

Confidential

Sector-led Improvement within Children's Services in the East Midlands Safeguarding Assurance Visit (SAV)

RUTLAND ASSESSMENT REPORT

SAV carried out by:	Steve Edwards, Service Director Nottinghamshire Carol Pattinson, Group Manager, Nottinghamshire
Date of SAV:	Friday 14 December 2012
SAV carried out in:	Rutland
QA AD	Jane Parfremment, Assistant Director, Derby City
Host AD	Wendy Poynton, Rutland

The Safeguarding Assurance Visit (SAV) focused on the effectiveness of safeguarding within Rutland children's social care and at the suggestion of colleagues from Rutland looked at the relationship between children's social care and early intervention prevention services.

A total of the 14 electronic case files were looked at these included;

- CAF cases
- Contacts not accepted as referrals x2
- Referrals not progressed to Initial or Core assessment
- Initial and Core assessments
- Decisions re threshold for Sec 47
- Decisions re threshold for ICPC

The above cases were also discussed with frontline managers and social workers. A focus group was held with children's social care and early years intervention frontline staff and first line managers.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff we met for their assistance during the SAV. All staff willingly gave up their time at short notice despite their very busy days. All staff presented as open and honest throughout the SAV. I would also like to thank staff at Rutland for providing a range of documentation prior to the day of the SAV. This was helpful in identifying key lines of enquiry.

Quality of Assessments and Planning

- 14 cases were looked at as part of the safeguarding assurance visit and no children were identified as being left at risk.
- A number of good quality initial and core assessments were seen.
- Rutland has an effective duty system which results in work being progressed in a timely manner.
- Some work is appropriately retained in the duty team for up to 6 weeks to ensure that appropriate family support work is completed.
- It was positive to note that chronologies are started in the duty team and there is a clear expectation that they are up to date at the point of case transfer.
- The case transfer pro-forma is comprehensive.
- In one case seen care proceedings were issued appropriately and in a timely way.
- All initial and core assessments seen were allocated to qualified social workers.
- Thresholds for Section 47 investigations were sound.
- Evidence was seen of a good working relationship with local police. The relationship with Child Abuse Investigation staff, based in Leicestershire, was described as less close and staff

noted that often Children's Social Care staff undertake single rather than joint agency investigations.

Areas for Consideration

- In one case (OS) a decision was made not to progress the case to initial assessment and an opportunity was missed to inform the health visitor of the referral.
- In a second case (IC) a domestic abuse contact was not progressed to referral and the police were not informed.
- In quarter 1 this year six cases went directly from referral to core assessment. The SAV team were informed that these cases had been inappropriately processed by one member of staff who has since left the service. Senior managers are confident that thresholds for Initial and Core Assessment are now applied appropriately.
- Several of the cases looked at suggested that the threshold for access to children's social care services is low.

Early Intervention and Prevention Services Interface with Children's Social Care, use of CAF

- It was positive to see that the electronic case recording system used by children's social care also records CAF and team around the family information, aiding effective communication.
- CAF and Children's Social Care thresholds do not appear to be always applied consistently or are not consistently understood.
- One CAF case was passed to Children's Social Care as the family would not co-operate, this case was accepted by Children's Social Care despite the fact that it did not appear to meet the threshold for Children's Social Care intervention. (CP).

- A Social Worker completed a CAF as part of the process to “step down” the case to Early Intervention Services despite having completed an in-depth initial assessment (VP).
- One CAF completed did not make any recommendations and the outcomes and goals sections were left blank (DC).
- The CAF manager is co-located with the Children’s Social Care duty team. Whilst it was clear that there are many strengths in doing this, particularly to improve communication, it is possible that this close working relationship is encouraging Children’s Social Care to accept work which falls below the agreed threshold.

Quality Management and Performance Management

- Senior leaders in Rutland acknowledged that there have been a number of changes of senior management over the last few months including a series of interim appointments and these have impacted on performance and the quality management framework.
- It was positive to note that case file audit is embedded within Children’s Social Care. However, consideration should be given to the involvement of all staff up to Assistant Director/DCS level in regular case file audit.
- Audits have recently started to be graded and it is recommended that case file audits are routinely graded and monitored in the future.
- It is recommended that audit of frequency and quality of supervision processes should become a formal and routine part of the quality assurance framework.
- There is no formal process for reviewing the case loads of individual social workers. It is recommended that consideration is given to the introduction of a workload management tool.

- Whilst it is positive to note that current case file audits result in an action plan, currently there is no embedded systematic process of regular review of action plans. It is recommended that this is embedded into the council's quality management framework.

Evidence from the Focus Group

- All the staff met were positive and enthusiastic.
- Good evidence was presented regarding the use of reflective peer group supervision sessions in early intervention services.
- Staff felt that thresholds for early intervention services and use of the common assessment framework (CAF) and thresholds for referral to children's social care were better understood since the launch of 'Family First' thresholds guidance. However it was also recognised that further development and embedding of thresholds across the partnership is required.
- Staff were very positive about elected member involvement and were able to give clear examples of the active involvement of elected members in case work and strategic planning.
- Staff spoke positively of the protocol for 16 and 17 year olds and the development of a placement strategy.

Key Issues and Recommendations

- Whilst the safeguarding assurance visit only had a very brief snapshot of the work completed by Children's Social Care in Rutland it did identify a relatively low threshold for Children's Social Care involvement.
- Whilst the council is rightly proud of its 'safeguarding is everybody's business' statement, if the Council wishes to reduce the amount of lower threshold work currently accepted by Children's Social Care it may need to further define

thresholds and roles across the continuum of safeguarding/child protection.

- The safeguarding assurance team wondered if a vision and mission statement providing clarification of thresholds for intervention by Children's Social Care would be helpful to both Children's Social Care staff and partners, this would build on the work already started through the Family First document and assist in communicating, both internally and externally, a clear message regarding the core business of the social care service.

Quality and Performance Systems

- Consideration should be given to an audit of case files where work has been progressed directly to core assessment from referral particularly as use of core assessment was an issue for Ofsted on their last visit.
- Case file audits should be undertaken by all staff within social care up to AD/DSC level.
- Case file audits should become more qualitative and be routinely given a grading.
- The recent appointment of key senior management posts including Assistant Director gives an opportunity to review the current quality management frameworks within Rutland. A single quality framework should be produced to include management information on the following;
 - CAFs
 - Contacts
 - Referrals
 - Initial assessments
 - Core assessment
 - Child Protection
 - Looked After Children
 - Case load management
 - Supervision, frequency and quality

- Case file audit overview

Steve Edwards 19th December 2012