part of the “practical considerations” part of the child protection core groups guidance*

Comment:

- This is in place.

10. *A high quality, standardised model of recording information should be developed and promoted across all agencies in the partnership*

Comment:

- The Common Assessment Framework is a standard mode of recording assessments and is being promoted throughout the partnership.

11. *Excellent standards of communication, both written and oral, are vital and should be a core competency when recruiting staff*

Comment:

- This is accepted. Current recruitment methods in all agencies seek to ensure this.

12. *Clear and timely communications should be a clear expectation of all staff and action taken if high standards are not met*

Comment:

- This is a clear expectation of staff. Some aspects of timely communication are monitored by our performance monitoring systems. Others come to notice through management supervision, case auditing or through informal or formal complaints. A range of management action is used to address shortcomings.

13. *ICT systems should be of benefit to staff, so operational staff should be actively involved in all relevant systems development*

Comment:

- This is already the case within the Council.

8 Organisation Specific recommendations

8.1 Metropolitan Police

14. *Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT), Child Abuse Investigation Teams (CAIT), the Sapphire Teams and Rapid Response Teams should work closely together and regularly, proactively share information on any incidents involving a household that includes children. The SNT should check the intelligence systems daily to keep abreast of and follow up any incidents in their area*

Comment:

- This recommendation is welcomed. Intelligence is shared already within the MPS 'CRIMINT' system, however, the process to ensure this is consistently applied will be monitored, reviewed and updated to ensure compliance.

15. *The police should work with the local authority to explore the possibility of co-located Child Abuse Investigation Teams (CAIT) and Children's Social Work teams as a priority.*

Comment:

- In principle, this recommendation is accepted, however, logistical considerations must be explored. The capital expense is co-location regarding IT solutions is extensive, and to be considered is the fact that the CAIT teams are part of the Specialised Crime Directorate and note within local borough governance.

8.2 PCT and GPs

16. *The PCT should explore with the Local Authority ways to facilitate GP and other health professionals' active participation in case conferences, including considering scheduling, location and possible utilisation of technology to facilitate participation (i.e. telephone conferencing).*

Comment:

- Agreed, the Local Authority and PCT are looking at ways of strengthening GP's participation in safeguarding arrangements. Attendance is currently reported as high and is kept under review.

17. *The PCT should investigate providing locum GP coverage to enable GP participation in case conferences.*

Comment:

- The GPs are able to access a Local Enhanced Service for Partnership working that recognises that time and resources are needed to support participation.

18. *The PCT should ensure that when commissioning and tendering for GP services, the explicit expectation of GPs to participate in case conferencing and activities related to safeguarding is included in specification and contract papers.*

Comment:

- All GP practices have Lewisham Safeguarding Guidelines for General Practice. Safeguarding arrangements will be specifically identified in the ongoing local review of Primary Medical Service contracts.

19. *The PCT should set up a clear mechanism/process to monitor GP attendance at case conferences and advise GPs that this will be done.*

Comment:

- Information from audits and monitoring of participation in case conferences can be used by Primary Care Commissioning staff in their contracting processes with practices.

20. *The important role of health visitors in safeguarding younger children should be recognised and better supported by the PCT when planning safeguarding activities and communications.*

Comment:

- All services and agencies who are signatories to the Children's Plan have acknowledged that safeguarding is 'Everybody's Business'. However, the link between health visiting and general practice is recognised as particularly valuable. There is ongoing monitoring of the six weekly HV/practice link meetings to discuss vulnerable families within practices.

8.3 Schools

21. *Schools should forge strong links between local primary and secondary schools to ensure clear communication directly between schools when children in need are transitioning from primary to secondary, or when children from one family attend different schools.*

Comment:

- This recommendation is welcomed as it builds upon work already taking place across schools. The effective transition of children with SEN and vulnerable children is a particular focus.

22. *Absence management should be monitored vigorously at all schools, and there should be a strong link between the safeguarding lead and the lead officer managing absence in a school, to ensure that the two areas are clearly linked in practice.*

Comment:

- this recommendation is welcomed and builds upon work already taking place. The link between absence management and safeguarding was identified in the local SCRs.

23. *Staff, particularly the safeguarding leads, should be clear on the escalation process both within the school and with the local authorities if there are safeguarding concerns.*

Comment:

- Again the need for this was identified in a SCR and work is in train to ensure this practice is embedded.

