

Audit Committee

26th March 2019



Report of: Director – Children and Families

Title: Corporate Risk 9 – Safeguarding Vulnerable Children

Ward: Citywide

Officer Presenting Report: Ann James, Director for Children and Families Services

Recommendation

The Audit Committee notes the assurances offered in terms of the effectiveness of approaches being undertaken to safeguarding vulnerable children and the progress made since the Ofsted Single Inspection of 2014 as reflected in the September 2018 Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services.

Summary

The significant issues in the report are:

- An update on Children’s Safeguarding Arrangements (paragraph 7)
- Details of external Inspection reviews (paragraphs 9 and 10)
- Latest update to the Corporate Risk Register (Appendix 1)
- A draft Assurance Map to summarise the assurances in place concerning safeguarding arrangements (Appendix 2)



Policy

The Audit Committee's Terms of Reference includes responsibilities to oversee assurance that the Council's risk management processes are effective. This report provides the Committee with information and assurances that a key risk in the Council's Corporate risk register is being managed proportionately, that the service is well managed and that mitigations operate as effectively as possible to safeguard children.

Consultation

1. Internal

N/A

2. External

N/A

Context

3. The Audit Committee receive the Council's Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. The Committee last received the register following the quarter 3 update in January 2019. At each of its meetings, the Committee select a risk from the Corporate Risk Register to focus on in detail. For this meeting, Corporate Risk 9 – Safeguarding Vulnerable Children, was selected.
4. This report is to provide the Audit Committee with full details on how this risk is being managed currently and maps the assurances in place concerning the effectiveness of those arrangements.

Corporate Risk 9 – Safeguarding Vulnerable Children.

5. Appendix 1 provides the recently updated Corporate Risk Register entry for this risk following the latest quarterly update. The risk register sets out the risk as 'The council fails to ensure that adequate safeguarding measures are in place, resulting in harm or death to a vulnerable child.' Potential causes are identified in the risk register together with actions that have already been taken to address this risk and further actions required to reduce the level of risk to the risk tolerance level.
6. Appendix 2 enhances the risk register information to provide a complete summary of mitigation and controls and maps the assurances that can be drawn from different sources to confirm, or otherwise, that risk management arrangements are effective. This analysis is completed using the 'three lines of defence' model developed by the Institute of Internal Auditors as set out in the diagram below:



7. Children's Safeguarding Assurance Update

- 7.1 A key element of the assurance framework is a quarterly assurance update report concerning the work of the Children and Families team. It ensures that Corporate Leadership Team is well informed and holds the Director of Children's Services to account for the quality and delivery of children's services and the challenges in the local area.
- 7.2 Alongside this report, corporate governance arrangements provide assurance for statutory children's services, including:
- Quarterly meetings between Executive Director for Resources and the Independent Chair of the Bristol Children's Safeguarding Board.
 - Bi-monthly Children's Services Improvement and Transformation Board, independently chaired by an LGA Children's Improvement Adviser and including in its membership the Cabinet Member for Children. The Board oversees improvement and transformation activity for children's services, and ensures that leaders understand the quality of practice in Bristol and the impact on children and families' outcomes.
- 7.3 Within the service Performance Management and Quality Assurance Frameworks are instrumental to developing and embedding a strong performance culture that is focused on continuous learning and quality improvement.
- Safeguarding assurance visits are undertaken by the service on a six-weekly basis and focus on a specific service area. A themed deep dive has been implemented since the last inspection. The deep dive will be undertaken on a tri-annual basis and triggers a revision of our self-assessment which is provided to Ofsted for our Annual Conversation.

Overall assessment of safeguarding

- 7.4 Children and Families service delivery safeguards children in the city with risks managed through purposeful work aimed at helping families achieve change quickly and sustainably. The re-configuration of services and approach is largely in line with the vision and work streams set out in the Strengthening Families Programme and is evidencing the intended impact. Whilst re-referral rates remain above those seen nationally and amongst statistical neighbours they are falling which indicates more families achieve the sustainable outcomes that we aim for.
- 7.5 Social work practice is improving as reducing caseloads give social workers more time to work with children and families. Our participation in the Signs of Safety programme is helping to embed strengths-based, solution focussed, and trauma informed practice. Consistent, high quality, purposeful approaches will be developed further in the forthcoming year as we progress our ambition to be an ACE informed city and join the Centre for Systemic Social Work, training our workforce in systemic practice. We have also been successful in becoming one of only five local authorities that will work with the University of Bedfordshire in the Contextual Safeguarding Scale Up Project focussing on safeguarding in situations of extra-familial abuse and exploitation such as criminal or sexual exploitation, serious youth violence and gangs.
- 7.6 A frontline manager development programme starts this year to ensure frontline managers have the leadership skills that will enable them to drive performance, support their team and assure safe, purposeful practice.
- 7.7 Bristol retains a relatively stable children's workforce, however turnover is at 19% and, whilst agency use remains comparatively low, a growth in the use of agency workers is anticipated this quarter as vacancies prove difficult to recruit to. Temporary members of staff and elevated turnover add to both the safeguarding and financial risks faced by the council.

