

## Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Services Improvement Plan Comments

Sandwell LINK has recently received and analysed the Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Services Improvement Plan and believe there are many issues that need clarification.

We understand that child services does not fall under the remit of LINK however we believe that some of the changes outlined in this plan may also be applicable and make an impact on Adult Services.

### **Priority Outcomes**

Sandwell LINK had concerns about some of the wording used in the Priority Outcomes section of the improvement plan and believes that some clarification is needed on points including;

- What is personal responsibility?
- Who has final responsibility if something goes wrong? Is it Child Services or the social worker involved?
- Are the reports/minutes from the monthly Child Services Performance Improvement Board meetings and quarterly Scrutiny Management Board going to be made public?

### **1.1 Leadership**

Sandwell LINK feels that there are many points that need clarification in this section.

- The main question is how does the leadership of the Child Services and Adult Services link with the Council?
- Are the councillors in charge of the services that lay in the topic of care?
- The monitoring of services was not in the Scrutiny work plan so this leads to the question how are the changes being made going to be monitored?
- Will there be public access to reports produced by OFSTED and the special measures group brought in by the government to monitor the Child Services in Sandwell.
- Another issue raised by Sandwell LINK is whether retraining is being carried out to help ensure all the goals outlined can be achieved?
- How long is ongoing? There has been no definition for how long the programme will be continuing for; this is not a SMART approach to goal-setting.

## **Delivery Strand 2: Quality of Practice**

Sandwell LINK believes there is a need for clarification of several areas in this section as well as several points that have not been raised in this section of the improvement plan, including;

- How many social workers are employed by Sandwell and are these fully trained and experienced or are they trainees?
- How many agency staff are employed by Sandwell?
- Are specialised social workers used by Sandwell? For example are there specialist social workers for elderly care?
- How is feedback from families and other service users collected? Who collects this and is it acted upon?

### **2.2 ICS**

There were several issues raised by Sandwell LINK in this section including;

- In regards to the establishment of a user group, have the users on the group been hand selected or were they selected by peers?
- Sandwell LINK felt that the workshops offered in this section of the improvement plan covered very basic areas of training that social workers should already be competent in.
- The concern was also raised about how these workshops affect frontline staff and their training, as well as what training programmes are available for frontline staff?

### **3.1 Employee Performance Management**

Sandwell LINK believes clarification is needed when speaking about the roles and responsibility of management in the service. Management's responsibilities should be laid out in a separate statement.

Another issue found was evaluation of services by people who use the services and how service user feedback and evaluation is built into the system.

### **3.2 Modernisation of Children's Social Care**

Sandwell LINK would like to raise concerns with the use of external consultants. The main points of concern are why is this expertise not already available within the service? What is the additional cost to the service to bring in consultants?

### 3.3 Recruitment and Retention

There were several issues that Sandwell LINKs believes need to be clarified, including;

- Why is there not already in place a consistent recruitment policy? Does the recruitment of staff vary within the borough of Sandwell?
- What is defined as a healthy staff turnover rate?
- What are staff sicknesses levels like?
- Are exit interviews in place and is the information gained acted upon?

## 4 Service Delivery

Sandwell LINK believes that several points raised in this section require some clarification, including;

- How independent are reviewing teams?
- Are the reviewing teams internal or external services?
- Why are care plans not meeting the needs of individuals? Is this a training issue?
- What is considered an efficient caseload for a single social worker?
- What are the criteria for deciding caseloads for workers?
- How do managers respond to changes in caseloads? How is this monitored?
- Along with this how is the allocation of new cases decided? Is it done by a single manager?
- What happens if the caseload is too great for a single worker?
- How are changes of social workers managed? Is there a system within the files to make them easier to understand and get vital information out of them?

### 4.1 Front Door

Sandwell LINK believes clarification is needed on the following point;

- With high staff turnover rates could Children services link with other services to provide a stable point of contact, schools for example?

## 5 Partnerships

Sandwell LINK believes there are points in this section that require clarification, including;

- If Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are being phased out what does this mean for the partnership strategy?
- Why is the safeguarding board not currently operational?

## **5.2 Information Sharing**

- Sandwell LINK believes clarification is needed on the point of who is allowed to see life records for the people being cared for?

## **5.3 Accident & Emergency and GP's**

Sandwell LINK believes that clarification is needed on several points, including;

- Do Child Services actively contact A&Es to provide information about vulnerable people?
- Is there a traffic light system in place for safeguarding?

## **5.4 Needs Assessment**

Sandwell LINK believes that some clarification is required on the following point;

- The agency partners mentioned, who are they? Are they private agencies? Are they accountable to the Child Services?

## **6.2 Quality and Audit**



Sandwell LINK would like to raise a point about this section;

- Is there a CAMHs service user group? Can they feedback to the LINK?

Sandwell LINK also raised several more general points during the discussion. These are outlined below;

- How much money is being spent to implement the changes outlined?
- Sandwell Child Services passed an announced inspection but then, not too soon afterwards, failed an unannounced inspection. What changes were made to help pass an announced inspection and why weren't the changes maintained?
- Why is there audit inconsistency and poor record keeping?

- In future could a glossary of the acronyms used be attached with the report?
- How will the outcomes from this improvement plan impact not only on the organisation but the individual users?
- If procedures were in place why were they not being followed and how will the new procedures put in place going to be assessed to ensure that they are being followed?
- Is a government agency in contact with Sandwell Child Services and if so how long will it maintain contact with the service?
- Will all of the outcomes of this report help service users by improving not only the backroom staff and procedures but also frontline staff by including service users in key decisions?

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<b>Date:</b>	06/09/2010	21/09/2010