

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

REVISIT OF THE "EVERY CHILD MATTERS - THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF)"

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in relation to a revisit of the "Every Child Matters - The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)".

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 8 July 2009, council considered a report of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in relation to a revisit of the "Every Child Matters - The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)".
- 2.2 The report was approved by council and referred to cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 The panel completed its review in May 2009. In March 2008, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel had carried out a review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) within North Lincolnshire. It was during this review that many headteachers had raised their concerns over the use and effectiveness of the Common Assessment Framework. As a result, the panel had decided to undertake a revisit of the review of the Common Assessment Framework. It was also agreed that not only would relevant Service Directors be asked to provide an update but that it would be beneficial to speak to services/agencies that were dealing with the CAF in every day work. This was the panel's brief.
- 2.4 As a result of the revisit the panel made 8 recommendations. A copy of these are attached as an appendix to the report together with the conclusions.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME & DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

6.1 The panel consulted widely with other scrutiny members and officers and other relevant organisations in relation to the preparation of the original report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That the Director of Children's Services, together with the Chief Executive of NHS North Lincolnshire and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report for submission to cabinet.

SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Report of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel - Revisit of the Every Child Matters - The Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS

There was still the general misconception that completing a CAF would be a long and lengthy process. The council's Head of Safeguarding Practice advised that the CAF had originally been implemented following research and pilot studies. It was held up as a tool that could be completed within 45 minutes to assess a child's needs along the assessment domain. He stated that this was an average estimate of the time.

There were concerns that many practitioners were overcomplicating the process and attempting to address all issues that may affect a child and family rather than focusing on the main reason for referral. Many practitioners did not feel they were able to embark upon such a lengthy process. This was known to be causing specific difficulties throughout Education and Health sectors.

In addition, some agencies were still using their own reports rather than the CAF, specifically those dealing with alcohol and drug misuse within the Adult Mental Health sector. Members were advised that the Service Manager Children and Families was meeting with these agencies, as they were bound by Central Government guidance to use the Common Assessment Framework to identify needs. This was to be monitored to ensure that all agencies complied with Central Government requirements, the guidance and the 'Every Child Matters' agenda which includes the CAF, a key aspect of implementing better outcomes for children.

It was disappointing to find that not all agencies had completed the national CAF training or were fully engaged within the CAF process. Work needed to continue to ensure that this was rectified as soon as possible.

The panel agreed that there was the need for a more effective communication, evaluation and feedback system. This would help keep up the momentum as it would enable practitioners to see the benefits and also positive outcomes that had been achieved through the use of the CAF. The council's Head of Safeguarding Practice re-iterated that this could only be attained once an effective and fully engaged multi agency work practice had been achieved within North Lincolnshire.

Practitioners had asked that consideration be given to two separate forums being arranged. The first under the current format, aimed at the newly trained practitioners, and a second forum aimed specifically at capable practitioners and line managers. Suggestions were also made that the forums be held on a more flexible basis, so as to ensure all agencies were given the opportunity to attend periodically. It was concluded that this could contribute to more effective line management, better relationships and networking opportunities for the services/agencies involved and also provided the opportunity for senior management to discuss what they perceived to be specific problems, how to address them and provide feedback from the practitioners perspective.

In addition, following discussions held with the Common Assessment Development Coordinator and Children In Need Coordinator, and also with representatives from NHS North Lincolnshire it became evident that a training event, specifically aimed at line managers, would be beneficial. It was hoped that this would provide the ideal arena to cover aspects such as two way feedback to establish satisfactory lines of communication between the multi-agencies involved with CAF, to learn what support other agencies could provide, and also to discuss how to provide effective and practical support for practitioners.

The panel agreed that accountable managers should have more significant involvement with the negotiation of achievable and realistic performance targets. It was apparent that this had not been the case within several of the services, especially NHS North Lincolnshire, and that future contact was necessary to agree on suitable target levels.

Throughout the duration of the review, it was apparent that there was a need for a more robust performance monitoring system. The Council's Head of Safeguarding Practice had produced a State of Readiness, action group report that was presented to the Safeguarding Board in September 2008. The report suggested that performance data be provided by all agencies/ services by 30 September 2008. The panel was advised that this had not been achieved and that an action plan had been agreed to roll out an IT format to all agencies involved with the CAF. It was concluded that this would be beneficial to ensure accurate monitoring of the CAF's.

THE PANEL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the evidence presented and evaluated during the review, as detailed in the panel's findings/considerations and the panels conclusions, the recommendations of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel are as follows:-

- 4.1 that everyone involved throughout this review be thanked for their contributions, and the team within North Lincolnshire Council working on the implementation and ongoing training of the CAF be congratulated on their hard work and ongoing commitment to the process.
- 4.2 that consideration be given to introducing training events/forums specifically designed for line managers, to assist with aspects such as two way feedback, establishment of networking opportunities with all agencies, and to deliver ideas on how to provide effective and practical support for practitioners.
- 4.3 that the Council emphasise to all agencies involved that the CAF is now a key piece of Government guidance within the 'Every Child Matter's' agenda and everyone must be engaged in the service delivery. To ensure that all agencies complete the national CAF training and also that appropriate Senior Management attempt to bring all agencies fully on board, specifically those who have not yet completed the appropriate training.
- 4.4 that lines of communication, feedback to practitioners and evaluation of the process be improved to ensure the ongoing commitment of all practitioners and line managers.
- 4.5 that consideration be given to introducing an additional forum, specifically aimed at capable practitioners and line managers, delivered by senior officers and arranged on a more flexible basis to allow all agencies the opportunity to periodically attend.
- 4.6 that all agencies take responsibility within the target setting process to ensure that performance targets are realistic and achievable.

- 4.7 that in line with the Council's Head of Safeguarding Practice 'State of readiness' report, September 2008, a robust performance monitoring system be introduced and made available to all agencies by January 2010.
- 4.8 that it be noted the panel supports and endorses the school cluster programme, with appointed Head Teacher taking on the role of professional lead and assisting other school's practitioners within the cluster.