

Social Work Services Review: Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team

Education, Children and Families

Sub-committee on Standards for Children and Families: South West

19 June 2008

1 Purpose of report

The City of Edinburgh Children and Families Department now has a systematic programme to review the work of Social Work services on a regular basis. The outcomes of each review are reported individually to the sub-committee on Standards for Children and Families using similar procedures to those followed for school reviews and HMIE reports. This report advises the sub-committee on the outcomes of such a review.

2 Summary

This report deals with the findings of a review carried out of the Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team during January 2008. It was published in June 2008, comments on strengths and also recommends areas for development.

3 Main report

3.1 The review focused on the authority themes for the reviews of Social Work as follows:

- delivery of key processes; and
- policy and service development, planning and performance management.

3.2 The review report is attached as Appendix A. The report commented favourably on the following across the areas reviewed.

- a Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team provided a good service to children and their families in a demanding and complex setting.
- b Senior staff in the team provided good support and direction to basic grade social workers enabling them to carry out their duties effectively.

- c The reception staff at Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team provided an excellent service to stakeholders and service users.
- d Almost all partner agencies reported very good and productive working relationships with staff at Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team.

3.3 The report made recommendations upon which the team should act.

- a The team and the authority should improve the range and availability of written information for service users.
- b An agreed procedure for the management of risk should be discussed and agreed by the team.
- c The team should ensure that service user and stakeholder views are routinely sought in terms of developing standards and improving services.
- d The practice team manager and senior staff should ensure that all staff are fully engaged in the production and review of the team plan in future. This should include the administrative staff and business manager.
- e The practice team manager should ensure that more emphasis is given to self evaluation as a tool for improvement.

3.4 The report also made recommendations upon which the authority should act.

- a The social work/working together manager should audit case files on a regular basis.
- b The social work/working together manager and the practice team managers from Oxgangs Path and Murrayburn Gate should revisit the arrangements for allocation of cases within the Principal Neighbourhood Access Point (PNAP) system.
- c Quality Development should provide assistance to the team in relation to improving self-evaluation.

4 Conclusions

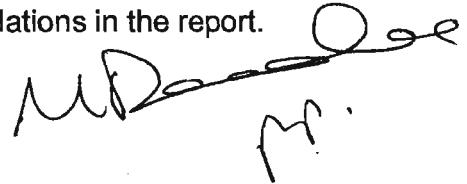
4.1 The comments noted earlier provide a basis upon which the team, in consultation with the authority, can address the above recommendations. A plan of action for implementation of the recommendations made in the report has been drawn up for the sub-committee's consideration. The Action Plan is attached as Appendix B. The authority will monitor the team's progress towards addressing the above recommendations.

5 Recommendations

The sub-committee is recommended to:

5.1 commend Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team for providing a good service to children and their families in a demanding and complex setting;

- 5.2 note the senior staff in the team provided good support and direction to basic grade social workers enabling them to carry out their duties effectively;
- 5.3 commend the reception staff at Oxfams Path Children and Families Practice Team for providing an excellent service to stakeholders and service users;
- 5.4 note almost all partner agencies reported very good and productive working relationships with staff at Oxfams Path Children and Families Practice Team; and
- 5.5 accept the Action Plan to meet the recommendations in the report.



Gillian Tee
Director of Children and Families

Appendices	Appendix A: Review Report Appendix B: Action Plan
Contact/tel	Sheila Brown 0131 469 3066
Wards affected	
Background Papers	Nil

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Social Work Services Review

**Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice
Team**

June 2008

Social Work Services Review
Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team

The team in context

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 places a responsibility on local authorities to promote social welfare by making available advice, guidance and assistance appropriate to people living in their area. There is a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and provide a range of services appropriate to their need.

Oxgangs Path Social Work Centre is located in the south west neighbourhood. There is a shared duty/access system with staff from Murrayburn Gate Social Work Centre. The team is comprised of a practice team manager (PTM), two senior social workers (SSW), two senior practitioners (SP) and 10 full time equivalent social workers, one whose main role is children with disabilities. There is one social work assistant, a business manager, one administrative assistant, one child protection support assistant, three generic support assistants and reception staff.

The area covered by Oxgangs includes the communities of Longstone, Oxgangs, Colinton, Dreghorn, Clovenstone, Currie, Balerno and Ratho village. Unique to Oxgangs are the two army barracks at Redford and Dreghorn with a large number of families being provided with a service. A growing number of families in the area served by the team have drug and alcohol dependency issues with a high level of vulnerable children requiring to be monitored and protected.

The PTM has overall responsibility for the work of the team and she supervises the two SSWs and senior practitioners. In turn the SSWs supervise the main grade staff. Staff members are expected to complete joint investigative interview training and after two years, they should complete the post qualifying certificate in child protection studies run by Dundee University. Where staff indicate a particular interest in an area of work, they are encouraged to take a lead role. Examples of this could be attendance at Pupil Support Groups (PSGs), children affected by disability, domestic violence and fostering.

The team provide a service to:

- children and the child protection register or subject to child protection concerns;
- Looked After and Accommodated (LAAC) children;
- children who are the subject of supervision requirements at home through lack of parental care and neglect, offending behaviour or lack of attendance at school;

- children affected by disability; and
- other vulnerable children in need.

The aim of the team is to support parents to cope and provide for their children by:

- enabling children to live within a safe environment;
- endeavouring to identify need in order to access appropriate resources and promote better outcomes;
- enabling children to access a good standard of education;
- supporting children who cannot live at home and need to be looked after and accommodated;
- living within a safe, supportive family and community; and
- being respected and taking responsibility for their own actions.

At the time of the review there were 17 children on the child protection register and 72 LAAC and Looked After Children. This included those living at home and those accommodated by the authority. Thirteen cases were held on duty.

Review remit

The review remit was agreed with the PTM and her staff. The focus of the review was the authority themes from the Social Work Inspection Agency's (SWIA) quality indicators:

- delivery of key processes; and
- policy and service development, planning and performance management.

Review methods

The team provided comprehensive background information including a self evaluation, team plan, case allocation system, budget information, notes from team meetings and staff profiles. The review team read 12 case files and interviewed a wide range of staff including the PTM and SSWs, basic grade social workers and the social work/working together (SW/WT) manager for south west. Observations included two PSGs, one Looked After Review, care planning and core group meetings, a child protection case conference, team meeting and a practice issues meeting. The duty/access system was observed on two occasions and the business manager and other admin staff were interviewed.

Two focus groups of partner organisations took place and were attended by 11 people in total. In addition, five partner agencies were interviewed by telephone. Two visits to carers and the children they looked after took place and another carer was interviewed by telephone. Interview also took place with headteachers, the reporter to the children's panel and health visitors. A limited number of service users were met by the review team and two questionnaires were completed and returned.

Key outcomes of the review

1 Delivery of key processes

This area was found to be good overall.

The team had good systems in place for receiving referrals and generally good arrangements for dealing with initial assessments. Oxgangs Path was the Principal Neighbourhood Access Point (PNAP) for referrals within the south west neighbourhood. SWs from the Murrayburn Gate office jointly managed the PNAP. However, there were still differing thresholds evident between the two teams and there was scope for the two PTMs and the SWWT manager to implement systems to ensure continuity. SWs were always available during office hours and there was good and consistent administrative support to the team. Some leaflets were provided to service users by the team but this was not consistent. There was little written information about the range of social work services provided by the team although this was an authority wide issue and not confined to Oxgangs. There was a lack of appropriate resources for young people with disabilities.

The service provided by reception staff at Oxgangs was excellent. Efforts were always made to make callers feel valued, phones were always answered and messages taken. An answering machine with messages for callers was noted as helpful. Several partner agencies and some carers commented very positively on the quality of service from the reception staff and this should be commended.

The duty system worked well on a day to day basis and there were good connections with most stakeholders. Workload management was generally effective with cases being allocated to staff based on their experience and expertise. Social workers were ably supported by the duty admin staff that had a good overview of the workload. Tasks were monitored effectively. The social work information technology (SWIFT) system was working well and most case records read by the reviewers were up to date. Unallocated cases were

managed appropriately by the duty system with other agencies playing a lead role where necessary. Stakeholders reported a good level of consistency in the team's understanding of the range of service options available for service users. On occasion, some unallocated cases took too long to be allocated and the differing approaches to allocation by staff from the two teams in the neighbourhood required to be revisited. However, the team were meeting their statutory requirements and did prioritise high tariff cases such as unborn babies. Some basic grade social workers did not have a good understanding of how the allocation system operated.

Assessment and case management was good overall. Where chronologies were used they were also good. Paper files were generally well organised and in a consistent format. There were some examples of very good practice. All statutory cases had care plans that were regularly reviewed. Most staff used the standard assessment in care planning, although this was not always consistent. However, it was noted that the authority had not always made explicit the expectations in regard to assessment. There was a good overview of this by SSWs. Care plans were reviewed regularly and feedback from two carers confirmed that they were consulted and involved as were the young people in their care. All child protection files were audited on a six monthly basis by the PTM and SSWs. Outcomes were recorded in SWIFT and a copy placed in the paper file. Issues identified were followed up with social workers where necessary. The team had identified a desire to review all care plans on a regular basis, although this remained to be progressed at the time of the review. There was also scope for the SW/WT manager to audit files more regularly.

Management of risk in the team was adequate. Most staff were using the standard assessment format and there was widespread use of the 'Protecting children living in families with substance abuse' guidelines. Staff were aware of the risk assessment document and toolkit issued by a senior manager from Children and Families but its application was patchy. This was an issue for the authority as well as the team.

Partnerships with service users and carers were adequate. However, this was based on a small sample. Evidence from case files and limited feedback from service users and carers indicated that the team had made efforts to improve this. Minutes of meetings were circulated in advance and service users were regularly informed about decisions affecting their lives. Parents and families were actively encouraged and supported to attend case conferences and other meetings. Joint visits with health visitors took place and there was good and regular communication with service users regarding care plans.

The team did not have an agreed system to gauge the views of service users. They did not contribute to developing service standards or performance monitoring. A suggestion box had been placed in the reception area at Oxfangs but this was fairly recent. Whilst there was some anecdotal feedback from children, parents and carers, the review team had insufficient opportunities to gather a wider range of views. Although questionnaires were circulated, only two were returned and it was difficult to make concrete judgements on this basis. It is recommended that the team should address the issue of more effectively seeking and recording the views of service users. This was also an issue for the authority.

Inclusion, equality and fairness in service delivery were good. Senior staff made efforts to allocate cases to workers with appropriate expertise or interest. Examples of this were immigration, domestic abuse and disability. Interpreting services were routinely used and the team had gone to some effort to provide a service to Fijian families based at the army barracks. Written material in a range of languages was provided. Smooth running of the duty system ensured that unallocated cases still received a good service. Feedback from partner agencies indicated a good and consistent service. However, there was sometimes a lack of services available to children with disabilities due to under-resourcing.

Multi-disciplinary working was very good. Interagency child protection procedures were well established and roles and responsibilities were clear. Communication with partner agencies was mostly very good. Some joint training had taken place but partner agencies indicated that more would be welcomed. Service users were appropriately involved in their care planning and the team were good at finding practical solutions to problems. Some city-wide services commented very positively on the consistency and quality of service provided by the Oxfangs team. They were viewed as open and approachable in comparison to their experience of some other practice teams.

2 Policy and service development, planning and performance management

This was found to be adequate overall.

Most staff were aware of the key policies and procedures within the council such as child protection and substance misuse. They were disseminated by the PTM through email and team meetings. However, not all staff were clear about how they were applied and there was no agreed systems in place to monitor their effectiveness. Most staff had a good understanding of the framework for standard assessment although they were less clear about risk taking. There was good and regular supervision reflecting the needs of individual workers. The PTM and SSWs had a good understanding of the strengths of individual

workers and matched them to appropriate cases. Supervision sessions gave staff the opportunity to discuss how policies and procedures operate in their day to day work but the team would benefit from a more robust process for monitoring their application and effectiveness. Arrangements within the team for supervision and appraisal were well established and operated effectively.

The team had produced an operational plan in line with authority guidance. There were links to the priorities in the service improvement plan. Senior staff in the team had a good understanding of the priorities but some other staff were unclear about its role and relevance. There was also scope to involve the administrative staff and business manager in future. There were some key weaknesses in planning at a neighbourhood level. There was no overall neighbourhood plan. The joint allocation system was still being developed between Oxgangs and Murrayburn Gate although there was a genuine commitment to ensuring that a good service was delivered. Differing thresholds between the two teams led to inconsistencies of approach. It is recommended that the SW/WT manager should address this with the two PTMs involved.

Involvement of stakeholders in planning and service development was adequate. Generally, the team had good links with a range of partners. These included schools, Working Together and Army Welfare services. Monthly meetings with the reporter had been established to promote more effective joint working. There were some good links with health visitors including joint visits to service users. Structured frameworks were used for assessing service user needs although this was not always consistent. Joint planning with service users and stakeholders could be strengthened. The team did not routinely undertake joint planning with partners other than on a case by case basis. Similarly, more emphasis should be placed on engaging stakeholders in policy development. Although a suggestion box had been introduced in the reception at Oxgangs, it was too early to tell if it was making an impact.

The team's approach to developing integrated services was adequate. All staff were responsible for assessing and responding to the needs of service user and they generally did this well. The team made efforts to involve families where children required to be removed from home. Staff were clear about lines of accountability through the structures operating within the team and via supervision. Case files indicated that there was joint analysis of need through core groups and case discussions. There were clear procedures for dealing with child protection and engagement with the Child Protection Investigation and Review Team (CPIRT).

The range and quality of services offered by the team was good overall. The team's response to assessed needs reflected the changing nature of the lives of children and their families. Sometimes these were not accessed due to resource constraints or if they were of lower tariff. The team's lack of capacity to do preventative work could mean that some cases held on duty were only allocated in a crisis. Some staff reported that their involvement with cases on voluntary measures was limited due to other pressures of work. However, cases held on duty were appropriately followed through by staff and there was generally good working with other agencies such as health visitors, schools and Working Together.

Quality assurance and continuous improvement was adequate although there were some key strengths. Good systems were in place for supervision and this appropriately met staff needs. The team met weekly and had recently introduced 'practice issues' meetings to look at sharing and developing areas of work. The senior staff in the team met regularly and there was an appropriate focus on improving practice. Registration of social workers had encouraged managers to embrace the need for training for all staff.

The PTM and senior staff audited child protection cases in line with the authority's requirements. Issues raised through this process were addressed via supervision meetings. Most staff were aware of the team plan but were less clear about how it would be used to improve practice and this should be strengthened. Similarly, further efforts should be made to ensure the views of service users are taken into account when developing services. A comprehensive self-evaluation was produced in advance of the review. However, some staff did not have an awareness of its importance for improving practice. The PTM and SSWs should ensure that self-evaluation take place regularly and that all staff are appropriately involved. Advice and guidance should be provide by Quality Development through the existing support and challenge arrangements.

Summary

Commendable features

- Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team provided a good service to children and their families in a demanding and complex setting.
- Senior staff in the team provided good support and direction to basic grade social workers enabling them to carry out their duties effectively.

- The reception staff at Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team provided an excellent service to stakeholders and service users.
- Almost all partner agencies reported very good and productive working relationships with staff at Oxgangs Path Children and Families Practice Team.

Areas for development by the team

- The team and the authority should improve the range and availability of written information for service users.
- An agreed procedure for the management of risk should be discussed and agreed by the team.
- The team should ensure that service user and stakeholder views are routinely sought in terms of developing standards and improving services.
- The PTM and senior staff should ensure that all staff are fully engaged in the production and review of the team plan in future. This should include the administrative staff and business manager.
- The PTM should ensure that more emphasis is given to self evaluation as a tool for improvement.

Areas for development by the authority

- The SWWT manager should audit case files on a regular basis.
- The SWWT manager and the PTMs from Oxgangs Path and Murrayburn Gate should revisit the arrangements for allocation of cases within the PNAP system.
- Quality Development should provide assistance to the team in relation to improving self-evaluation.

Sheila Brown
Quality Improvement Manager
June 2008

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Social Work Services Review: Oxfangs Path Children and Families Practice Team

Action Plan

Areas for development by the team

Recommendation 1

The team and the authority should improve the range and availability of written information for service users.

Action

- The team will initially identify the gaps by auditing what information is currently available within the office.
- When workers are involved with outside agencies they will request written material to be held within an information bank that can be given to service user when referrals are being made on their behalf.
- With the assistance of the business manager, the team will seek to identify what information is held by the authority that can be given to service users.

Recommendation 2

An agreed procedure for the management of risk should be discussed and agreed by the team.

Action

- The team will be holding an away day in August 2008 at which point a discussion will take place regarding the current risk taking/assessment policies and procedures will be shared.
- Ongoing risk management of cases will be discussed and recorded with staff during supervision.
- The fortnightly allocation that is held within the neighbourhood attended by the social work/working together manager, practice team manager and senior social worker from both teams will continue to monitor the cases that cannot be immediately allocated and identify the risk factors in each case.

- The senior social worker and practice team manager will disseminate the current risk management tools used to manage unallocated cases to the team.

Recommendation 3

The team should ensure that service user and stakeholder views are routinely sought in terms of developing standards and improving services.

Action

- Views of both service users and stakeholders will continue to be sought at times of formal meetings and when appropriate outwith such times.
- The team will seek and record the views of the above at the point of closing/transferring cases as a matter of routine.
- The team will devise a proforma to aid this practice.

Recommendation 4

The practice team manager and senior staff should ensure that all staff are fully engaged in the production and review of the team plan in future. This should include the administrative staff and business manager.

Action

- The team plan and its progress will be addressed at the away day in August 2008 as an agenda item with a view to actively amending where appropriate.
- Each member of the team will be given a hard copy of the team plan and each new members and students joining the team will be given a copy as a matter of course.
- Where appropriate, the business manager and administrative staff will be included in future team plan discussions.

Recommendation 5

The practice team manager should ensure that more emphasis is given to self-evaluation as a tool for improvement.

Action

- Once Performance Review and Development (PRD) has been cascaded down through the practice team manager self-evaluation will be conducted through PRD annually.
- Until the above occurs the practice team manager and seniors will continuing using the self-evaluation tool contained within the annual appraisal format.

Areas for development by the authority

Recommendation 1

The social work/working together manager should audit case files on a regular basis.

Action

- The social work/working together manager will receive a copy of every audit carried out within the neighbourhood and a database will be held within the neighbourhood office.
- The social work/working together manager will randomly audit two cases per team per month.

Recommendation 2

The social work/working together manager and the practice team managers from Oxgangs Path and Murrayburn Gate should revisit the arrangements for allocation of cases within the Principal Neighbourhood Access Point (PNAP) system.

Action

- A fortnightly allocation meeting has been established with the attendance of the practice team manager and senior group from both Oxgangs and Murrayburn Gate offices will be in attendance. The working together manager will also attend this meeting as will the social work/working together manager.
- This meeting will address issues of thresholds for allocation and monitor work that is not immediately able to be allocated.
- The meeting will also review the workload management systems of existing cases held by team members across the neighbourhood with a view to establishing a consistent model for all staff.

Recommendation 3

Quality Development should provide assistance to the team in relation to improving self-evaluation.

Action

- The social work/working together manager will contact the Quality Improvement Team to seek the assistance to improving self-evaluation within the team.