

Sounding Board Meeting
April 3rd 2009, County Hall Oxford

Safeguarding Services in Oxfordshire

15 parents interviewed:

4 with mental health as an issue

7 with some form of domestic violence

4 with drug and alcohol issues

Key Findings / Issues:

1. At the beginning of the Child Protection process parents need help to understand:

- Expectations of them
- Time frames
- How communication will happen

2. Parents need:

- Plans that are individual to each family's needs
- Clear explanation to parents at regular points through the process
- Regularly revisiting the initial agreement

3. Involving absent partners:

- Support the parent who is caring for the children full time. Support them in contacting the absent parent too.
- Ensure the absent parent takes a full & equal role within the child protection process.

" It was good that the professionals listened and seemed to really want to hear what we had to say "
(parent)

"the meeting was really interesting and I would like to do more work to support other parents going through the child protection process"
(parent)

4. When violence from partners & drug or alcohol issues are indicated:

- Do more work to confront and address the behaviour of the violent parent.
- Agree unannounced visits as part of the initial agreement.

5. Consider the impact of the process on the children:

- Professionals need to be skilled at supporting children & helping them understand the process.
- Professionals should ensure the children know its not their fault.

"Brave and compelling group" (professional)

6. Qualities of an excellent practitioner:

- Encouragement - *"they believed I could do it "*
- Support - *" coming when they say they will "*
- Regular communication - *"don't expect me to take it all in straightaway "*

- Honesty - “ *tell it as it is* ”
- Effective referral to other services – “ knowledgeable ”
- *Specialist knowledge* (e.g. mental health / domestic violence / drugs)
- Fast response to need
- Recognising problems early on and working with the family to address them

7. How to overcome concealment of problems:

- Specifically agree unannounced visits to home and schools - from the outset
- More efficient liaison between services
- Training with the new extended services work force, such as home school link workers, to look for problems concealed by the community.
- Specialist workers on certain issues, such as post natal depression & domestic violence.

“I really hope that things happen after the meeting so we can see that you heard us properly” (parent)

Parents’ Actions:

Attending parent education course on “the impact on children of absent parents” and evaluating the programme May 09

Supporting the relevant agencies in training with their teams on the parents’ experiences of child protection. TBC

Offering their time to be a mentor for other parents going through the child protection process. TBC

Continuing to be involved in any parent participation work in their local area. May 09

Attending training provided by the Participation and Play team on how to participate and be involved in the development of local services. June 09

Parents will be feeding back to the Children and Young People’s Trust on the Sounding Board.

“It was difficult to go through the past again but the meeting made it feel that we had made a difference, and all the professionals were really friendly ”
(parent)

Professionals ’ Actions:

Children’s Social Care will be planning how to involve parents in training social workers to give them an understanding of the parents’ experience; they will also be looking into the mentoring role that parents can play to offer support to other parents going through the process.

Children’s Social Care will be having an **Away Day** to discuss the issues raised. The parents will be invited to the day as experts and trainers.

The Sounding Board Report will be given to the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board for them to consider. The findings and recommendations will be part of the Safeguarding Review, and the actions will be taken up as a separate piece of work.

The findings will be presented to social workers & other professionals to support their development.

Thames Valley Police - will be exploring the possibility of working with the parents in the appropriate police environment.

Domestic Abuse Services will look at how they could work more closely with the parents through the child protection process, to offer a non-statutory line of support.

“ I was impressed with the openness & frankness of the parents and the fact that they didn’t appear to have a personal axe to grind but did appear to genuinely want to improve services for the good of others ”
(professional)

Area Service managers will be talking to their area social care teams and area service managers teams about the outcomes.

Health Commissioners will discuss key messages for health, especially regarding maternity & mental health services, with relevant PCT & Trust colleagues.

This report will be sent to Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet members.