

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 8
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Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Report Author – John Richards
Contact Details – 01733 863600

PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE

To provide Members with a progress report from the Children's services Portfolio Holder

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to scrutinise the progress made on the Cabinet Members' Portfolio by providing challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support improvements in performance.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

One of the priorities contained within the Sustainable Community Strategy is Creating Opportunities, Tackling Inequalities, which is within the remit of this Committee

4. BACKGROUND

The performance of Children's Social Care Services (CSC) is monitored through the Green Book, a monthly reporting process which tracks children's journeys through the children's services system. The report that follows should be read in conjunction with other reports on today's Scrutiny agenda, namely, the Ofsted Annual Assessment Report and the CTPB Post Inspection Action Plan. Issues covered in those reports are not repeated in this report.

Referrals

We have received 1064 referrals to CSC between April and November 2010. These range monthly from between 91 and 173 averaging 133. About 75% of referrals go on to be initial assessments. This is regarded as good performance when compared to national and statistical neighbour comparisons.

Child Protection

This year has seen an increase in Child Protection (CP) activity: so far, in response to child protection concerns, there have been 132 initial CP conferences held. This is about one third more than was projected at the beginning of the year. The numbers of children who have become the subject of a CP plan between April and November is 115 and those discontinuing is 99. As a result, the total number of children with a CP plan in November was 135. The proportion of CP plans to the population is hovering between national and statistical neighbour averages. Performance is deemed therefore to be good. 100% of CP reviews have been held in time.

Children in Care (CiC)

Between April and November 2010 a total of 86 children were admitted to the care of Children's Services. During the same period 84 children ceased to be in care. As a result, at the end of November there were 300 children in care. The numbers per month have fluctuated between a low of 297 and a high of 307. We still have considerably more CiC than do our statistical neighbours, but we have reduced the number from its all time high of 386 during 2008. The number of care proceedings started between April and November is 35 which is slightly above our projected target. When children are in care they have regular reviews: 274 reviews have been held between April and November 96.7% of which were in time. This is higher than both national and statistical neighbours' averages. 96% of children have participated in their reviews. 87% of CiC have had their teeth checked and had an annual health assessment in the last 12 months. This is above national average performance.

Children who leave care are expected to have Pathway Plans. Of the 149 young people in this category 147 have pathway plans. These are reviewed regularly and 94% of these have been reviewed on time. Given the volatility of some of the lives of care leavers this is good performance.

100% of care leavers aged 19 are judged to be living in suitable accommodation whereas only 63% are in education, training or employment. This is an area for development even though we perform above the national average.

Children with Disabilities

All children with disabilities who are aged 14 or over have a transition plan in place. This is essential if their transfer to adult services is to go smoothly.

Social Work Utilization

All children in care are allocated to a qualified Social Worker (QSW). This is our target and is above the national average (92%). 70% of children in need are also allocated to a QSW which is much higher than last year (year end figure 53%). 92.7% of children with a disability are allocated to a worker (101 out of 109). We would expect this to be 100% and have asked that this be addressed.

Adoption

So far in the year from April 2010, 20 children have been adopted 75% of which, were adopted within 12 months of their being placed for adoption. This percentage is slightly higher than the national and statistical neighbour average. The number of adoptions represents 8.1% of those children who have been in care in excess of 3 months. This equates to the national average and there are still 4 months of adoption activity to go to year end. This is excellent performance.

Placement of Children

Currently, 6.3% of CiC have experienced 3 or more placements in the last year. This is well below the national average of 11%. Stable placements lead to better outcomes for children. In addition, 71% of CiC aged under 16 who have been in care for at least 2.5 years have been in the same placement for the last 2 years or placed for adoption. This is above national average.

Foster Carers

There are currently 89 foster carers, 18 "family and friends" carers and 11 link carers. During the year to date there are 10 given referrals, 9 packs for fostering have been sent out, 8 initial visits have been undertaken, 5 foster carers are proceeding to the Skills to Foster course and 6 foster carers are subject to the completion of the necessary form F or have been presented to panel. This shows that the fostering service is making progress albeit at a rather slow pace.

Adoption Service

During the year to date 87 adoption enquiries have been made by people wishing to adopt. 34 of these have been closed. To date 12 adopters have been approved and 11 adopters have been matched with children. The adoption Service is due an Ofsted inspection in March 2011.

5. KEY ISSUES

The statistics provided in this report are not just figures on paper; they tell a story about children and young people and particularly they tell of the interaction between a department and some of the most vulnerable children in our society. They show that there is much more to Children's Services that has not been reported on as part of the Ofsted Annual Assessment. While we are not complacent with these results we are pleased with the story told and the difference made. We have a position of strength from which to build.

6 IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that the Scrutiny Committee will comment on and make recommendations relating to the updates provided in this report in order that delivery potential is maximised for the benefit of children and families.

7 CONSULTATION

No consultation has taken place with regard to this report

8 EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

Comments and recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee members will be considered as part of the ongoing development and delivery of children's services.

9 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

10. APPENDICES

None

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