

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 JUNE 2018

ANNUAL UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services

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Summary

This report provides a summary update to members on progress and developments within Children's Services.

This annual update is brought to members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny to support the Committee in its role in reviewing and scrutinising performance of the Council's Children's Social Care Services.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Medway Council was inspected by Ofsted in September 2015, and its Children's Services were found to be 'Requiring Improvement'. Under the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, a 'Requiring Improvement' Authority would expect a further standard inspection within a three year period. This is in addition to a potential focussed visit and/or a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).
- 1.2 Following the last inspection of the Local Authority's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, and care leavers in September 2015, actions were specified in the 'Together We Can' improvement plan. Where some recommendations remain outstanding and/or where there are challenges to address these, further actions have been incorporated into the new 'Promoting Practice' plan for 2018.
- 1.3 Internal scrutiny of progress is undertaken by the Children's Services Management Team. The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member) chairs the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children's Services Delivery Board which has been established to support the Council's priority focus on Children's Services, as well as the Medway Children and Young People's Transformation Board to support partnership working. Monthly 'dashboard' meetings are also held between the Lead Member, the Director of Children's Services and the Deputy Director of Children's Services.

2. Background

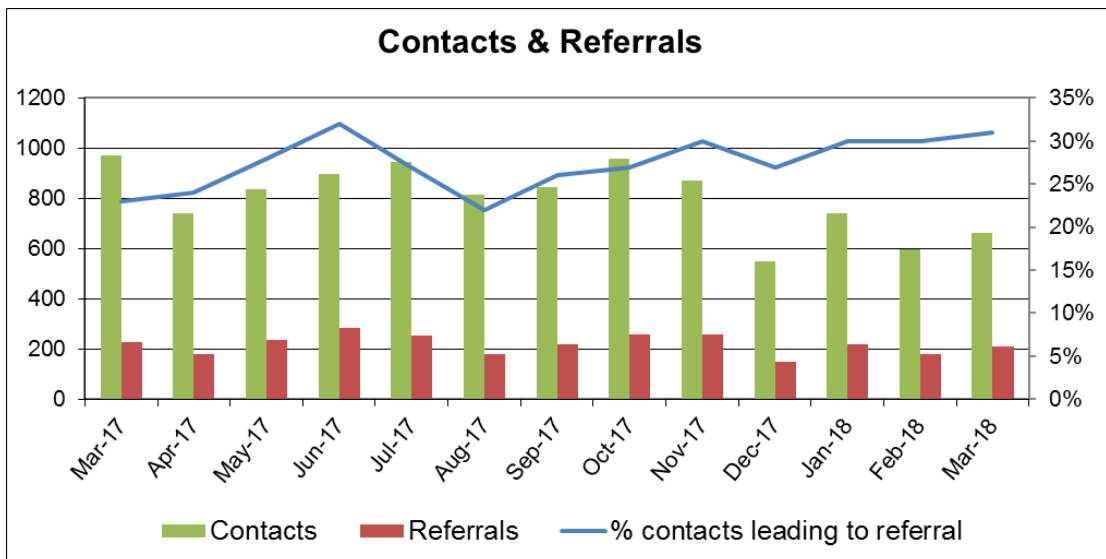
- 2.1 The Children's Services senior leadership team is stable and permanent, led by Ann Domenev, Deputy Director. Our delivery of Children's Services is informed by our vision of achieving positive change for families we work with so that children are safe, services are effective, and families feel supported and enabled to care for their children. This vision has informed our redesign of Children's Services with the development of small area-based social work teams, known as pods, each with one Practice Manager and four social workers. These work with children and families, following assessment, throughout their engagement with statutory social work. This service design was created with the intention of minimising the social work changes experienced by children and families.
- 2.2 Each pod has a strong focus on quality of practice, underpinned by a systemic practice model of service delivery. This way of working promotes strong networks with partners and communities, and supports purposeful and focused interventions with families. Practice Managers have an explicit responsibility for overseeing and driving up quality and consistency of social work practice and thus outcomes for children.
- 2.3 We launched this model of social work in September 2016 to strengthen frontline leadership. The boundaries of this area-based model are consistent with those in Early Help. The structure has been designed to ensure good join up across Early Help and Safeguarding in the four Medway areas. In each of the areas, Child and Family hubs are established to provide targeted support for those cases that do not meet the criteria for statutory social work. The creation of the Child and Family hubs has been based on our vision of 'Right Place, Right Time, Right Service'. Primary School Leaders have now aligned school clusters called Learning Zones with these areas to create opportunities for a consistent and locally sensitive response to need.
- 2.4 The four Child and Family Hubs will work intensively with families that have more complex needs, to prevent need escalating and avoid children requiring statutory social work intervention. The recent restructure has integrated our early help and early years offer into one service working out of a four-area locality model. This is being delivered through a Child and Family hub and, supported by part time Children and Family Wellbeing Centres, and Outreach Centres in each of the four areas. This model will strengthen our ability to work with other agencies, schools and academies to develop stronger professional local networks.
- 2.5 Each hub will have an Early Years and an Early Help team working alongside each other to provide an integrated service from 0-25 years. The hubs will work with children and families who need targeted services but do not meet the statutory threshold for social work intervention. In addition, there will be access to centralised teams of school attendance/ inclusion practitioners; information advice and guidance; youth services, specialist family support, and the youth offending team. These services offer a range of both universal, preventative and in some cases, specialist support across Medway.
- 2.6 Other partners will also work from the hubs, including a range of community child health services and health promotion services commissioned by Public