- 7.8 Reduced caseloads and improved performance management is driving improved performance across key performance measures. Improvements to the quality of performance information, together with an embedded quality assurance framework are enabling earlier identification and analysis of difficulties and to take remedial action where necessary.

Key areas of challenge/risk

- 7.9 **Response to contextual safeguarding challenges**, specifically criminal exploitation, serious youth violence and gang affiliation. Resources have been allocated to develop a multiagency response to the significant and escalating risks being experienced across the city and in the East Central area in particular. The approach follows a public health approach and will benefit from our partnership with Bedfordshire University in the scale Up Project referenced above. A police led executive officer 'gold group' has been established. Operationally, a newly formed multiagency intelligence and response team will focus on enhanced safeguarding by supporting our localities model of service delivery and disruption of perpetrators.
- 7.10 **Missing Children** is the subject of improvement work in police and children's services to ensure better reporting and response to missing children. Enhanced reporting functions are being developed to enable better scrutiny of eligibility, uptake and timeliness of return home interviews (RHIs). New commissioning arrangements for RHIs will be in place within the year.
- 7.11 **Timeliness of health assessments for children in care.** Performance has improved significantly for children in long-term care however, timeliness of initial health assessments is not as good. A recovery plan is in place with partners in health piloting a new approach to paediatric appointments aimed at meeting the required timescale.
- 7.12 **Timeliness of reviews for children in care.** A number of steps have been taken to improve reported performance to just below Bristol's target level.
- 7.13 **Placement Sufficiency.** Whilst Bristol continues to have a comparatively high percentage of children placed in a foster family, we are not yet meeting our ambition to recruit more carers. Further, the profile of our carer population is changing as experienced carers retire and are replaced by new carers whose skills are less well developed and who often make a more limited offer. Measures being taken to improve local sufficiency include a revised allowance, training and support structure for carers and the development of our children's homes.
- 7.14 **Attendance and attainment for children in care and vulnerable children is improving but remains comparatively poor.** A detailed analysis has been undertaken and a plan is in place led by The HOPE Virtual School for children in care and care leavers. The attendance strategy has been launched and schools are supported by an improved team around the school offer.

Areas where improvements provide assurance that risk mitigation is effective

- 7.15 **Quality Assurance measures**, including collaborative case file audits and consistently seeking feedback from parents/carers and children, is becoming embedded in business as usual and evidences improving consistency in the quality of direct work with families, assessment and care planning in area teams.
- 7.16 **Caseloads are reducing** as a result of an increased number of case-holding social work posts and work focused on increasing the effectiveness of interventions. However, we are not yet at the case load levels we aim for across all areas of the city.
- 7.17 **Re-referrals to social care.** Re-referrals are reducing and work continues with partners to ensure thresholds are understood and support is provided to families in need at the earliest point.

- 7.18 Quality of written assessments and plans.** The timeliness of assessments is above average when compared with other local authorities. Central to our improvement work this year is workforce development aimed at improving the quality of analysis and specificity of assessments and plans for children and their families.
- 7.19 Good decision making and strong management oversight at the front door.** Identified as part of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection in October 2017 and commended in the full inspection in September 2018. We now identify neglect and name it more clearly from the front door through to area services.
- 7.20 Reduction in the rate of children on a Child Protection Plan and the length of time plans are in place.** Improved assessment, social work practice and management oversight including the implementation of a nine month check together with improved oversight and challenge from Child Protection Chairs has driven improved outcomes for children. Timely decision making means that the majority of children with a Child Protection Plan is under one year in duration and no child has a plan extending beyond two years.
- 7.21 Reduction in the rate of Children in Need, Children on a Child Protection Plan and Children in Care** results from our focus on purposeful work, the effectiveness of our Early Help Offer and the impact of work with partners. A focus on reducing teenage entrants to care, supporting more children to remain within their family and the launch of our edge of care service underpins the reducing rate per 10,000 in each group.
- 7.22 Support and outcomes for care leavers.** As reflected by inspectors, this is an area of sustained improvement over the past four years with top quartile performance for care leavers in touch with services, in education, employment and training and in suitable accommodation. A high percentage of young people stay put with foster carers beyond the age of 18 years and Bristol's Staying Close innovations pilot ensure that this option is also in place for those growing up in a children's home. These safeguarding measures, together with feedback from young people¹ help us support young people into adulthood.
- 7.23 Placements for children in care.** As recognised by Ofsted, a high percentage of children live in a stable foster placement and for those who require a children's home placement, all are rated "good" by Ofsted. Bristol's placement sufficiency plan is being refreshed and will underpin our approach to the placements market.
- 7.24 PAUSE²** works with women who have had two or more children removed from their care and aims to support women to avoid the repeat cycle of pregnancy and removal. It is a successful programme that has been commissioned for a second time to work with 20 women. For those parents who require a residential or fostering based parenting assessment, these too have been recommissioned to provide greater access to local placements and reduce the high cost of such placements.
- 7.25 Permanency.** For those who need our care, a permanency panel now ensures that permanency is considered at the earliest point and tracked to achieve best outcomes in a timely way. For those who can return to parents from our long term care, the Exit from Care Team was established in July 2018 to support more children to return home successfully. For those where adoption is the plan, adoption timeliness is above national average.

