

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 MARCH 2013

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

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Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services. The areas within the relevant portfolio are listed each time a Cabinet Member is invited to attend any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to be held to account.

1. Background

- 1.1 The area within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, according to the Council's constitution is:
 - Children's Independent Safeguarding and Review Service (CISRS)
- 1.2 The Children's Independent Safeguarding and Review Service sits within the Business Support Directorate, reporting to the Assistant Director for Communications, Performance and Partnerships. The Service's core function is to chair statutory Looked After Children (LAC) Reviews and employs Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) required to undertake this role. These statutory posts are underpinned by legislation and guidance.
- 1.3 Like many local authorities, IROs in Medway also chair Child protection Conferences. These are multi-agency conferences which are held to consider whether children are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm and to design and review plans to reduce those risks.
- 1.4 The service was transferred from children's care to Business Support in April 2008 to give it greater independence. This is recognised as good practice.

2. Achievements for 2012-13

Looked after children

- Performance against NI66 (% of children for whom LAC Reviews which were held within statutory timescales) has improved to 91.1% at the end of quarter 3 2012/13. This compares to 82.3% at year end 2010/11 and 79.4% in 2011/12. It is important that statutory reviews are held in a timely way as it ensures that decisions that promote children's best interests are made promptly and monitored regularly. This helps avoid "drift" and keeps care plans on track.
- The service has focussed on improving the *quality* of reviews for children and young people during the year.
 - There is a requirement for IROs to visit children in their placement in order to ascertain their wishes and feelings about their care and progress. In 2011, CISRS undertook a survey of children and young people in Medway's care which showed that LAC value the visits and contact with their allocated IRO. An IRO is a very consistent professional within a looked after child's life – many children looked after in Medway have the same IRO for several years and young people report feeling positive about their input. When the survey was repeated in July 2012, the results were the same (please see below).
 - The numbers of children who have had a face-to-face visit with their IRO in between their reviews has increased throughout the period to 36% at the end of December 2012. 48% of children coming into care in q3 2012/13 were visited in their placement by their allocated IRO *prior* to their first statutory LAC Review. The rate of children's participation in their reviews (through face-to-face contact, telephone conversations and/or in writing or by text) during the year currently stands at 92%, compared to 82% at the same time in 2011/12.
- The annual survey of LAC (July 2012) set to assess their levels of satisfaction with the service they receive from IROs showed (previous year outturn in brackets):
 - 90% (73%) were happy with their IRO
 - 40% (55%) had met with their IRO prior to their review
 - 90% (64%) were happy with their review.
 - 80% (77%) felt they had been "listened to"
 - 90% (63.6%) found their review helpful

Areas for Improvement

- We continue to work to increase the face to face contact that IROs have with children and young people between their reviews in order that we can also support children's contributions to their reviews and build upon the positive feedback that they have provided to us.
- There is also room for some improvement in our performance against NI66 and we are working with practitioners in children's social care to reduce the numbers of LAC Reviews that are postponed to facilitate other competing commitments such as external assessments, Court proceedings and other pressures on professional staff.

- The service currently has a vacant full time IRO post that we are currently in the process of recruiting to. However, attracting appropriate qualified personnel has proven a challenge and we are about to advertise the post for the third time.

Child Protection

- Performance against NI67 (% Children whose child protection conference reviews which were held on time) has improved to 98.3% at the end of quarter 3 2012/13. This compares to year end figures of 92.4% and 96.6% in 2010/11 and 2011/12 respectively. This 98.3% outturn is as a result of 3 Child Protection Conference Reviews being held out of timescale since 1 April 2012. As with LAC Reviews, it is important that children's Child Protection Conferences are held in a timely way to ensure that the progress made in Child Protection plans is closely monitored to avoid drift
- There has been a significant fall in the numbers of children who are subject to Child Protection plans over the last year. The decrease between 31 December 2011 and 31 December 2012 was 40%. This reduction is, in part, due to work during the year that CISRS have undertaken with Children's Social Care to reduce the numbers of children who are might be subject to more than one planning process – for example if children are subject to a Child Protection plan and then become looked after. This is to ensure effective use of resources whilst ensuring that children and families are appropriately and properly protected.
- Since 1 April, we have received feedback from approximately 564 participants in 187 separate Child Protection conferences and have received a 99% "customer satisfaction" score. We use questionnaires at the end of Child Protection Conferences to test out how well parents, children and professionals understand the concerns that exist about the children being discussed and about the effectiveness of the conference process
 - 100% of all respondents (including parents) are clear about the risks to children that have been identified
 - 100% are clear about what needs to change
 - 99% are clear about what their role is in achieving change
- The Inspection of arrangements to protect children undertaken by Ofsted in January 2013 made some positive observations about the work undertaken by staff in CISRS. Inspectors felt that approaches to improve the quality of Child Protection planning had started to bear fruit and also commented, "Most child protection conferences observed by inspectors were well chaired. There is a clear structure, parents are engaged and professionals are encouraged to actively contribute both to the discussion and to the child protection decision-making process." However, there are a number of areas where a need for improvement were identified:
 - To ensure there is greater participation of children and young people in Child Protection Conferences and their views and experiences are effectively taken into account in decision making. The lessons that we have learned by improving children and young people's participation in

their LAC Reviews will be transferred into this area of our work, including the use of advocataes.

- To continue to embed the new improvements made in the delivery of outline Child Protection Plans to ensure that they are outcomes focussed, specific and progress is measurable.
- To improve the quality of risk assessments undertaken within Child Protection Conferences and recorded within the formal minutes of these meetings in order for professionals and parents to be clear about the risks and needs of children that are identified

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Background Papers:

None