Health and the CCG as well as community mental health services commissioned from NELFT. Recently established roles of the Early Help social workers and Early Help coordinators will be crucial in signposting families to either universal, preventative, targeted or specialist services. Early Help coordinators take part on a rota basis in the single point of access in First Response ensuring that no child falls through gaps.

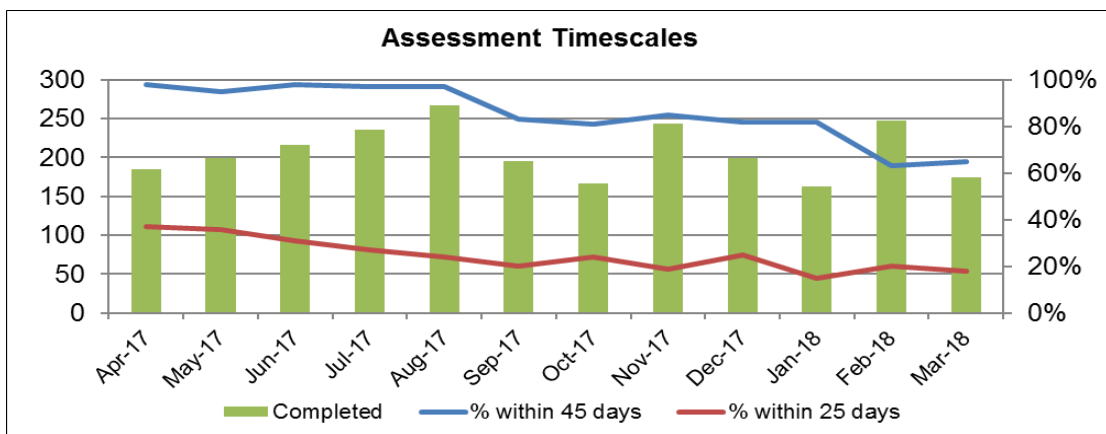
- 2.7 We have committed ourselves to an improvement programme of Promoting Practice in Frontline Services based on the principles of a relationship and strengths-based approach to Strengthening Families. This is aimed at building stronger, more resilient families that can safely care for children and young people.
- 2.8 We believe that we have the right structure in place and we need to embed it and concentrate on improving basic practice and culture. We are confident that through our Promoting Practice Plans for 2018 we are focussing on the right areas for improvement and this is reflected in our priorities, with the emphasis on the need to recruit and retain high quality social work practitioners, and to embed and sustain improvements in consistency of practice.

