Strengthening families: a new approach to child protection

Presentation

Jane Doherty Independent Social Work Consultant
Context

Recommendation from an audit commissioned by the LSCB in March 2014:

“Bexley currently operates a very traditional model of CPCs and many Local Authorities have moved forward with other models that Bexley may wish to consider”.
Families’ experiences

Audit undertaken by LSCB March 2014;

- Feedback was relatively positive.
- Professionals need to understand how intimidating it is to be so ‘outnumbered’ in a formal meeting;
- Parents felt they lacked the necessary information about what would happen;
- Parents feel unprepared and one explicitly complained about not having the paperwork on their case in advance;
- Families want a more respectful, open, helpful, challenging, but less judgmental form of social work.
Professional Experience

- Positive generally but reports often late or not produced at all
- Professionals seem unclear of their role at times in their contribution to assessing risk
- Need more multi agency information about what has already been done
Research suggests conferences should

- Have a greater focus on planning
- Hear the child’s voice
- Enable families to present their views
- Ensure all views are grounded in evidence
- Promote discussion and explore dissent
- Place a strong emphasis on relationships
- Reduce power inequalities
- Build on strengths
Strengthening Families Framework

- Based on work by Andrew Turnell – Signs of Safety
- More similarities with than differences from the traditional business meeting format of Child Protection Conferences…
  - Reports
  - Pre-meetings with families
  - Multi-agency meeting with parents attending
  - Decision about harm
  - Protection plan

…but designed to help families participate more easily, to help all participants assess risk better and for all to be more engaged in the development of a CP plan.

- Strengths based and outcome focused
Comprehensive Risk Assessment

Family Knowledge
Network and Culture

Danger

Balanced Assessment of Risk

Safety

Professional Knowledge
Network and Authority

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Key differences

- Building safety for children at risk of harm
- Visible and transparent analysis of the information presented to the meeting
- Analysis of risks as well as safety/protective factors
- Engages professionals and parents as part of the solution
- Uses a safety scale
- Seeks cooperation thus highlights lack of cooperation
- The plan is owned by the conference and is not the work of the chair – improved working together in core group
- Clearer about outcomes which indicate effective safeguarding – better chance of change or timely decision making.
Roles

The role of Conference Chairs;
- Active
- Facilitative
- Directive
- Challenging
- Enabling

Expectations of professionals;
- Clearer focus on analysis of risks
- Engagement in the protection plan
Key elements

- Chair meets family first – completes genogram
- Layout of room
- Style of chairing (facilitative)
- Family can be helped to complete genogram
- Succinct presentation of information NB reports shared prior to the meeting
- Family gets opportunity to respond
- Clear and transparent focus on risk, danger, harm, complicating factors and safety
- Risk statement
- Plan – focus on bringing about change
- Decision
Potential benefits/challenges

- Shifts the balance of power
- Significant change in the approach of chairs
- Importance of multi-agency ownership and engagement
- Should have a system wide impact
- The focus must be on risks
- Requires professionals to synthesise and analyse information
- Develops intervention plans rather than monitoring plans – requires different skill set
Implementation – Bexley

- Presentation and discussion at LSCB
- Pilot begins in January 2015
- Role of CPCs in early planning for the ICPC
- Development work with CPCs
- Multi-agency briefings for social workers, TMs and partner agencies
- Report and minutes formats
- Practicalities – room, whiteboard and refreshments