

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 8
13 OCTOBER 2014	Public Report

Report of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services

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PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT FOR CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDRENS SERVICES

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

This report focuses on the progress made across my portfolio.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Highlights:

- Sustained performance in Children’s Social Care
- Implementation of the Single Assessment

5.2 Children’s Social Care

CAFs (Early Help Assessments)

There were a lower number of CAFs completed in August, due to the school holidays. Nonetheless, 35 CAFs were opened in August, which is higher than this time last year. The rate per 10,000 children and young people at 184.2 is 24.6% above our target.

There were 724 contacts coming into the service, of which 139 went on to referral. This is the lowest conversion rate since September 2013.

Referrals

There were 139 referrals in August, of which 134 had a Single Assessment. The additional 5 were not progressed because 4 were transfers from other Local Authorities and the other, a private fostering notification, where a single assessment was not required.

Re-referrals

Of the 139 referrals in August, 31 were re-referrals. This is, at 18.9%, lower than the outturn for last year which was 23.6%. The reasons for these re-referrals include significant changes to a child or family's situation that required an assessment (within 12 months of a previous intervention ending); new information coming to light since closure that warrants a further period of support or intervention; and/or a precipitating event (such as an incident attended by the police) that might warrant a Child Protection (Section 47) enquiry.

The improved performance evidenced by a reduced re-referral rate is largely a consequence of improved partnership working and communication with families and partner agencies; robust management of cases; and more robust arrangements in place to deal with contacts and referrals.

Single Assessments

There were 199 single assessments completed during August. Since commencing introduction of the single assessment in June, 391 have been completed to the end of August, of which 19 were out of timescale in the month. The reasons for this are recorded as social worker availability (9), client availability (5 - including one family that moved out of area during the period and who's new address had to be confirmed), and awaiting information from an external agency (5). Information from external agencies during the school holidays is sometimes unavailable. Similarly, social worker availability in August was impacted by annual leave and the difficulties experienced during the period June-August in recruiting to vacant posts. The recruitment position improved considerably during August with all vacant permanent posts filled by locum colleagues by the end of the month.

Section 47 (Child Protection) Enquiries

46 Child Protection enquiries were completed during August and 24 of them (52.2%) had the outcome of an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). This number remains too high against our regional comparator authorities and the national average. This will be a key line of enquiry for Ofsted. The reasons for those that did not go to conference (an indicator of our thresholds) include enquiries where the original concern correctly warranted an enquiry but following enquiries the concerns were a) not substantiated (8, including two sibling groups of three), or b) substantiated but the child/young person was NOT considered to be at continuing risk of harm (14) – often where the concern was historical or where the family have since split or taken appropriate protective steps. In one case, the department has issued proceedings to protect the child, and was therefore no longer at risk of significant harm.

Whilst there is still more to do, service performance has improved over the past twelve months with the year-to-date figure rising from 28.1% of Section 47 enquiries progressing to ICPC in September last year, to 45.3% in August this year.

Children subject to a Child Protection Plan and initial Child Protection Conferences

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan increased to 242 at the end of August and was 24.3% higher than target. This number has reduced to 233 at the time of writing this report, due to more robust management oversight of decision making.

Child Protection Plans lasting two years or more

Six of the Child Protection episodes that have ended since April were CP for longer than two years. I have asked the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) to audit these cases on a multi-agency basis and report back.

Looked After Children

At the end of August, the number of looked after children was 376, a net reduction of 3 compared to the previous month (379 in July 2014). The number of looked after children remains relatively high in relation to the previous two years and is currently equivalent to a rate of 83.6 per 10,000 children compared to a national rate of 60 and statistical neighbours rate of 78 per 10,000.

We have rigorous processes for agreeing accommodation and all of these children meet the criteria for care based on need and risk.

8 children exited care, which is below our target rate of 14 per month, but this is indicative of the age of our looked after children cohort.

Looked After Children Missing from Care

There were 4 individual looked after children who went missing in August. The actions we took were to make enquiries to locate the young people, ensure their safe return to placement and to follow up with multi-agency meetings to update and review risks in 3 of the cases.

Health of Looked After Children

The proportion of looked after children that have had a health assessment has improved from 82.9% to 85.3%.

Child Protection Visits in Timescale

91.9% of children with a Child Protection Plan received a statutory visit within timescale. This is an improvement from last month when it stood at 87.9%. The reasons for the visits outside timescale typically include families being absent at time of visit, non-engagement and also workforce pressures.

Children in Need

As of the end of August, the service had 1681 open referrals, of which 1067 were Children in Need, 376 were looked after children and 242 were subject to a Child Protection Plan (4 are both looked after children and subject to a plan).

There are a number of Children in Need cases that need to be closed down and we are currently producing a list of all cases that have been opened for 12 months or more, which will be audited for closure.

