

Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

10 September 2018

Present: Councillor M Thirlaway (Chair)
Councillors L Bell, J Cassidy, C Davis, J Kirwin,
M Madden, A Newman, P Oliver, W Samuel,
J O'Shea and S Phillips.

Rev. M Vine Church Representative
Mrs M Ord Parent Governor Representative

CES11/09/18 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Brooks and K Clark.

CES12/09/18 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the appointment of the following substitute members were reported:

Councillor J O'Shea for Councillor K Clark.
Councillor W Samuel for Councillor P Brooks.

CES13/09/18 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

CES14/09/18 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CES15/09/18 Neglect Strategy

The sub-committee received a report on the neglectful care of children and young people in the borough and the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board's Neglect Strategy to ensure that multi-agency help and support was available to children and young people and their families.

The sub-committee was informed that neglect was defined in the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* statutory guidance from 2018 as:

"The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- a) provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- b) protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- c) ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- d) ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs."

Examples were given of what would and would not qualify as neglect and a case study was provided. The biggest challenge faced by officers was deciding when enough was enough in neglect cases and taking the decision to remove a child from what could be a loving but neglectful, for whatever reason, home. When a referral was received by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) the response was based on the seriousness and severity of the reported neglect as assessed against the Thresholds of Need established by the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Board.

In 2014/15 and 2015/16 the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board had Neglect as one of its key priorities and in 2016 had published a Neglect Strategy. The Strategy had established twelve key principles under which work around neglect would be undertaken and three strategic objectives for the Borough's safeguarding partners. The three objectives were to: improve awareness and understanding of neglect across the whole partnership; improve the recognition, assessment and response to children and young people living in neglectful situations before statutory intervention was required, including the appropriate use of assessment tools; and to ensure the effectiveness of service provision.

A refresh of the Strategy was now expected to take into account proposed changes to local safeguarding children boards and the Working Together statutory guidance; to ensure the early help response offered the appropriate help at the earliest opportunity; and the provision of training for practitioners.

Currently 48 children and young people were subject to a Child Protection Plan as a result of neglect. Until recently, neglect was the highest numerical category of child protection concern in the borough (59.2% in 2016/17). Now more children and young people had been subject to emotional abuse concerns, often related to domestic abuse, and neglect had decreased as the primary safeguarding concern. 59.2% was a higher percentage than the average for the borough's statistical neighbours and England but it was lower than the average for the North East.

In response to questions the difference between emotional abuse and neglect and the appropriate thresholds were explained; how different opinions between the partner agencies were resolved; how safeguarding of children who were home educated was achieved; what options might be available to family members who can see neglect but have shared or no responsibility for the children involved; and where childhood obesity ranked in the neglect spectrum. The sub-committee was reassured that very few children had no contact with any external practitioners and referrals could be made from a dentist, a doctor or a concerned neighbour. All reports were acknowledged so the individual who had

reported the matter knew that the concern had been noted.

It was **Agreed** to note the information about the Neglect Strategy and its forthcoming review.

CES16/09/18 Prevention and Early Help

The sub-committee received a report from the Senior Manager Prevention and Early Help on the Troubled Families Programme and the objectives for the final 18 months of the programme.

The report included an explanation of how the second phase of the programme was different from the first; the progress made on turning around a minimum of 1480 families; the impact service transformation had made; the data used to identify families for the programme; and how the programme had improved working practices across the service and with partners.

The sub-committee was reminded that stage one of the programme had achieved 97% of families being “turned around” with the outstanding 3% rolling over to phase two; as of the beginning of August 2018 the team had identified and attached 1354 families (91%) with the trajectory of attaching the remaining cohort of families by December 2018. The Authority had already successfully claimed for 459 families (33%) with a trajectory of claiming a 100% of the 1480 by March 2020, the end of the programme. The team was on track to maximise the income from the Programme by demonstrating not only service transformation but also improved outcomes for vulnerable families in the borough. The Troubled Families Programme had enabled the Authority to examine how it worked with safeguarding partners and make adjustments to ensure support offered to these families was done so at the earliest opportunity. The Programme had also improved the use of data and informed some of the developments the Local Authority had made to services during this period. As the programme ended in 2020, the on-going challenge was how the Authority would continue to intervene and evidence the impact of the intervention work with troubled families beyond that date.

