

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 JANUARY 2017

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ADULT SERVICES

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

Author: Christine Impey, Interim Head of QA and Safeguarding

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. It provides details on the services provided by the Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Service, which has responsibility for the chairing of statutory reviews of Looked After Children, and the chairing of multi-disciplinary meetings in relation to children who are the subject of a child protection plan.

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. Demand

2.1 During 2016, the demand on the Independent Reviewing Officer Team has reduced compared to the previous year. The below table illustrates a reduction in the numbers of Looked After Children and those subject to a Child Protection Plan.

	Number of Looked After Children	Number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan
December 2015	437	515
December 2016	395	319

- 2.2 The reduction in these numbers relates to the operational changes in Children's Service, including both the initial triage service as well as the strengthening of the Integrated Family Support Service, and a range of other factors.
- 2.3 In relation to LAC reviews it is essential that young people participate in these meetings and gain a sense of control and empowerment in relation to decisions made about their lives. As of December 2016 96% of LAC reviews included participation of children and young people using a variety of media, attendance at meetings, consultation forms, use of advocates and so on. In addition the IRO visits young people in between reviews. As of December 2016, 70% of young people were visited in between reviews. It is important to note that young people are able to refuse these visits.

3. Performance

Performance indicator	2014	2015	2016
Average IRO worker caseload	77	87	64
% children whose ICPC was held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting	50%	93%	87%
% LAC reviews completed within time period	88%	97%	97%
Number of reviews completed	1951	2198	2033 Comprising of: 872 LAC Reviews 931 Review Child Protection Conferences 230 Initial Child Protection Conferences
Number of children who are no longer subject to Child Protection Plans	264	322	464

3.1 **ICPC Timescales**

The current performance is at 87% which is reduced from 93% in the previous year. This is in relation to transfer in conferences from other local authorities being delayed due to a lack of interpreter / social worker availability for other local authorities. A further protocol has been agreed in relation to transfer in conferences from other local authorities and it is hoped the target performance of 90% will be met in April 2017.

3.2 **Dispute Resolutions**

A key role of the IRO is to raise alerts and challenges when there appears to be drift and delay, poor practice or poor decision making. Over the past year the IRO service has focused on improving the efficiency of these alerts, as a result, the number of alerts raised has significantly increased, IRO's are keenly aware of the progress of the children allocated to them and are stronger in acting as the Local Authority's challenge.

4. **Capacity and Staff Establishment**

4.1 The IRO team continues to remain reliant on agency staff which mirrors the national picture, although over the past 12 months this has significantly improved. 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.

4.2 Whilst this is a financial burden for Medway, it is often the case that the IRO is the only consistent professional involved with the children. All the locum staff have been consistently employed in Medway as an IRO for over 2 years, which has provided stability in service delivery to children and their families / carers..

4.3 Over the past 12 months there has been a significant improvement in the recruitment of permanent staff, in December 2016 the team was staffed by 47% locum staff and 53% permanent staff. This will reduce further in February 2017 when a further permanent staff member will join the team reducing the locum staff ratio further to 39%.

4.4 Furthermore, 2 locum staff are currently considering moving to permanent contracts. This could further reduce agency costs to a ratio of 25% agency staff.

4.5 With regard to the management of the QA and safeguarding service as a whole, Medway made a successful appointment to the substantive Head of Service role. Unfortunately due to personal reasons, the post holder has now left the organization. An interim Head of Service was appointed in December 2016 and is, as of 9 January 2017, is now in post.

4.6 The Operational Manager for the IRO service is a permanent post and has been consistent for over 2 years, which has contributed significantly to the continuity of leadership and continuous improvement.

4.7 In the latter quarter of last year, Councillor Brake met with the IRO team to discuss the role, function and challenges of the IRO service. This was a very positive meeting.

5. Future Plans

5.1 The service as a whole will be reviewed following the appointment of a new Interim Head of QA and safeguarding in January 2017. This will examine both service delivery and efficiency moving forward including right-sizing the service to meet demand. In addition, a comprehensive and robust recruitment campaign is planned for the New Year.

Lead officer contact

Christine Impey, Interim Head of QA and Safeguarding, Gun Wharf,
Tel: 01634 334001 Email: christine.impey@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None