3. Quality of Practice – Child in Need and Child Protection

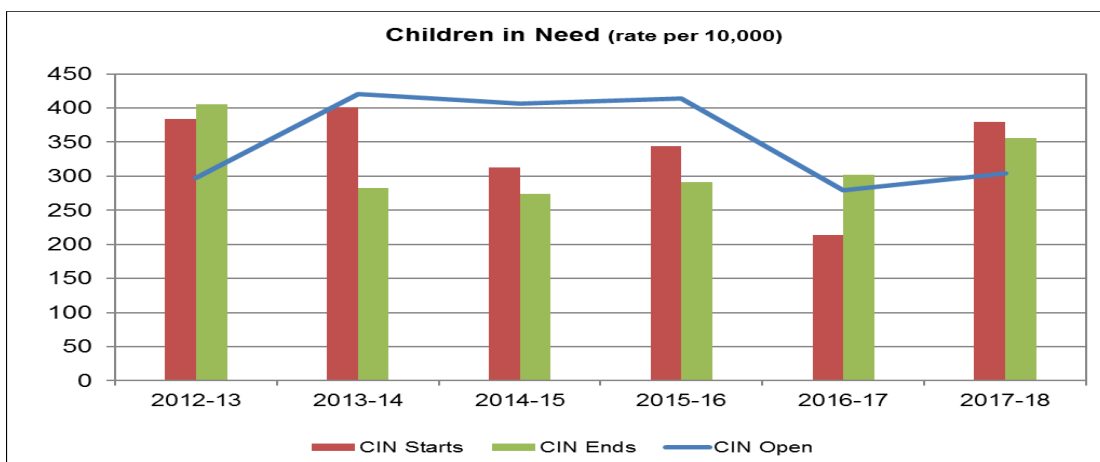
- 3.1 The First Response Service was launched in April 2018 and is comprised of our co-located 'Single Point of Access' (SPA), new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and our social work assessment teams. The SPA for Children and Families is our front door to Early Help and statutory social work services. To ensure the right children and young people get the right service, qualified social workers, early help co-ordinators and education safeguarding staff assess against the threshold criteria, to make timely and proportionate decisions, led by social work managers.
- 3.2 The development of the MASH reflects the close partnership between key agencies in Medway and co-locates police, professionals from other Children's Services Teams, Health and Education Safeguarding. There is additional involvement of virtual partners from Probation and Housing to improve information sharing at the front door.
- 3.3 The recent Local Government Association (LGA) Safeguarding Diagnostic confirmed arrangements at the front door and decision making is robust, and partners reported very positively about their experience of contact with our First Response Service.
- 3.4 There were 9405 contacts in the 12 months to 31 March 2018, which converted into 2630 referrals, a rate of 412 per 10,000. The percentage of re-referrals in 2017/18 was 17% which is a reduction from the 18% in 2016/17.



