

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 MARCH 2013

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults

Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care. 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 areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, according to the Council's constitution are:

- Adoption
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Children with disabilities
- Children's residential care
- Fostering
- Integrated Children's Teams
- Leaving Care
- Looked After Children
- Sunlight Assessment Team

1.2 The Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care has political responsibility for the strategic leadership and effectiveness of Children's Social Care Services which includes safeguarding and looked after children's services.

2.1 Adoption

Overview

The Adoption Team has been reconfigured into three service areas. Assessment and Recruitment practitioners, who focus on the assessment and recruitment of adoptive families; Family Finding practitioners who identify placements for children who are more of a challenge to place, and Adoption Support. This has enabled, practitioners to develop a more specialist approach. .

Achievements

- Recruitment of Adoptive Families is increasing as Medway and Bexley undertake joint work to co-ordinate recruitment preparation and assessment of adoptive families.
- 25 children were matched with prospective adoptive families
- Since April 2012, 56 children had adoption identified as their future plan.
- 12 adoptive households were approved in the period April 2012 – December 2012 and there are currently 21 households in assessment.
- Recruitment of staff has resulted in team being fully staffed and invigorated.

Challenges

- Nationally set indicators for the average time between the child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family continue to reduce.
- There are currently 63 children with a placement order and no adoptive match.

2.2 Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Overview

A new contract has been commissioned with a new provider that has already showing improvements.

Achievement

- Numbers of children on the waiting list have reduced from 266 to 80.

Challenges

- Work continues to address and reduce waiting times for children who have been referred to CAMHS .

2.3 Children with disabilities

Overview

Medway Children with Disabilities Team has a highly motivated and committed Social Care team with specialist roles within it. These include, practice teaching, deaf blind intervener, out of hour's therapeutic activities, groups for siblings of disabled children and support networks for the parents of disabled children. There are 266 children and young people across our service.

Achievement

- Excellent group work programme facilitation (via a small group of Family Workers) relating to our Daisy and Behavioural Exchange parent training/support programmes. This has resulted in consistently high levels

of praise and related feedback being received from large numbers of attending parents.

- Overall, our Social Care team effectively provides a wide range of child-focused, support and assessment services to local families.
- Overall, our two teams have a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills at their disposal, which they use in creative ways to empower parents, resolve daily problems being experienced, as well as enhance parents' overall understanding and management of their children's disabilities.

Challenges

- To enable our Tier 3 social workers to carry out their own child protection enquiries
- Managing the variety of issues that are presented particularly the use of personal budgets and the transitions to adult services.
- The review of short breaks provision has been a challenge to co-ordinate across authorities and with health. Formal consultation now underway and service re-provision will follow during this coming year.

2.4 Children's residential care

Overview

Medway has 23 children and young people in residential settings some of which are in independent care homes and residential educational establishments. The OFSTED inspection of Medway's residential The Old Vic was extremely disappointing and an action plan has been developed and is being implemented.

Achievement

- The commissioning service is reviewing all commissioned residential placements to ensure that they are best value and has the best outcomes for our children and young people.

Challenges

- Improving the Ofsted judgment of The Old Vic and delivering the action plan.
- The key challenge for the service is the overnight short breaks review. The outcome of which is awaited and the changes to the NHS both of which will impact significantly on the service.

2.5 Fostering

Overview

There are 221 children and young people placed with Medway Fostering households. 70 young people are placed within independent fostering agencies. The fostering service was awarded an adequate rating by OFSTED in August 2012. We have changed the recruitment process resulting in a

quicker response to fostering applications - there is now an initial contact after 48 hours and initial visits are taking place within ten days of that initial enquiry where the applicant is available. There are currently 155 children and young people placed by Medway within other local authority boundaries and 378 children placed by other local authorities within Medway (although not all of these will be living within fostering households).

Achievement

- Successful launch of the Foster Carers' Charter, which was drawn up with the Medway Foster Carers Association and Fostering Team. The event was well attended by foster carers, their families, professionals, Cllr Wildey and the Foster Carers Association.
- Recruitment strategy devised and implemented February 2013. This has resulted in 35 information packs being issued to enquirers, which is double the previous month.
- Development of Connected Carers service from a staff group of one, to a staff group of three workers has improved timeliness in completion of reports.
- Scrutiny of Foster Carers Annual Reviews has enabled a thorough evaluation of individual carers and their practice.
- Fostering development meetings are convened on a weekly basis to explore practice and the development of the fostering service.
- We have increased monitoring of carers that includes unannounced visits.
- Supervising Social Workers see the children on their own and ensure that the voice of the child is captured in the Foster Carers annual reviews.
- Medway now have an independent Foster Panel Chair and the effective use of Panel process and good communication with Panel members has seen a more robust quality assurance process in place.
- A comprehensive training programme is delivered by a range of agencies and is valued by carers. The programme is responsive to the needs of carers and new requirements. Resulting from changes in Standards. Mandatory courses are now very well attended with the knowledge gained on courses being put into practice by carers to meet outcomes for children.
- Improved efficiency/process in commissioning placements with Independent Fostering Agencies by use of a single point of contact (Placement Officer)

Challenges

- Moving the service from adequate to good
- Increasing the number of in house foster carers
- Reducing the numbers of independent fostering placements

2.6 Children's Referral, Assessment & Support teams and Safeguarding Teams

Overview

The CRAFT are situated over two sites in Medway with one Team at Redvers and the other at Woodlands. The teams hold a combination of Children in

Need cases, Looked After Children and Child Protection providing services to an average of 700 children across the two teams. They respond to approximately 1500 contacts per month.

The Safeguarding Teams work with children subject to Child Protection Plans and children subject to legal proceedings. They, like our CRAFT are based over two sites with one at Redvers and the other at Woodlands. Team members are committed to protecting and supporting the children and families of Medway and are very motivated and supportive of each other. The team are currently working with 563 children across the service and are working hard to implement recommendations that will enhance practice and outcomes for children. The Family support workers provide invaluable support for the social workers by assisting with observations; parenting support plans in the home, tailored to the individual needs of the family; direct work with children; group work for parenting skills; domestic violence; self esteem; and currently preparing play sessions for parents and children during the school holidays. Their work enables us to provide evidence in court as well as supporting children and families to safely be removed from child protection plans. .

Achievements

- The team has a core group of committed and loyal staff who were described as 'committed and hardworking' in the recent OFSTED inspection report.
- The service is preparing it self for further significant change and has begun the journey of improvement.
- Staff are engaging in the work to further develop the service and improve the experience of service users.

Challenges

- Reducing the number of cases across the teams
- Timeliness of assessment to improve.
- The implementation of Framework i
- Improving timeliness of statutory visits
- Recruitment and retention of permanent staff
- Court directed timeframes remain a challenge and need to be reduced considerably over the coming year to meet the requirements of the national Family Justice Review.

2.7 MILAC & Leaving care

Overview

MILAC is a combination of 172 looked after children and 222 care leavers. The service consists of qualified social workers and young persons advisors. For our looked after children our priorities are placement stability, education outcomes and health and wellbeing are maximised. The team provide support and advice in preparing our care leavers for adulthood.

Achievements

- Re-devised Children's Accommodation and Placement Panel in order to ensure appropriate management of resources and threshold criteria for accommodating children is met on a consistent basis
- Increased use of Family Centres to support families.
- Review of Outreach Services commissioned to determine service delivery to reduce numbers of Looked After Children by providing support to families.
- Pilot of Functional Family Therapy, secured through 2 year Department for Education grant funding, to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children and those going into custody.
- NEET partnership work has commenced with Medway Youth Trust, Housing and Commissioning colleagues and the Troubled Families Initiative to reduce the percentage of looked after young people who become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). To ensure care leavers have access to appropriate education training and employment opportunities
- Sufficient and cost effective supported accommodation including emergency accommodation has been identified to meet the needs of care leavers.
- All Medway Integrated Looked After Children's Team care plans are less than six months old and reflect the current needs and planned outcomes for all children.
- Permanency plans in place for all looked after children in Medway Integrated Looked After Children's Team.
- Contracts are in place for all Independent Fostering Agencies/supported accommodation placements for Looked After Children and care leavers to ensure good quality provision for Medway's young people.
- A joint working protocol was implemented in September 2012 with Medway Youth Trust connexions, Job Centre Plus, Looked After Children Health Team, and the European Social Fund, which has improved service delivery for care leavers seeking education training and employment in Medway.
- Exit interviews with care leavers was piloted for care leavers and in November 2012 to inform service delivery
- Protocols have been implemented for Looked After Children with learning/physical disabilities/mental health diagnoses that are to be transferred to Adult Services, in order to provide a seamless service.
- Joint working and training with YOT is now in place to assist in meeting outcomes for young people who are remanded to care.

Challenges

- Increasing educational outcomes for care leavers
- Increasing the number of care leavers who enter employment or training
- Reducing the number of independent fostering agency placements.

2.8 Sunlight Assessment Team (Sunlight and Wayfield Assessment and Contact) Centre

Overview

The Sunlight Centre completes family assessments over a 12-week period to ascertain parenting capacity. During the period April 2012 to date we have assessed 30 families and 24 of these have recommended court proceedings, with 6 assessments recommending a return home. The Sunlight Centre has built up a good reputation in court with its recommendation generally accepted without challenge. This has meant we can resist more expensive outside assessment when put forward by other parties within the court process. Wayfield Contact Centre supervises contact between parents and their children where they do not live together. It is a very busy service with over 6,500 contacts requested this year.

Achievements

- Wayfield offers weekend contact for parents who cannot attend during the week.
- The Valuing Peoples Support Service works with families where the parents have a learning difficulty.
- This service has been successful in bridging the gap between adults and children services and is highly regarded within the court process.

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Background Papers:

None