24. *Safeguarding training should be provided for all governors, and efforts made to ensure improved take up of training offered*

Comment:

- Training is already in place, monitoring of take-up will be developed.

8.4 Lewisham Council

25. *The Council should continue to prioritise the recruitment and retention of social workers.*

Comment:

- The Council is continuing to prioritise the recruitment and retention of social workers. At the time of writing this report 12.5% of social work staff are agency staff in Children's Social Care; this is significantly better than our statistical neighbours. Nevertheless, it is a continuing source of management action because many of the social workers who are agency staff work in the arena of child protection and care proceedings.

26. *The Council should maintain the high level of management in children's social care that currently allows for a high level of both supervision and support.*

Comment:

- The Council is operating in an extremely challenging financial climate. It is our intention as far as possible to ensure that social workers always receive a proper level of management support.

27. *Communication skills should be a core competency of all children's social workers and social work assistants and the testing and then ongoing development of these skills should be effectively managed.*

Comment:

- This recommendation is accepted and our training manager is working to ensure this.

28. *Once established, the recently announced National College of Social Work should be utilised to ensure best practice amongst all existing staff.*

Comment:

- This is our intention.

29. *The roles of the social work assistants and business support officers should be better utilised to ensure that the social workers are able to spend the maximum time on working with families and children, with more administrative tasks supported by the assistants.*

Comment:

- The Council endeavours to ensure that administrative processes are as efficient and effective as possible and to free up social workers from lengthy, routine administrative duties. Social workers are required however, to record details of their interactions with service users and other agencies in a relatively complex electronic case recording system. Ensuring that details of children and families are absolutely accurate is vital to ensure proper communication with staff of other agencies who are also involved with the families and this does mean that our staff need to pay attention to this. We are however committed to freeing up as much time as possible for direct work with children and families by our staff. The recently announced review of social work by Profession Eileen Munro may assist further in this regard.

30. *The parents' advocate service should be expanded to ensure there is adequate cover at all times to ensure that all case conferences can be covered by the parents' advocate service, to ensure that all parents have access to this support service, and the external challenge to professionals continues to be robust.*

Comment:

- Lewisham was first in the country to have a parents advocacy service which is offered to all families involved in the child protection process. It has been a highly effective service. However, it is not a statutory requirement and in a challenging resource climate the Council may have to consider other approaches.

8.5 Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board

31. *Continue to monitor and review the effectiveness of the recent structural changes to the board and its activities.*

Comment:

- This is accepted and will continue.

32. *Consider ensuring the "independence" of the Chair over time – remuneration should be reviewed and the costs split across all members of the partnership and re-recruitment after an agreed time to ensure a fresh independent approach.*

Comment:

- The Council has had an effective independent chair of the safeguarding board for some 12 months. It is accepted however that the requirement of transparency would suggest that all agencies in the partnership should contribute to her remuneration and that at an appropriate time the post should be re-advertised.

9 Financial implications

9.1 There are no financial implications.

10 Legal implications

10.1 There are no legal implications in this paper.

11 Crime and disorder implications

11.1 The recommendations of the Select Committee are intended to improve the protection of children and to ensure a co-ordinated response by relevant agencies when maltreatment of children occurs.

12 Equalities implications

12.1 There is no negative impact on staff and local communities as a result of this report.

12.2 The select committee report and the response from the children and young people's strategic partnership contribute to continuing to improve safeguarding practices and procedures, helping to protect vulnerable children and young people, many from disadvantaged groups. The EIA of Children's Safeguarding and Care Planning (2007) identified areas for action concerning sharing information, communicating and seeking the views of children and parents, and data collection. These have been built into service plans and also informed the development of the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Scheme 2008-2011.

13 Environmental implications

13.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

14 Conclusion

14.1 The Select Committee's recommendations are broadly welcomed and will help to ensure best practice is embedded.

15 Call-in and urgency

15.1 State that permission has been granted by the chair of Council if the decision is not to be subject to call-in.

16 Background documents and originator

16.1 Safeguarding: Information Sharing for Child Protection. A review by the Children & Young People Select Committee, December 2009.

For further details please contact Alastair Pettigrew on 0208 314 6827.