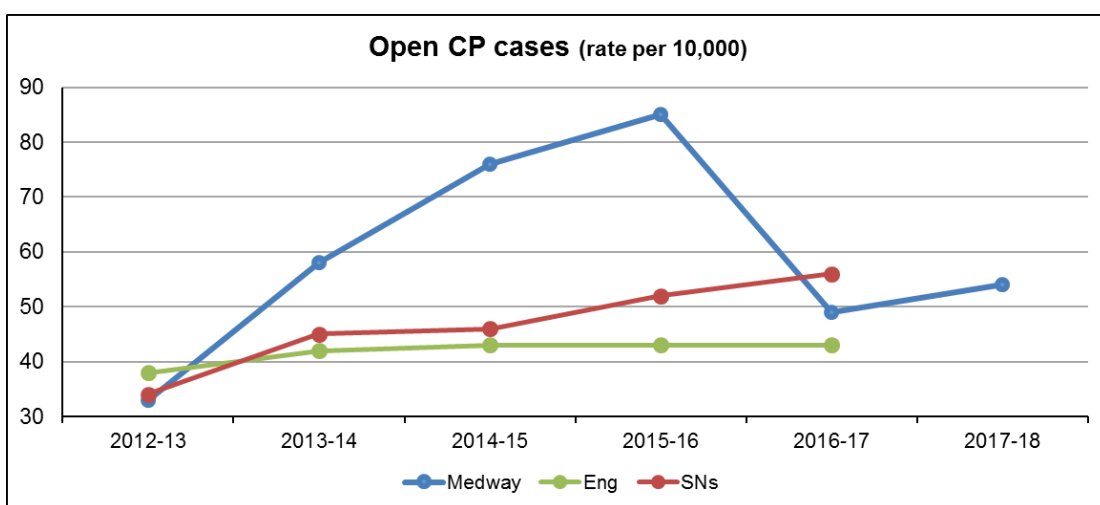
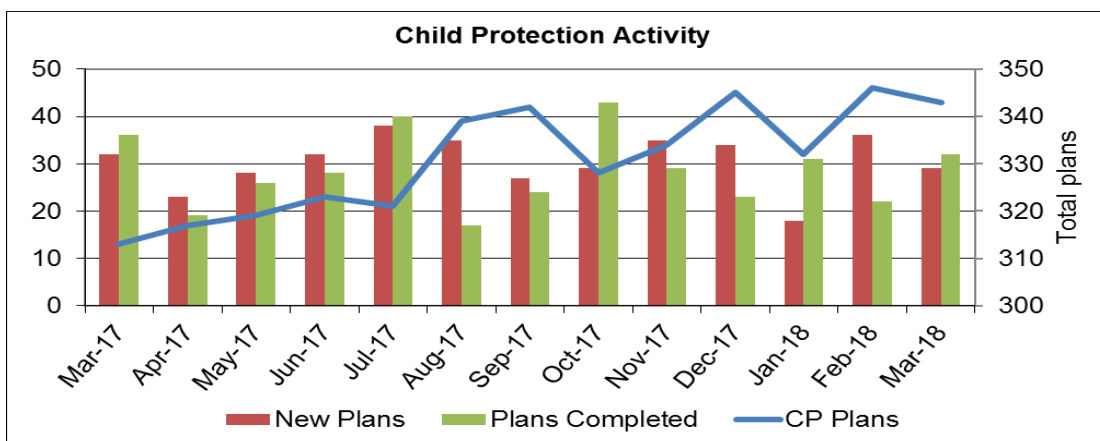
3.5 There are four Social Work Assessment Teams, responsible for completing Children and Family Assessments and conducting brief interventions. If the intervention is successful, cases are closed, or stepped-down to Early Help. If it is clear that a longer intervention is required, they are transferred to the area based social work pods. In 2017/18 there were 2493 completed assessments, 391 per 10,000, reduced from 442 in 16/17 and 493 in 15/16. 86% of assessments are completed within 45 working days.



3.6 There were 2418 Children in Need (CIN) starts in the year, which is a rate of 380 per 10,000. This is up from 214 per 10,000 in 2016/17. The number of open CIN has increased from 1776 at the end of 2016/17 to 1937 at the end of 2017/18.



