

# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**19 JANUARY 2016**

## **ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ADULT SERVICES**

Report from: Councillor David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adult Services

### **Summary**

This report details the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services. The areas within the 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 Adult Services, according to the Council's constitution are:

- Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Service

### **2. Overview of 2015/16**

2.1 During 2015 the demands on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has continued to rise despite expectations that there was predicted to be a plateau and reduction. It was always recognised that there was likely to be an increase within the Looked After Children (LAC) population as Medway addressed some of the legacy cases making their way through the court system. As the impetus of the improvement work in Children's Social Care continued this had a ripple effect to the Quality Assurance (QA) and Safeguarding service and specifically for the IRO service which is an integrated service managing both LAC and child protection (CP) work. The recommendation within the IRO handbook for case allocation is between 50 and 70 but at the time of writing the IRO's are holding up to 87 cases. At the beginning of 2015 and with the increase in work at the beginning of 2014, there was a reduction in performance, although this began to improve at the latter end of 2014. However it is pleasing to note that the performance has made great strides despite the increased workload and is now performing above its targets. This has been due to reviewing processes, increased scrutiny of performance data in children's social care (CSC) and making changes to ensure that all the workforce is

responsible for performance and improving and understanding data and targets as well as ensuring that children remain at the heart and focus of the work.

- 2.2 The personnel changes made in 2014 have continued with the Interim Head of Service (HOS) still in post together with the Principal Reviewing Officer (PRO) also now some 13 months in the post, which has made a difference in terms of stability and consistent expectations. The post for HOS has been advertised and following interview the post offered. Unfortunately the applicant has withdrawn due to personal circumstances. A further strategy has been developed with an agency to source a permanent replacement.
- 2.3 The IRO team continues to remain reliant on agency staff which mirrors the national picture. However, although this has been a challenge, some progress has been made in appointing permanent staff. The challenges in appointments of IRO's consist of ensuring that any applicant has at least five years experience and has had management responsibility in line with the handbook and such applicants are competitively sought by a number of Local Authorities. Medway has carried out a benchmarking exercise to consider how to address its position and what other incentives could be applied. In the latest round of applications we have integrated the market premia payment that is usually advertised separately. This strategy was adopted to attempt a different approach –some authorities were paying higher rates but did not have other financial incentives in relation to year on year premia payment. By integrating this within the salary scale it demonstrates the true salary payment. Three applicants have recently been offered the opportunity of working in Medway and their references are awaited. In addition a management move has been integrated for one employee who has recently passed the probationary period. One of the recent appointments is someone who we hope 'to grow our own'. This candidate has not had direct management experience and is on the cusp of the five year experience but shows great potential. Clearly not all the vacancies can be filled with inexperienced staff but where the potential in some candidates can be seen, this is balanced against the experience workers, as a way forward.
- 2.4 By the new financial year the team will have 49% permanent staff with further interviews of four applicants to take place in January 2016. Whilst this may appear disappointing we are making progress – having had 67% of locum staff. There is confidence that this position will continue to improve.
- 2.5 Whilst there is a financial impact of having to retain locum staff the group that is presently employed are all very experienced professionals and they have been employed within Medway for some time. Whilst this is a financial burden for the authority, for the children in Medway this is very positive, particularly with staff movement within CSC as they try to stabilise their workforce. The IRO's have often been the consistent professional for the children who are Looked After and for families whose children are subject to CP Plans.

- 2.6 The Conference Centre at Eagle court is working extremely well and in a recent evaluation both professionals and families felt that the centre and the Strengthening Families (SF) model enabled them to participate, understand the concerns and risks and work towards mitigating these to ensure children are safe within their family. Equally the SF model gives clarity of the outcomes if the CP plan is not able to make and sustain change for children. A further evaluation will take place in the summer of 2016 to review and consider any further changes.
- 2.7 The SF model has now been adopted as the organisational model for Supervision, Assessments, Children in Need (CIN) meetings and Core Groups and at the time of writing is now being rolled out to Looked After Children reviews in line with the team action plan. It is worthy to note that the model is being adopted by our MSCB partners through the Learning and Development subgroup. Partners and particularly the health visiting service are using this in supervision to really focus on the issues in relation to child protection and what needs to change and how a particular agency plays a key role in this.
- 2.8 Considerable work has been undertaken to review and stream line the work of the IRO services. A specific data set for the service has been established alongside the overarching performance information. This is reported weekly within the service and monthly performance meetings with the HOS and PRO are held to ensure we are monitoring but also predicting issues that may arise. All the IRO's are given this information weekly to ensure that our performance targets remain consistently high – it can be somewhat competitive which is positive not only for the service but ultimately our children. We have introduced mid way reviews for both CP and LAC – these take place at 6 weeks following the initial CP conference or first LAC review and then every 3 months when both meetings are reviewed at 6 months. This enables the scrutiny and challenge to our colleagues within CSC that the plan is moving forward and there is no drift for children if the plan is not giving the results we anticipated. In addition the IRO allocated will contact the child at midway intervals and visit in person ensuring that the voice of the child is heard and they can express 'what difference we have made'.
- 2.9 An advocacy service has been commissioned to increase the active face to face participation of young people within Child Protection Conferences. Participation levels are high in terms of their voice either through documents, the IRO or their social worker but we want to ensure that those children who can attend some or all of the conference have the added assurance of a further independence through advocacy. Improvements will be monitored throughout the next six months.
- 2.10 In addition and because of the increased number of cases moving through the court process a paper de plan model has been introduced. Prior to this, for a child to be deplaned following the making of an order whereby they were not returning home, a conference needed to be convened. In the light of the numbers of conferences and slots

available it felt prudent to model this – our partners were in agreement and letters are sent to partners informing them that the child is subject to an order and not remaining with the birth parent and allowing them 10 days to give any views. This has worked well and freed up IRO time but also professionals time and is sensitive to a family whose child is no longer residing with them.

