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Safeguarding in FIVE External Audit of Strategy Discussions and Conferences (March 2022)

1. Background

An external audit was commissioned in March 2022 to review the quality of practice in cases where a strategy discussion had been held, followed by an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). This was a repeat audit, with the CHSCP having examined these themes in 2021. 15 cases were audited in total that included children of different ages and some sibling groups.

An online review of the child's social care case file was undertaken to determine the overall quality of practice. There was a specific focus on the following:

- Any key information shared at the ICPC which was not shared at the strategy discussion
- The quality and breadth of information sharing at strategy discussion meetings
- The quality of agency reports to ICPCs

2. Identified Strengths - Strategy Discussions

- Evidence that timely strategy discussions were held in all cases.
- Evidence of good multi-agency information sharing, with this being sufficient in all cases to inform planning.
- There were cases where information was shared at the ICPC that was not shared at the strategy discussion. Whilst this is to be expected given the timings of strategy discussions, none of this was seen as affecting decision making. Concerns that emerged between the strategy meeting and the ICPC were appropriately shared.
- Most strategy discussions outlined how investigations should be undertaken, with the next steps being clear. A smaller number provided clear guidance on the immediate and short-term action needed to support the child.
- In the Serious Youth Violence case audited, a trusted professional for the young person was considered in line with the CHSCP's guidance and good practice.
- The understanding of the child's needs was of high quality.

3. Identified Areas for Improvement - Strategy Discussions

- More consistent use of the CHSCP strategy discussion template to ensure all areas that need to be considered are routinely addressed.
- Practitioners need to share relevant information concerning all individuals and significant others within the family.
- Improved consideration of ethnicity and culture, identity and discrimination as part of the strategy discussion process.
- Detailed minutes are needed in all cases (including those already open to a social worker).
- Information about previous and current social work involvement should be made more explicit.



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4. Identified Strengths - Initial Child Protection Conferences

- Evidence of high quality contributions from health professionals.
- Concerns that emerged since the strategy meeting were appropriately shared at the ICPC.
- Reports and multi-agency contributions as recorded in the ICPC minutes demonstrated a good understanding of thresholds and rationale for decision making.
- Understanding of the child's needs in the reports submitted by all agencies to ICPCs was of a high quality.

5. Identified Areas for Improvement - Initial Child Protection Conferences

- Continuing improvement required from all agencies on submitting reports within ICPC timescales.
- The sharing of agency reports with parents / carers (and children where appropriate) and the recording of this should be improved.
- Recording the voice of the child could be strengthened, but there was clear evidence about the understanding of the child/young person's needs in the reports submitted.
- Levels of previous and current HCFS involvement were found to be not as explicit in the strategy discussions as in the ICPC.