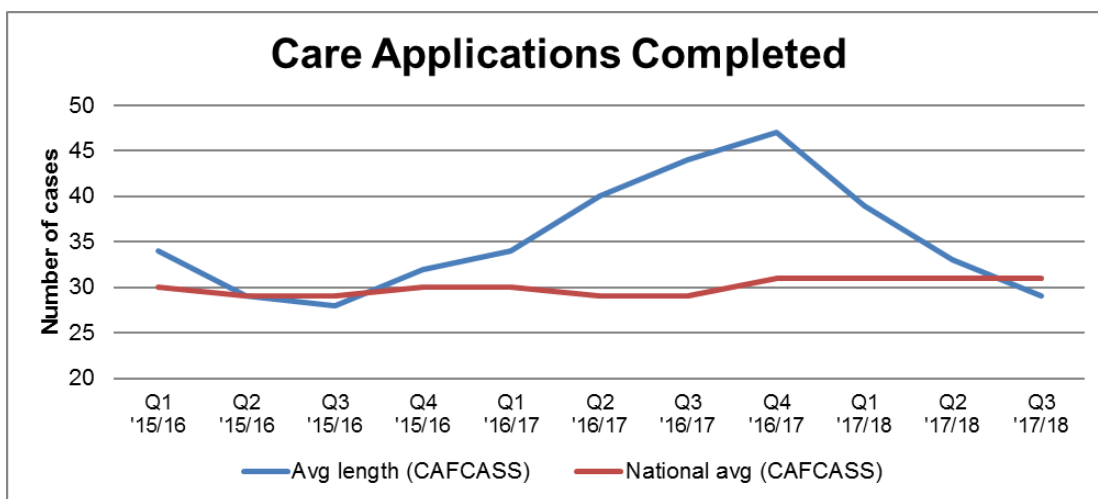
3.7 In the last 12 months, there has been an increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection (CP) plans from 313 to 343. This increase is seen as being a positive impact of the quality and timeliness of decision making to safeguard children, and also reflects the increases reported nationally. On 31 March 2018, the 343 children subject to a CP plan equates to a rate of 54 per 10,000. This is above the 43 per 10,000 for England in March 2017, but slightly below the 56 per 10,000 for our Statistical Neighbours.



3.8 Interventions are generally timely; most plans last between 6-12 months. Those children subject to a CP plan for 2+ years was 5.8% of the total number

of children subject to child protection plans, which is higher than the National average of 2.1%. In 2017, we established a Support and Solution Panel; a multi-agency panel of senior managers from partner agencies who work to remove the barriers impacting the progression of child protection plans. This panel meets six weekly and reviews children who have been subject to a child protection plan for over 18 months.

- 3.9 We know from our analysis of referrals that domestic abuse is the most common presenting need at point of referral. As a result, we have created two new Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator roles which will be located across the 4 Child and Family Hubs and the First Response Service. These roles will be responsible for providing support to families in crisis.
- 3.10 All cases where use of the public law outline is being considered are presented to Legal Gateway Panel, chaired by the Children’s Safeguarding Head of Service and attended by the Assistant Head of Legal Services. A log of all cases presented at Legal Gateway Panel is maintained including pre-proceedings cases. The role of Legal Practice Development Manager (LPDM) has been established to ensure robust monitoring of completion of identified actions, quality of assessments, and to progress permanency. The rate of issuing proceedings has been recently reducing with numbers now stabilising.
- 3.11 The average timescale for proceedings is also reducing overall, at the end of 2017 having fallen below the national average. Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) data reporting shows that in quarter 3 of 2017/2018 the average length of care proceedings had reduced to 29 weeks, compared to an average of 44 weeks for the same time period in 2016.