- 2.11 As part of the QA and Safeguarding team the IRO's play a crucial role in raising standards of practice. As part of this an IRO has been allocated to each pod within CSC – this is to enable consultation to take place and for workers to have the opportunity to 'check things out' with the IRO for the case. In addition the IRO has a role to play in any case in the court arena in giving their views with regard to the care plan and placement.
- 2.12 The Principal Reviewing Officer has delivered the Strengthening Families training across the authority together with the MSCB training officer and the Principal Social Worker, all of whom sit under the Head of Service of QA and Safeguarding. The IRO service take part in the Quality Assurance scheduling which includes regular auditing and attending the QAPM (Quality Assurance Performance Meetings) which are held by the QA Manager with CSC to look at what has been achieved and sets out team action plans for continued improvement.
- 2.13 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has been a major initiative within Medway resulting in a partnership within the new CSE Unit, which was launched on 2 December 2015 with an opening by the Director of Children and Adult Services. The IRO service have been heavily involved in this work to ensure that they are alive to any potential vulnerabilities of children they are reviewing either through CP plans or Looked After reviews.
- 2.14 The Strengthening Families model, as discussed above, has been driven by the IRO service very successfully together with multi agency and CSC training. It is a testament that other partners are now adopting this model for their own supervision and assessments purposes and writing conference and LAC reports using the format which clearly identifies what needs to change for children.
- 2.15 The Principal Reviewing Officer now sits on the Legal Gateway Panel, the Resource Panel, the Permanency and Monitoring Panel, Adoption Panel and the Case File Audit MSCB sub group, as well as holding regular surgeries with Managers and Heads of Service to ensure that there is a healthy discussion around plans. She also attends the CSC Management meeting on a regular basis to feed back the performance and issues. She writes a monthly assurance report for the Head of Service outlining successes and areas where improvement is required.
- 2.16 Since the last report child protection surgeries have taken place to review children subject to CP plans. We began the work at 15months+ and now continue to review from 9 months onwards to check and balance whether there is improvement for children, whether this is

sustainable and if not what next steps need to be taken within the child's timescales.

- 2.17 A more robust escalation policy has been launched which moves from Stage 1 through to Stage 5 (which is Director of Children and Adult Services (DCS) level). Most of the issues are resolved between Stage 1 and 2 within prescribed timescales. There have been three occasions when the escalation has needed to be resolved at the DCS level. We have not needed to raise any escalations to CAFCASS.
- 2.18 Cancelled Conference and Reviews: this process was introduced at the beginning of 2015 to improve the control over cancelled conferences and reviews and to ensure that children were being reviewed within the statutory timescales. The only change to a review, both LAC and CP, is with the explicit authorisation of the QA Head of Service or PRO. This has proved beneficial for children, carers and professionals but has also added to the improved performance outcomes.
- 2.19 In line with the improvement journey and changes in social workers the PRO in supervision with IRO's now add any issues raised in supervision on a specific child to the child's electronic file. This is clearly marked **IRO supervision** to prevent any confusion around management decisions. This has been an added benefit whilst the CSC stabilise its workforce as the IRO have been a stable team for a period of time.
- 2.20 The strengthening of the performance agenda as stated has seen an increase in the performance of the team and will be sustainable going forward providing there is some movement in the decrease in the numbers of children becoming subject to CP plans or LAC in the future. It is anticipated with the changes to the front door and strengthening of the Family Intensive Support Service (FISS) and Specialist Multi Agency Response Team during 2016 that this will stabilise. Performance throughout 2015 has improved in relation to Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) - from April to November Medway's performance for ICPC within 15 days increased from 78% to a consistent average of 93%. The Medway target is 72% and whilst the expectation was that this improvement would be sustainable there has been an unexpected continued increase in the number of children subject to a plan. We currently have 500 children subject to a plan compared to 472 in January and 440 Looked After children compared to 410 in the same period. In December we anticipate a further 35 children who are likely to be made subject to a plan This could place this performance at some risk.

<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>2013/14 YTD performance</b>	<b>2015/16 YTD performance</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Average IRO worker caseload	N/A	77	87	Average case load as at time of writing report
% children whose ICPC was held within 15 working days of the initiating strat	72% or higher	50%	93%	Performance has continued to improve and is now above the Medway target
Number of reviews completed in period	N/A	1951	2198	Total number of ICPCs, RCPCs and LAC reviews from April to the end of November (not full validated)
Number of de-planned Child Protection cases	N/A	264	322	Number of de-planned cases to end of November

### **3. The Future**

- 3.1 The IRO service has made considerable progress in the last year and this is demonstrated on the positive impact for children and young people and their families and sits well with the improvement journey that Medway has been on and the outcome achieved in the recent Ofsted inspection which acknowledged the hard work of the staff.
- 3.2 Overall it has been a successful year for the IRO service but it will not sit on its laurels and there is more work to do and improvements to be made to ensure that it achieves the very best outcomes for the children in Medway.
- 3.3 The challenges ahead are the ongoing increase in the numbers of children subject to plans and the numbers of Looked After children with the same establishment at present. However this will need to be monitored closely in line with the stronger services at the front door.
- 3.4 The biggest challenge continues to be recruitment to the posts and we have enlisted the services of a dedicated agency to look for suitable qualified staff to join a strong and stable team. The last advertisement which integrated the market premia payment has bore fruit with 2 borne very experienced IRO practitioners joining us in the New Year and it is hoped that this will produce further permanent staff. The recent Ofsted outcome will also encourage staff to apply to Medway which will move from a solid 'requires improvement' to good in the future.

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**Background Papers:**

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