

TITLE OF REPORT: **Review of Child Protection in Gateshead – Third Evidence Gathering**

REPORT OF: **Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning**

SUMMARY

Council has agreed that this committee should review how the child protection system operates in Gateshead. The review will examine each stage of the process and will explore the way decisions are taken, risks are managed, and the involvement of partners. The review will explore how Gateshead undertakes its safeguarding responsibilities in conjunction with partners within the policy context and legal frameworks for Child Protection.

The review will provide the committee with an overview of how the child protection process works in Gateshead and provide examples of how Gateshead's children's social work service operates with partners to ensure children's safety. It will focus in particular on the ways in which services work collectively and contribute to the future development and delivery of child protection within children's social care services.

Background

1. The Committee agreed the scope of the review at its meeting on 18th June and proposed that the focus of this review will be on the specific aspects of the system which are concerned with child protection. The review will follow the potential steps for a child who becomes subject to a child protection plan.
2. It is suggested that the key issues which this review will need to address are:
 - a. An understanding of the child protection system, the policy context and clarity on roles and responsibilities.
 - b. The opportunity for improvement of systems, processes and improving efficiency.
 - c. The effectiveness of multi-agency working, especially around communication and information sharing.
 - d. The ways in which the views of children, young people and their families are used.
3. The first evidence gathering session on the 10th September 2015 provided the committee with a precis of the legislative framework and statutory guidance, and set the scene for how the child protection system is organised and delivered in Gateshead.
4. The second evidence gathering session on the 22nd October 2015 provided the committee with an overview of how children and young people are

referred into children's social care, the thresholds that govern at what level the child and family should be assessed and how the level of support is determined to meet their needs.

Third evidence gathering

5. This third evidence gathering has been developed to provide the committee with an overview of the process of holding a strategy discussion or meeting and undertaking child protection enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
6. The session will enable the committee to follow the journey of a child and their family to illustrate the steps and considerations social workers and partners take from the point of referral through to a strategy discussion and section 47 enquiry.

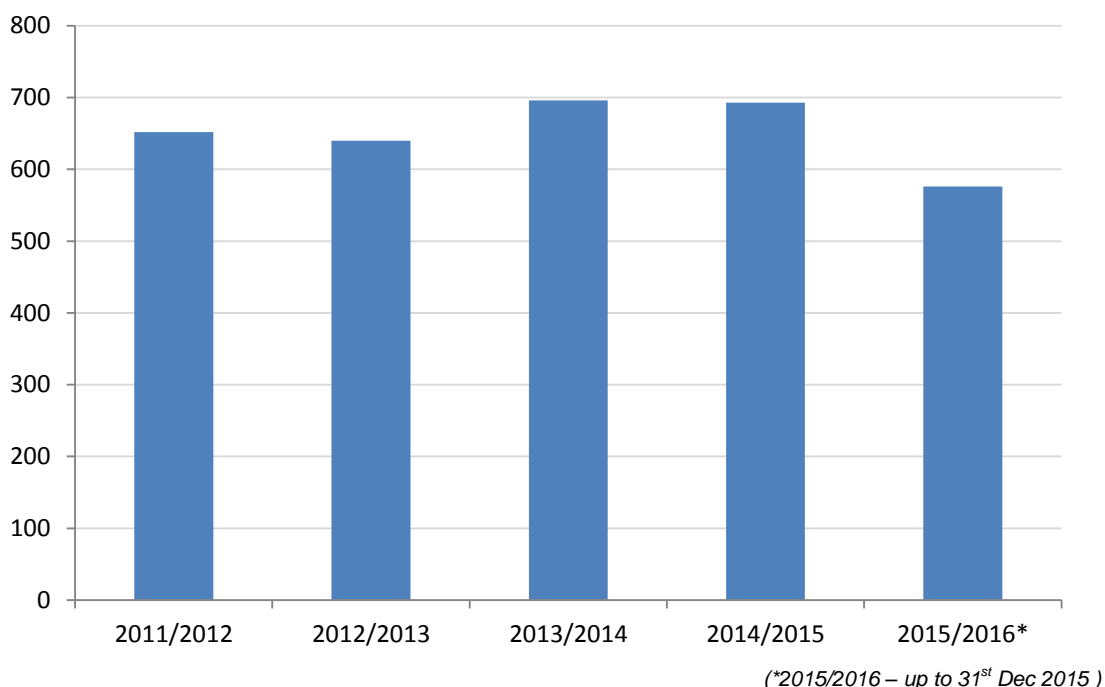
Strategy discussions

7. **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)** is the statutory guidance provides the framework for interagency working and sets out specific safeguarding arrangements where there are concerns that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
8. This guidance states that whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care (including the fostering service, if the child is looked after), the police, health and other bodies such as the referring agency. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during the assessment process.
9. Local authority children's social care should convene a strategy discussion to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
10. The strategy discussion is convened by the social worker and their manager. Health professionals and a police representative should, as a minimum, also be involved in the strategy discussion. Other relevant professionals will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include: the professional or agency which made the referral; the child's school or nursery; and any health services the child or family members are receiving. All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their agencies
11. The discussion is used to: share available information; agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation; and decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 should be undertaken.
12. Where there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, decisions should be made as to what further information is

needed and how it will be obtained and recorded, what immediate and short term action is required to support the child, and who will do what by when, and whether legal action is required.

13. In Gateshead, there were 693 strategy discussions held in 2014/15. This is an increase of 6.3% since 2011/12. There have been 576 strategies from 1st April to 31st Dec 2015.

No. of strategy discussions - Gateshead

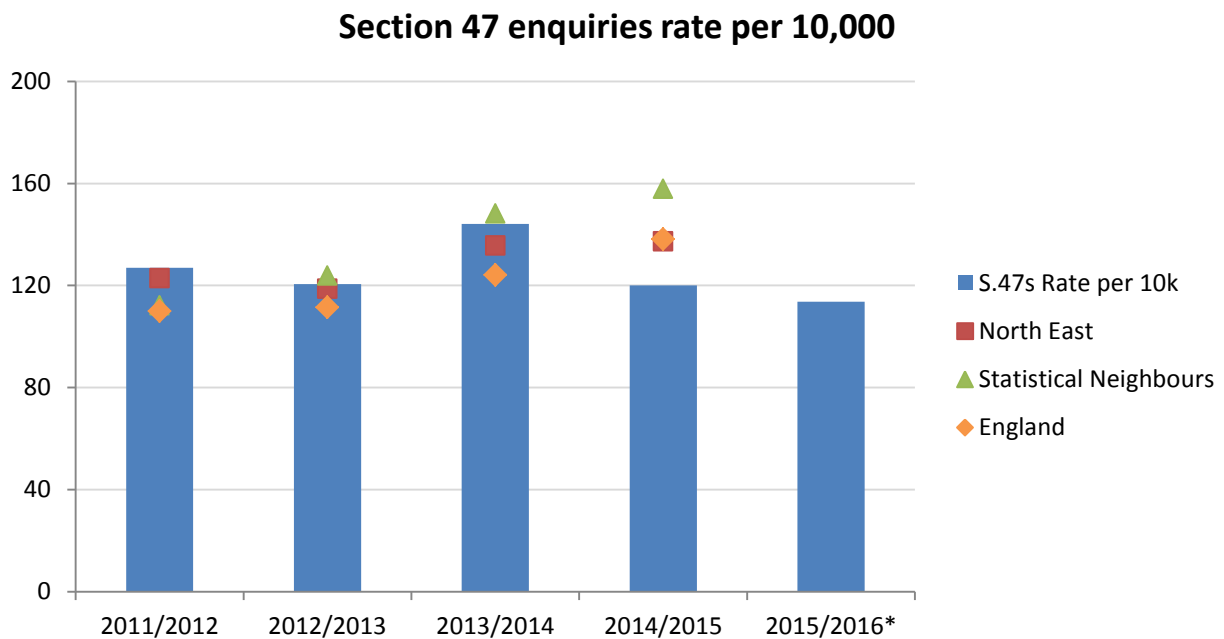


Enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989

14. A section 47 enquiry is initiated to decide whether, and what type of, action is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is suspected of, or likely to be, suffering significant harm. It is carried out by undertaking or continuing with an assessment in accordance with the guidance set out in **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)**.
15. Local authority social workers have a statutory duty to lead assessments under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. The police, health professionals, teachers and other relevant professionals should help the local authority in undertaking its enquiries.
16. Following section 47 enquiries, the social worker and their manager are responsible for deciding what action to take and how to proceed.
17. Where concerns of significant harm are not substantiated, the social worker and their manager will determine whether support from any service may be helpful. Other professionals may contribute to the development of any plan and provide services as specified in the plan for the child.

18. Where concerns of significant harm are substantiated and the child is judged to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, the social worker with their manager should convene an initial child protection conference which should take place within 15 working days of a strategy discussion.

19. In Gateshead, there were 482 section 47 enquiries undertaken in 2014/15. This was a decrease on the previous year's total of 581. The rate of enquiries per 10,000 of the child population was 120.1 in 2014/15, which is lower than the England average (138.2) and statistical neighbours (157.9). There have been 456 enquiries undertaken from 1st April to 31st Dec 2015.



External Scrutiny

20. In November 2015, Ofsted undertook an inspection of the Local Authority's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. Children's services in Gateshead were judged to be good. Ofsted noted a number of areas of strong practice in relation to children who need help and protection. They reported that:

"Referrals to children's social care receive timely responses that are thoroughly considered, safely managed and lead to swift and decisive actions. In almost all cases, child protection enquiries are thorough and benefit from effective multi-agency strategy meetings."

Evidence gathering continued

21. It is proposed that the fourth and final evidence gathering session will review child protection conferences, plans and reviews.

Recommendations

22. Committee members are invited to:

- i. Comment on this third evidence gathering;
- ii. Outline any additional information / evidence they wish to have included in the review at the fourth evidence gathering stage.