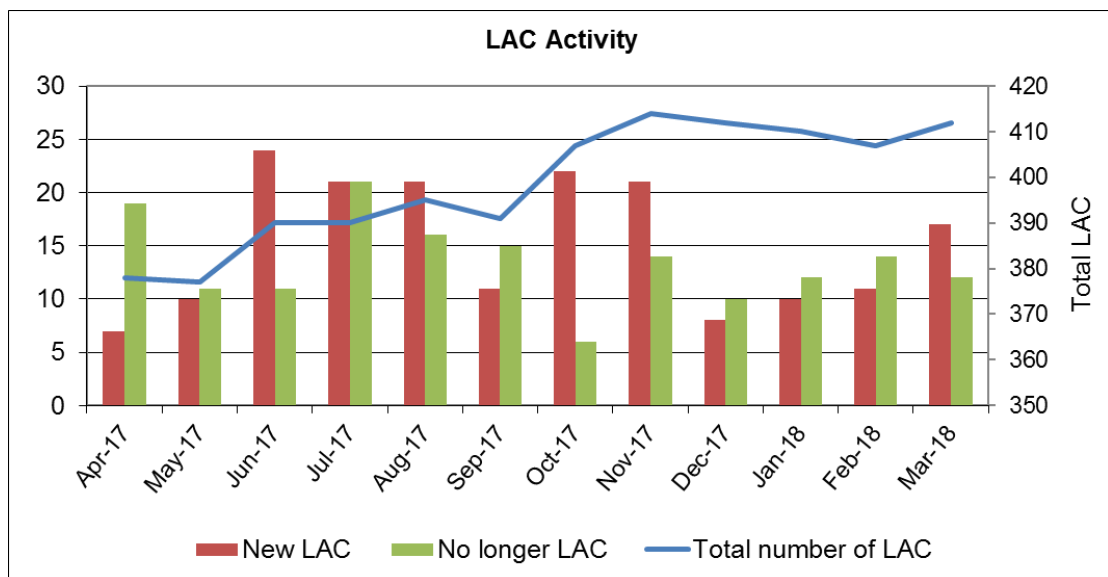


4. Quality of Practice – Looked After Children

- 4.1 As Corporate Parents, Medway Council holds the highest ambition for all the children and young people under our care and for those young people who are leaving our care. Supporting our children and young people is one of our key priorities and we want to make sure we support all those we care for to the very best of our ability. We are committed to continuing progress against our pledge to children in care that was developed by our children in care council:

- Children/young people to be treated as individuals – not a number on a caseload or a statistic
- Reduce the number of social work changes
- We have 6 month reviews but how can we review our workers?
- Get up to date!
- More choice of accommodation for care leavers

4.2 At the end of 2017/18 there were 413 children looked after, and the rate (per 10,000) was 65. This rate is in line with the England rate per 10,000 of 62 (2016-17) and well below the rate for our statistical neighbours of 73. Over the last two years, the number of children in care has reduced overall in spite of an increase in the last year.



4.3 Of the children and young people looked after at the end of March 2018:

- 92% are placed within the area – Medway/Kent (54% Medway, 38% Kent)
- 60% are placed within the local authority's own provision
- 341 live with foster carers, of whom 67% live with local authority foster carers
- 22 live in children's homes
- 2 live in residential special schools
- 4 live with parents
- 23 placed for adoption
- 16 are in supported accommodation
- 5 are in other

4.4 Medway Council operates two children's homes. Both are judged as being Good by Ofsted. One was cited to contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children; the other home, which provides overnight respite for disabled children, was judged to be Good in all areas in November 2017.

4.5 There were a total of 151 LAC endings in the last 12 months, of which 35 were adoptions (23% of those leaving care). This continues our success on

securing adoption for older children and sibling groups. 19 children (13% of children leaving care) became the subject of special guardianship orders. 50 children returned home to live with parents. 31% of those who were adopted in the last 12 months were aged 5+. This compares to England and Statistical Neighbours three year average of 5% of children adopted aged 5+ adopted.

- 4.6 There is now a clear process in place to track permanency options for all children in care and ensure plans are implemented in a timely way. We have significantly improved our response to children requiring permanence through adoption.
- 4.7 A new tracking process has been established to support the early identification of children who may require an adoptive placement and to support joint work between the adoption teams and frontline social work teams when an adoption placement is appropriate. Stability of adoptive placements is very good, with a disruption rate of 2%.
- 4.8 The Mind of My Own App (MOMO) was introduced to Medway in July 2017; this is an app that affords young people the opportunity to share their views, wishes and feelings at any time. Medway has been confirmed as one of MOMO's top users nationally. Over 240 statements have been received from young people through MOMO, 28% of which have been to share good news. Young people in care have used MOMO to express that they feel 'happy', 'supported' and 'settled' at home. Young people speak very highly of MOMO and plans are in place to fund Medway Express, an app for younger children and those with communication difficulties over the next financial year.

5. Quality of Practice – Leaving Care

- 5.1 At the last Ofsted inspection, services for care leavers were judged to be 'Good'. A Personal Advisor gets alongside young people in care at their 16½-Year Review and works jointly with the social worker until the case transfers when the young person reaches their 18th birthday. There is a dedicated Personal Advisor to support young people with disabilities as they transition into Adult Services.
- 5.2 There are currently 157 care leavers receiving support from our Leaving Care Team along with 54 children in care aged 16+. This is an increase from the 142 care leavers supported at the end of March 2017. The extension of support to 25 years has increased those being supported aged 21+ from 18 care leavers to 30.
- 5.3 Young People have been involved in developing the new Local Offer, and of the Pathway Plan that is now being used. They have also contributed to the development of the quarterly training for staff on Pathway Planning.
- 5.4 The Corporate Parenting Board supports the development of a mentoring scheme for Care Leavers in partnership with Young Lives Foundation (YLF). Following consultation with the MCYPC (CICC) Care Leavers Group the concept of a Mentoring Service for Care Leavers was adopted as a clear strategy to take forward by YLF. The members identified gaps in the support that they were/had received and how consistent support from an adult other than their PA would be helpful in adapting to 'Independent Living', sustain

education/employment placements and support existing tenancies (i.e. preventing placement breakdown). Mentors will be drawn from senior officers of the Council and local business leaders who are willing to undergo training from Young Lives Foundation.

- 5.5 Relationships with Probation have been strengthened. They are now always involved in supporting the review of the Pathway Plan for young people known to them.
- 5.6 Currently 95% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation, up from 88% at the end of 2016/17.
- 5.7 We have an increasing number of care leavers going to university, with 16 as of September 2017.
- 5.8 The Council has established a fund to support care leavers to manage council tax, and provides Leisure Passes for care leavers up to 25 years.

6. Other Vulnerable children

- 6.1 The social work team for children with disabilities transferred from Adults to Children's Services in January 2018. This 0-25 team is part of an integrated multi-disciplinary team responsible for 276 disabled children and 232 disabled young people. The team does not hold case accountability for Child Protection cases although there are plans to change this. These cases are jointly allocated, with the area social worker as the lead worker.
- 6.2 In December 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission carried out a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) local area inspection. The inspectors concluded that there were some areas of significant weakness and determined that a written statement of action should be developed. A written statement of action forms the basis of an improvement plan and documents the outcomes the actions we are taking in response to the areas of weakness outlined in the published inspection outcome letter.
- 6.3 We currently have 14 children in privately arranged foster placements. There is a full-time Private Fostering Social Worker who ensures that private fostering notifications are responded to and arrangements are supported.
- 6.4 The Youth Offending Team (YOT) currently consists of approximately 19 YOT staff. This is made up of Youth Justice Partners such as a Police Officer, Health Leads and Education/ Training. There are four social workers specialising in court work. The YOT is based in a local Youth Centre. This gives staff the ability to work with young people in a private 1-1 space but also utilise the youth centre activities - sports hall, kitchen, pool/ table tennis, arts and crafts. Medway YOT volunteered to take part in a pilot inspection using the new Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) framework. This took place in January 2018. Feedback received was mostly positive and has informed the next stages of improvement planning.
- 6.5 Vulnerabilities, including Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and 'Gang' related activity continue to be a priority. Medway has a well-established multi-agency group that meets regularly to discuss young people and their families where

professional concern has been raised regarding risk of gang association and/or gang affiliation. Children's Services co-ordinate a regular Vulnerable Young People's Panel chaired by the First Response Service Manager, sharing information, reviewing and strengthening safety plans for all children identified as being either vulnerable to or currently at risk as a result of exploitation by others. Police Officers from the Missing and Child Exploitation Team (MCET) attend to share information. Targeted assertive outreach is provided to young people at risk of Missing, CSE, and involvement with gangs.