In response to questions it was clarified that the programme complemented the Signs of Safety approach and even though the formal relationship with the families ended six months after they had been “turned around” the service did remain in touch with them and should it be required could attach them to the programme again.

It was explained that the programme aimed to build resilience, skills and confidence in the family so they took action when things became difficult; for example if they were impacted by the introduction of Universal Credit they would know and have the confidence to ring the Council or their landlord to let them know that their rent might be late this month rather than ignoring the situation.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and attendance.

It was **Agreed** (1) to note the progress of the work undertaken to date to achieve the Troubled Family Programme outcomes; and
(2) that the Sub-committee was satisfied as to the effectiveness of the approach and ability to demonstrate improved outcomes for families.

CES1709/18 Permanency Planning

The sub-committee received a report which detailed the processes and policies in place to support permanency planning for children in the Authority's care. The senior manager for Looked After Children attended the meeting to present the information and answer questions.

The statutory definition of permanence in the Children Act 1989 was to provide children with *'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond'*.

Placement stability was an important element of permanence as it created opportunities for children to develop relationships by giving them the time to do so. Continuing high-quality relationships was important for children in care because it helped them build security by developing secure attachments and supported their ability to form relationships in the future and develop a strong sense of belonging and identity.

Children and young people in care had expressed the view that they hated the drift, delay and uncertainty about where and with whom they might live and government had responded by requiring all children and young people who had been looked after by a local authority to have an individual plan for permanency after four months in care.

During the four months' work was undertaken to see if a return to the family was likely. The Signs of Safety model included at the outset of any work with a family a meeting described as a 'network meeting' when adults involved in a child's life who were able to offer support to the child and/or their parents came together to identify the concerns that had led to social work involvement; establish a 'bottom line' with parents; and also to identify contingency arrangements in the event changes were not made or sustained within a timescale required by the child. If a return to the family was not likely the plan for permanence would change to one of the other options.

Permanence could be achieved through any of the pathways: a return to birth parents; shared care arrangements; permanence within the looked after system (a residential placement, long-term unrelated foster care, or family and friends care); or legal permanence (adoption, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order).

The vast majority of children achieved permanence by being returned to the family with the second largest cohort being long-term foster placements, a small number were adopted because that was the only occasion when all ties with a birth family were severed. A permanent placement did not mean that the Authority severed all ties; in the case of a long term foster placement the legal responsibility for the child remained with the local authority and adopted children and their parents had a range of additional needs and needed to be supported long term.

It was emphasised that the Authority did not have enough foster carers or adopters and if Members knew of any people interested to encourage them to come forward. A larger number than was actually required was needed to ensure each child was placed with the right foster carers/adoptive parents.

It was clarified that the Authority had moved away from not placing children over 12 with foster parents as the difficulties to overcome when placing a child were rarely to do with the child's age and more often the details of the particular case, how the child presented and

how the child would fit in the home. When matching families the challenge was to ensure the carers had resilience and were able to understand that the child might not respond in expected ways. Training was provided on child development, attachment and what the changing needs might be as the child grew up.

Where children had been placed out of the borough due to a lack of capacity in the borough, specialist intervention or additional needs, the children and their care was closely monitored by the Authority as it retained parental responsibility. Announced and unannounced visits were conducted of the establishments before and during the placements and the child's social worker visited regularly. Efforts were also made to maintain the child's network in North Tyneside for when they returned; the Authority had a good record of bringing children back.

In response to questions the work undertaken with children to help them understand their story and make informed decisions as adults and the process undertaken and support provided to foster carers who had been accused of mistreatment was explained.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and attendance.

It was **Agreed** to note the information about Permanency Planning.