

Safeguarding

Context

East Sussex has a strong record of performing well on safeguarding. In 2003 our Climbié self-audit was deemed excellent; this judgement was endorsed by the CSCI inspection of social care services in 2005. In 2006 the APA grading for Stay Safe was 4, and in 2007 key performance indicators remain very high.

In 2006/7 100% of child protection reviews were held on time and all children with child protection plans had a key worker who was a qualified social worker. These indicators have been consistently high for the last five years with 100% for both in the last two years. In 2006/7 the number of children who ceased to have a child protection plan, having previously had one for over two years, was low at 7% and, again, this indicator has been low for the last five years. The proportion of children requiring child protection plans more than once was 11% in 2006/7. During the last five years, performance on this indicator has been more erratic, and in the last year it has improved significantly following a review of the causes of repeat child protection plans, which indicated that some of the planning for children with child protection plans could be over-optimistic, particularly where substance misuse or domestic violence issues were a factor.

There is good inter-agency partnership working to protect and safeguard children, including close working with police and health colleagues around assessments, enhanced by the joint working arrangements with police and health visitors in the Duty and Assessment Teams. Numbers of children with child protection plans have increased during 2006/7; this is an indicator of the close working relationships between all agencies. East Sussex CSD has very good standards for assessment with a clear understanding of safeguarding issues. The CAF processes are developing well and include relevant reference to safeguarding and child protection procedures and protocols. Assessment work undertaken within the aegis of the Assessment Framework for Children in Need is of a high quality with most assessments being completed within relevant time-scales, (initial assessments 79% and core assessments 88%). Safeguarding issues and concerns are also fully considered within more specialist assessments such as SEN, EPS, Education Welfare and Speech and Language Therapy.

Relevant strategies

The Local Safeguarding Children Board produces an annual report that incorporates the yearly business plan. This includes specific targets for work by the LSCB steering group and sub-groups but also includes the Local Area Agreement targets that specifically relate to safeguarding matters. There are also a number of associated strategies that the LSCB reviews regularly such as anti-bullying, domestic violence and substance misuse because of the relevance to and interface with safeguarding.

Key Themes

Local Safeguarding Children Board

East Sussex has well established inter-agency systems for safeguarding children. The East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board (ESLSCB) is made up of representatives from the senior levels of all organisations in the area involved in protecting the welfare of children. The three principal areas of work are:

- Activity that affects all children and aims to prevent maltreatment, or impairment of health or development, and ensures children are growing up in circumstances consistent with safe and effective care.
- Proactive work that aims to target particular groups.
- Responsive work to protect children who are suffering or at risk of suffering maltreatment.

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In East Sussex the LSCB is part of the wider Children's Trust which has the aim of improving the overall well-being of all children in the local area. The LSCB has particular responsibility for areas of safeguarding activity and contributes to delivery and commissioning through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Children's Trust arrangements. It is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness and co-ordination of the safeguarding system. The delivery of that system however remains the responsibility of the individual agencies within the Children's Trust. The East Sussex LSCB has an authoritative and independent voice working within the Children's Trust. It raises performance issues regarding children's safeguarding directly with partner agencies. The Chair of the LSCB provides regular reports to the Children's Trust Executive Group. The LSCB in essence provides a scrutiny function for the Children's Trust in the area of safeguarding, and is also responsible for producing and reviewing procedures, promoting training and carrying out audit and performance monitoring in the area of safeguarding and child protection. It achieves this through a well-established network of sub-groups and committees.

Specific achievements of the LSCB in 2006/7 include producing Sussex-wide Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures that are Working Together 2006 compliant (by October 2006); briefing almost 1,000 staff on the new procedures across a very wide range of agencies including the voluntary sector; establishing a pilot Child Death Review Panel by April 2007 which has been chosen to be part of the national pilot of these schemes; undertaking a review of child community safety arrangements across East Sussex resulting in a safety action programme for 2007/8; and organising an audit by all LSCB agencies of their compliance with Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 which will inform the LSCB work programme for 2007/8.

Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups

Analysis of underlying causes for children needing child protection plans in East Sussex indicates that the three most significant risk factors are domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental health. Nationally, Lord Laming's Inquiry into Victoria Climbié's death indicated that children who are privately fostered and those who are missing from school are very vulnerable to abuse and need a proactive approach to be safeguarded.

- Reviews of practice during 2006/7 have indicated that substance misuse by both parents and young people is a significant safeguarding issue. The further development of the substance misuse services to include the Family Substance Misuse service for children whose parents have a substance misuse problem is a major advance. Recent briefings on serious case reviews provided for all CSD staff have highlighted the risks and emphasised the importance of involving specialist services early where substance misuse issues are identified.
- Domestic Violence continues to present challenges for safeguarding children. The development by the police of Domestic Violence Reduction Panels provides one opportunity for closer inter-agency working to resolve these problems. Another innovative development, jointly with the Sussex Partnership Trust, is of a perpetrator group for those with mental health, alcohol or substance misuse problems, which is due to commence in June 2007. There is also a short-life working-group, led by the police that is exploring ways in which information about domestic violence incidents may be better shared with front-line agencies such as schools and primary health professionals.
- Parents with mental health problems often present difficulties. Planning has begun, therefore, to develop a service similar to that for substance misusing parents where the needs of the children and the parents can be considered alongside each other. Given the high correlation of parents with mental health problems needing to access CAMHS services on their children's behalf, this would seem an appropriate preventive measure as well as a key safeguarding action.

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- Specialist private fostering services have been developed in East Sussex during 2006/7 by NCH. They have invested heavily in a communications strategy to raise awareness of agencies' and families' responsibilities for notifying private fostering arrangements. This has included producing information materials customised to different sections of the community, contacting a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies including Housing providers, Sure Start, CAMHS, health visitors and schools. As a result of this publicity and public education, notification of private fostering arrangements has increased by over 400%.
- Clause 4 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 places a new duty on local authorities to identify children and young people who are missing from education and this will be a challenging piece of work in 2007. Policies and procedures have been developed and new staff are being appointed to implement this work in 2007.

Safeguarding and Disabled Children

The East Sussex LSCB recognises the increased risks faced by disabled children and has a Disabled Children's sub-group with the task of raising the profile of disabled children and child protection issues, and contributing to the protection of disabled children through collaboration with the LSCB multi agency training programme and commissioning of specific courses. A specific piece of development work was the 'Best Evidence' Project developed jointly with Police, CPS and a special school to determine how best evidence can be achieved with children who have a severe learning disability. In 2007/8 a priority for the Disabled Children's sub-group will be using the learning from this project practically to enhance child protection investigations with disabled children and young people.

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Child protection advisers consider all requests to convene child protection conferences and chair all conferences ensuring consistency of registration and child protection plans. There is regular auditing of files by managers, including senior management team; independent officers chair all reviews of looked after children; off line Regulation 33 visits are made monthly to residential units for both adolescents and disabled young people.

The LSCB Audit sub-group receives regular reports on safeguarding performance data and undertakes serious case reviews and multi-agency reviews where concerns have been identified. Additionally, it undertakes more thematic audits of practice.

Areas of development work in 2006/7 have included work to improve participation within safeguarding processes by both parents and children and young people. Consultation forms have been developed to ascertain the views of both parents and professionals attending child protection conferences; the findings from these consultations are used to inform and develop the practice of the conference chairs as well as social work with families. Input by children and young people to the conference process is monitored carefully, and work is underway to develop advocacy services for children and young people involved in the child protection conferences. In 2006/7 leaflets have been developed by a group of young people with the assistance of Xpress Advocacy and during 2007/8 Xpress Advocacy will pilot an advocacy service for young people who are the subject of child protection plans.