¹ Bristol has recently commissioned the [Bright Spots](#) survey to further improve the way in which young people's views are captured and support service improvements.

² <https://one25.org.uk/how-one25-help-women/pause-bristol/>

Third Line of Defence:**8. Independent Assurance from Internal Audit**

- 8.1 An Internal Audit review in 2017/18 of 'Safer Recruitment Processes' concluded improvements were required in pre-employment checking processes. A follow up to re-assess the effectiveness of these arrangements indicated that whilst some improvements were seen at recruitment stage, recording and re-checking of DBS status for social work employees required attention. The new HR/Payroll system includes enhanced functionality which should improve this.

External Assurance:**9. ILACS Inspection**

- 9.1 Bristol Children's Social Care Services were subject to a full Inspection under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework in September 2018. The Committee is to receive a separate briefing in respect of regulatory inspection activity at this meeting, however a summary is provided below.

The overall judgement is that Bristol **Requires Improvement to be Good** with sub-judgements:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice: **Good**
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: **Requires Improvement to be Good**
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: **Requires Improvement to be Good**

- 9.2 Inspectors recognised substantial improvements made to services for care leavers, children in care and children in need of help and protection since the previous Full Inspection of October 2014 and Joint Targeted Area Inspection of November 2017.

- 9.3 Inspectors reported that:

- There has been considerable progress in developing an environment in which good social work can flourish by changing the way services are delivered and significantly reducing social workers' caseloads.
- Children identified as being at risk of immediate harm receive timely support and appropriate interventions.
- The vast majority of children in long term foster care live in stable homes and make good progress.
- We are in touch with virtually all of our care leavers and they receive a good level of support.
- Services for disabled children, which were previously a weakness, are now a strength.
- Corporate ownership of and commitment to children's services have resulted in strategic partnerships that are well developed and increasingly effective.
- Senior leaders are outward looking and innovative.

- 9.4 However, the inspection also identified the following areas for improvement:

- The quality of strategy discussions, reviews and child in need meetings, including records of decision-making.
- The quality of analysis in assessments and plans so that they are explicit about the desired outcomes and the timescales for completion.
- The quality of case recording, including recording of management decision-making.
- The effectiveness of arrangements to secure a sufficiency of placements.
- The educational progress and achievement of children in care.
- The take-up of return home interviews for children who go missing from home.

- 9.5 An action plan setting out how we will meet the areas for improvement was submitted to HMI on 28th January 2019.

10. Inspection of Youth Offending Services

- 10.1 An Inspection of Bristol's Multiagency Youth Offending Service was completed by HMI Probation in July 2018.

- 10.2 The overall judgement is that the service Requires Improvement, with Good for the following sub-judgements:

- Leadership and governance
- Information and facilities
- Assessment
- Implementation and delivery

- 10.3 An improvement plan is being implemented to address areas identified:

- Ensure children and young people working with the YOT receive their education entitlement and that this meets their specific needs.
- Ensure the YOT Board provides effective oversight to the work of the YOT, holding the YOT and its partners to account for their performance.
- Build on the voice of children and young people as represented in their individual assessment and plans to systematically seek their views and use these to improve the services provided to them.

Proposal

11. The Audit Committee notes the assurances offered in terms of the effectiveness of approaches being undertaken to safeguarding vulnerable children and the progress made since the Ofsted Single Inspection of 2014 as reflected in the September 2018 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services.

Risk Assessment

12. This report is targeted at demonstrating the effectiveness of risk management arrangements around children's safeguarding.

Other Options Considered

13. N/A

14. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 14a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following "protected characteristics": age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular,

to the need to --

- remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
- tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.

14b) The recommendations have no specific bearing on equality issues.

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

Legal Services have provided views on the recommendations and the agreed recommendations have reflected their advice.

Legal advice provided by Husinara Jones (Senior Practitioner – Solicitor)

Financial

(a) Revenue

Not applicable

(b) Capital

Not applicable

Land/Property

Not applicable

Human Resources

HR advice provided by Mark Williams – Head of HR

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Extract from Corporate Risk Register

Appendix 2 - Assurance Map

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: