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**IMPLEMENTATION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY in CARDIFF COUNCIL**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. As part of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee 2017-18 Work Programme, the Committee requested a briefing report on the implementation of Signs of Safety in Cardiff Council.

**Background**

2. Signs of Safety is an integrated framework for how to do children's services work. It sets out the principles for practice; the disciplines for practitioners' application of the approach; provides a range of tools for assessment and planning, decision making and engaging children and families; and describes the processes through which the work is undertaken with families and children, including work with partner agencies. This practice returns child protection intervention to being the catalyst that initiates behaviour change by families.
3. Signs of Safety is now used in some 100 jurisdictions in 13 countries and has a strong evidence base. There are 41 authorities engaged with Signs of Safety in the United Kingdom, including 38 in England.

The three principles address key challenges of the work

- a. Working relationships are paramount: to enable honest and respectful discussions of concerns and worries. Research shows that, irrespective of the type of intervention, professionals see better outcomes when they have a shared understanding with the family of what needs to change, agreement on what they are aiming to achieve and the family feel an affective bond with the worker.
- b. Thinking critically: to minimize error a culture of shared reflective practice and a willingness to admit you may be wrong is needed. Risk assessment is a core task and requires constant balancing of the strengths and dangers in

a family to avoid the common practice problems of drifting into an overly negative or positive view of the family.

- c. Based on everyday experience: assessment and safety planning is grounded in the everyday lived experience of the child.

The core assessment tool is the 'Three Columns', an easy to understand framework that is completed by the worker, family and other key professionals exploring 4 key questions:

- What are we worried about?
- What's working well?
- What needs to happen?
- Judgment, typically, on a scale of 0-10 considering how serious do the professionals, the family and key people believe the situation is for the child?

4. Having developed a detailed understanding of how the family is functioning and a shared agreement of what needs to change, the next step is to undertake safety planning. This will usually involve families calling on the wider family and their social network to provide active support, being the people who are likely to play a more substantial and enduring part in the family's life than professional interventions that tend to be of short duration and short term. The aim is to create a proactive, structured and monitored process that provides parents involved in child protection matters with a genuine opportunity to demonstrate that they can provide care for their children in ways that satisfy the child protection service. The safety plan is a specific set of rules and arrangements that describe how the family will go about and live its everyday life that shows everyone, the professionals, and the family's own support people how the children will be safe in the future.

### **Implementing signs of safety in Cardiff Council**

5. In response to challenges facing social work practice, Cardiff Children's Services embarked on the implementing a single risk assessment framework by adopting the Signs of Safety model - a solution focused approach to social work. The

implementation of Signs of Safety will enable Social Services to work towards strategic vision encompassing:

- Prevention,
- Reducing the need for statutory interventions including care proceedings and reducing the need look after children.

6. To fully and successfully implement Signs of Safety, it was agreed that a project approach would be adopted to help embed the framework across the service. A project team has been established to work alongside a Signs of Safety consultant and project leads assigned to the four key areas of the implementation:

- A strategic approach to offering training and knowledge to staff and partner agencies
- Defining what to communicate, to whom, how, and when, throughout implementation
- Ensuring processes, forms, and policies are amended to reflect values of Signs of Safety
- Ensuring mechanisms are in place to report successful adoption of the framework

7. A detailed implementation plan has been produced to help shape how Signs of Safety is embedded into everyday practice.

8. A steering group approach has also been agreed as a means of developing internal forms and processes to best assist the implementation of Signs of Safety. The group membership has been established and includes staff across the service, including representation from the Intake & Assessment team; Looked After Children Teams (0-14 & 14+); Family Information Support Service; Integrated Family Support Team; Fostering; ARC; Personal Adviser Service; Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub; Youth Offending Service; Business Support; and Training.

9. Signs of Safety is a solution focused approach to keeping children and young people safe. Its successful implementation is predicated on a whole service change to social work practice and a commitment to keeping families together

by managing and reducing risks. Over the last 12 months, Children's services has made significant progress in this transformational change, but there have also been and still are some serious challenges to face:

- The Signs of Safety approach turns social work practice on its head, so making such a change requires confidence. Confidence can only be achieved by ensuring the right training and support is consistently available and role modelled by senior managers
- The Signs of Safety approach requires time to be spent with the families. This is better achieved by ensuring Social Workers have the capacity to spend that time.
- Commitment must be driven from the top down so that social workers know they have the support of their senior managers and can rely on Practice Leaders for help and guidance.
- Middle and senior managers must adopt the SofS approach within their practice and decision making. This is challenging because it requires practice and decision making to be slowed down which is difficult when working under pressure.

#### 10. **Signs of Safety in practice: our challenges**

**Signs of Safety QA Roles** -As part of the growth bid, 3 Signs of Safety specific posts were approved. These posts will provide a sustainable approach to the implementation, but challenges regarding the grades of the posts is causing a significant delay to the project and risks undermining the implementation of the approach

**Practice Leaders and Senior managers** - Capacity issues across the service are preventing the Practice Leaders from fully adopting their roles. The Practice Leader is incremental to the sustainability and success of the approach, so if our Practice Leaders continue to have case loads, then the support is not there for the social workers as it is required.

**Practice Leader development** - Due to capacity issues, practice leaders find it difficult to commit their time to Practice Leader specific development. This development is crucial for the sustainability of the approach in Cardiff and also the development of confidence within the workforce.

**Recruitment** - A successful growth bid permitted additional resource to be recruited in order to relieve the capacity issues and therefore allow for a

smoother transition in practice. Agency initiatives now provide a much higher pay option for Social Workers, so they are reluctant to join our workforce where the pay is lower.

### **Scope of Scrutiny**

11. This report enables the Committee to review, assess and comment of the implementation of the Signs of Safety in Cardiff Council. In particular Members may wish to inquiry whether, the approach enables, practitioners to focus on the strengths, whilst considering actual and potential harm experienced by the child(ren), Encourages a strong emphasis in creating opportunities for children to be involved in the process, Promotes the need for children and families to remain together where it is safe for them to do so, and will achieve the desired outcomes as highlighted in the approach.

### **Way Forward**

12. Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children & Families) and Tony Young (Director of Social Service) Irfan Alam (Assistant Director), Jo-Anne Phillips (Project Manager) and Marisa Moon (Team Manager, Intake and Assessment) will present the report to the Committee, and will be available to answer any questions Members may have.
13. This report will also enable Members to provide any comments, concerns or recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children & Families and Director of Social Services around the implementation of the approach.

### **Legal Implications**

14. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b)

comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

### **Financial Implications**

15. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Committee reviews the information provided at the meeting and provide any recommendations, comments or advice to the Cabinet Member and / or Director of Social Services.

**Davina Fiore**

Director of Governance and Legal Services

6 September 2017