Another area of review was with regard to the needs of minority ethnic children and young people involved in the safeguarding process. The Matching Needs and Services Audit of work with minority ethnic families did indicate that the proportions of children with child protection plans from a minority ethnic background were higher than in the overall population, with a particular focus on dual heritage children. The action plan from the MNS audit includes developing a specialist family support service that works directly with dual heritage children and their families and also acts as a catalyst for improved practice across CSD, developing learning sets for CSD staff working with ME/DH families to enable sharing of good practice and improved learning, and developing guidance for managers to

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ensure that their oversight of casework with ME/DH children and families addresses cultural and heritage needs.

Safeguarding and Employment

The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer is well established within East Sussex with agencies having Named Senior Officers and clear arrangements in place for the management of allegations. The Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures have a specific section relating to allegations against professionals including foster carers and volunteers.

Safeguarding in Schools

Within East Sussex there is a well developed network of 'designated teachers' who link with the Education Safeguarding Officer. This ensures that school staff are given guidance and training about safeguarding children, including work with the most vulnerable with child protection plans. This network complements the good working relationships that exist between the Area Integrated Children's Services and schools, which are further strengthened by the link arrangements for secondary schools whereby referrals for secondary age children are made to social workers working within the school. The Education Safeguarding Officer has audited all schools against Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 and demonstrated a satisfactory level of compliance with the protective standards as detailed in 'Safeguarding Children in Education'. Areas for development from the audit included reviewing and developing policies on control and restraint of children by staff (a new policy has been developed and is subject to consultation) and more training for school governors; over 70 governors were trained in 2006/7.

Safeguarding and Public protection

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements have been in place in East Sussex for many years with strong inter-agency systems at level 1, 2 and 3. There is regular training for all key players and good co-operation between Police, Probation, Health and the Local Authorities at County, District and Borough levels. Also important is the Chrysalis Team, an early intervention service for adolescent sex offenders and children with sexually harmful behaviour and their families/carers. It prevents further sexual abuse by children and young people through the provision of co-ordinated and consistent assessments and intervention programmes for children and young people whose names have been placed on the Sex Offenders Register or whose sexual behaviour is abusive. A recent Serious Case Review in Brighton and Hove identified that there is limited understanding of the MAPPA processes by frontline child protection staff. This learning will be incorporated into the East Sussex LSCB training programme and a series of multi-agency briefings are planned for autumn 2007 to launch a new protocol that clarifies information sharing arrangements associated with the MAPPA processes.

Safeguarding children in the community

A short-life working group involving a range of voluntary and community groups as well as statutory bodies has reviewed community safety arrangements in place across Sussex. This resulted in the development of an LSCB safety action programme for 2007/8 that includes the following areas for development:

- The development by the Inclusive Learning & Development Team of a resource and guidance pack for secondary schools, enabling them to address domestic violence issues within the PSHE curriculum.
- Establishing effective communication mechanisms with the Sussex County Sports Partnership and the local Community Sports Networks (CSNs), enabling improved access to training for staff and volunteers.

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- Working with Sussex Police and neighbouring LSCBs to review the existing protocol for children missing from care and to developing a further protocol to make it inclusive of all children.
- To support the Safer Communities Team and Sussex Police in developing a cross-County "Hate Crime" service for all victims of racist and LGBT motivated incidents and working with the service to make it inclusive of children and young people.

Key Areas for development 2007/08

- ◆ Review current inter-agency processes for intervention to prevent domestic violence adversely affecting children.
Ensure that there are positive working relationships between refuges and statutory agencies and that the role of refuges in protecting children from harm is clear to all relevant personnel.
- ◆ Work with the police to improve involvement of disabled children in the ABE interview process, building on the success of the ABE interview project.
- ◆ Put in place arrangements to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children (including children who might not be ordinarily heard) about the priorities and effectiveness of local safeguarding work.