

## **Agenda Item No. 7 - Appendix 4**

### **Summary of whistleblowing referrals to the Local Authority**

During 24/25 reporting year, there are three records of whistleblowing relating to CEF.

1 x to the office of the Chief Executive

2 x to Ofsted

Each record came from an anonymous source and all raised similar issues.

1. High caseloads in Family Support and Safeguarding
2. Performance management processes
3. Management practice
4. Practice approach and model

### **Outcomes**

Each whistleblowing referral was investigated and in the case of the Ofsted referrals a response was returned, and the Regional HM Inspector has subsequently confirmed they are satisfied with the response and have closed the referrals. In my role as Executive Director for Children, Education and Families (CEF) I also met with the Regional HMI to discuss the referrals and this was welcomed as an act of transparency and accountability on behalf of the Council.

None of the referrals contained details of specific incidents at a recorded date and time and the responses were drafted against the general themes raised. We have subsequently been able to report a significant reduction in caseloads for almost all social workers. The performance management processes are council-wide and CEF follows them in accordance with Council policy.

Management practice: - where examples are shared of poor management that does not align with the Councils policies and principles these are challenged. The referrals did not contain specific incidents which made it difficult to investigate. In response the Executive Director for CEF now has regular scheduled drop in sessions across the County where any member of CEF staff can share things they are worried about, ideas for the service development or reflect on successes. There have also been service specific meetings for the Family Safeguarding and Support Teams and the Assessment Teams with the Executive Director for CEF where all staff have been invited to share concerns and hear about the service development plans. Teams have subsequently reported feeling listened to and that they have experienced notable improvements in their teams workload. It is recognised that some social workers will have caseloads that are higher than we would like from time to time and improvement activity focussed on the decision-making earlier in the referrals process is having a positive impact.

Practice approach and model: - The practice approach has been in development with staff groups. Our practice is relational social work practice using strength-based tools. This is in keeping with many Good and Outstanding Local Authorities. We are aligning this with our Quality Assurance Framework and Learning and Development Offer and will be rolling this out across our teams in June 2025 onwards. This will be the first clearly articulated, whole-system practice approach in Cambridgeshire for many years. The focus is supporting families to make positive changes in their lives by building meaningful relationships with them and using tools designed to build on pre-existing strengths within each family. Ultimately we aim to reduce the number of children coming into Local Authority care by doing this and by building capacity within the family to care for the children who cannot be cared for by the parents.

The themes of workforce capacity and our practice approach will also be reported to the CEF Improvement Board which is independently chaired.