Update on MASH

The Countywide **MASH** (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) came into effect on 1 September 2014, the next stage of the evolutionary development of what has hitherto been called the **MARU** (Multi-Agency Referral Unit).

To all intents and purposes, in the early stages, this amounts to little more than a name change for Children's Services as the core business and the way in which it is conducted has changed only very slightly. During the following weeks and months though, as other partners join the MASH, either through co-location or integration, the way in which we conduct our business will change and mean that we shall be better able to share information leading to improved decision-making and outcomes for children, young people, and their families.

The MASH operates from two bases, one at Godmanchester in Cambridgeshire and the other from Bayard Place in Peterborough. There will not be a discrete new team at Peterborough, but as now, the core function and business of the MASH (primarily the conduct of Section 47

Strategy Discussions and Enquiries) will be met by the First Response teams. The key changes that are to come into effect in the near future that will significantly enhance the information sharing and decision-making processes will be the co-location and integration of other key partners.

Work is at an advanced stage now to recruit a full-time Health practitioner to sit within the FRT at Bayard Place. Similarly, a CAF/Connecting families coordinator is being recruited and discussions are underway with Peterborough Women's Aid to identify a resource that might be located within the FRT to contribute to Section 47 discussions, and also to aid the provision of early assistance to victims of Domestic Abuse at a lower level than might otherwise be picked up by other existing services.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary have co-located two colleagues from their Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Persons team at Bayard Place to further strengthen and develop the relationship with our own CSE/Missing children resources, and Peterborough City Council Adults Service are also committed to joining the MASH (as are Cambridgeshire County Council Adults Services) and this is a very welcome development.

Stronger links too are being developed with colleagues in the Housing Department, Integrated Offender Management Service and other agencies such as drug and alcohol services, so that in addition to those co-located services, there is an additional network of single points of contact with other agencies and services that can be called upon as required to contribute to Strategy discussions and risk management strategies.

The MASH Project Board continues to meet and has produced a development plan that pulls together, in one document, the different strands of activity that are currently underway. The MASH operational management group also meets regularly and is focussed on developing practice and processes to improve consistency and outcomes. A First Response team manager is a member of this group.

Update on CSE

Following two significant trials earlier in 2014, culminating in the conviction of six adult males, jailed for serious sexual offences against children and young people, work is now in progress to support a number of victims and witnesses (many of whom are now young adults) in anticipation of a further trial early in 2015. The location of the trial is likely to be in Cambridge and three adult males have been charged with a number of alleged offences ranging from rape to grooming and trafficking.

The multi-agency CSE risk assessment tool has recently been revised and circulated by the Safeguarding Children Boards for both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.

Ofsted have recently announced that they are to undertake eight announced thematic inspections of CSE across the country following publication of the Rotherham report. They are to report to the Secretary of State at the end of October. Work is underway to ensure that should Peterborough be visited, we would be prepared for this.

Funding for four additional posts to support the ongoing work related to CSE and other related activity was agreed by the Corporate Management Team earlier this year (for two years). The posts sit within the First Response Teams.

Update on Recruitment and Retention

As of 27th September, the current vacancy gap is 22.0FTE against an establishment of 83. This figure includes pipeline leavers and pipeline starters. Presently there are 22 locum social workers and a peripatetic locum social work team consisting of 7 social workers.

The new permanent Team Manager for Leaving Care Service begins in post on the 1st October and as a result, the current interim Team Manager will be released from post.

A permanent Team Manager for First Response was recruited in September and is due to start in December, subject to satisfactory references and DBS.

Adverts have been placed in The Guardian Newspaper and Guardian Online for both Head of Service and Team Managers.

Social Worker and Team Manager Adverts are currently being advertised in Community Care online also.

The Assistant Director post of Safeguarding will be advertised shortly and work is being completed around this.

6 NQSWs have started their permanent posts within Family Support, Looked after Children, and Leaving Care. There are 4 others due to start in the coming weeks and as a result, there will be a requirement for agency staff to be given notice.

1 experienced social worker begins a permanent post in November within Looked after Children.

5.3 Early Intervention Activity - Connecting Families Programme

Peterborough's response to the national Troubled Families programme is 'Connecting Families'. Troubled families will usually have a large number of agencies involved with them, often focussing on the individuals within that family, rather than looking at the family as a whole. This can bring its own problems as families become confused by overlapping professionals, assessments and appointments. This costly and unfocussed activity can mask the lack of progress for that family. Some of the starkest evidence for this collective failure to properly help families is to be found in the frequency of problems which are transmitted from one generation of the same family to another.

The aims of the Connecting Families Programme are to get children back into school, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour, put adults on a path back to work and bring down the amount public services currently spend on them. The programme works by assigning a dedicated worker to engage with a whole family on all of its problems.

To date, the programme has worked with over 300 families in the city and around 200 families have been 'turned around' as a result of interventions that have taken place. This means that children are attending school; crime and/or anti-social behaviour is reduced; and/or adults are back into permanent employment.

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