- 6.6 In the year to 31 March 2018, there were 351 children with missing episodes, of which 61 children were LAC. Return home interviews were offered to all the young people, with 223 accepting the offer. Since January 2018 the Youth Service has had responsibility for undertaking return home interviews for young people who are missing and who are not known to Children's Services, or where an independent interview is thought to be in the best interests of the child when they have been missing from home or care.
- 6.7 The ongoing role and responsibility of the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools and Academies (AASSA) is pivotal in ensuring that children and young people missing from Education are identified where possible and a suitable educational establishment or provision is identified, and the child or young person returned and receiving an education.
- 6.8 There are very low reported incidents of other hidden harms. Our responses to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Forced Marriage, and Honour Based Abuse form part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and Action Plan.

7. Workforce

- 7.1 The recruitment and retention of social workers to Medway is a main priority. We are committed to providing relationship based social work and aware that families and interventions benefit from consistency. We continue to seek a permanent workforce through the development and retention of our staff. Having achieved a permanent leadership team, we will continue to focus on recruitment. As with many social care employers this remains an ongoing challenge.
- 7.2 We have recently redesigned our career progression to reward continuity of practice for children and families. This means that in addition to the organisational improvements we have made and the new professional development opportunities available for social workers and leaders, we have designed career pathways for social workers that reflect the importance we place on the work that social workers do. Our offer to social workers in respect of pay rewards has been improved to support our aspirations for recruitment and retention.
- 7.3 In order to further support retention, we have agreed an additional 10 FTE social work posts to facilitate lower caseloads and manage work pressures.
- 7.4 The establishment across social work services is 147 FTE social workers and managers; 39% of vacancies for social workers are in First Response and Area Pods; these vacancies are covered by agency social workers.

- 7.5 We are investing in staff to develop their knowledge and skills, so that they can deliver more effective interventions and good outcomes for children and young people. We have invested in 2 Principal Social Worker posts (PSW) to support the leadership team to drive up the quality of practice, providing leadership to the children's team in the Medway Academy.
- 7.6 There is ongoing investment in learning and development opportunities created through the Social Work Academy and a Practice Development Programme designed to embed and underpin the Strengthening Families approach. We have designed a comprehensive core and advanced skills programme through our Children and Adults Academy plus accredited training programmes for Systemic Practice; Practice Educating and Leadership Development.

8. Partnership working

- 8.1 In our Child and Family Hubs, there will be access to centralised teams of school attendance/ inclusion practitioners; information advice and guidance; youth services, specialist family support, and the Youth Offending Team. These services offer a range of both universal, preventative and in some cases, specialist support across Medway. Other partners will also work from the hubs, including a range of community child health services and health promotion services commissioned by Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) as well as community mental health services commissioned from North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT).
- 8.2 The development of the MASH reflects the close partnership between key agencies in Medway and co-locates police, professionals from other Children's Services Teams, Health and Education Safeguarding. There is additional involvement of virtual partners from Probation and Housing to improve information sharing at the front door.
- 8.3 From the summer of 2017 the Local Authority established a Support and Solution Panel, this is a multi-agency panel of senior managers from partner agencies who meet to reflect on and attempt to remove the barriers that are impacting on the progression of the child protection plan. This panel meets six weekly and reviews those children who have been subject to a child protection plan for over 18 months.
- 8.4 The Medway Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) undertakes regular auditing of multi-agency child protection in Medway which provides an additional level of scrutiny and insight into practice.

9. Quality Assurance and Performance Monitoring

- 9.1 We have several ways to evaluate the quality and impact of our social work. As well as the internal monitoring of safeguarding arrangements through individual supervision, the regular monthly Performance and Quality Assurance meeting chaired by the Deputy Director supports the use of data, including benchmarking data, which has led to a stronger performance management culture with managers using information to monitor their services. The meeting involves managers from across the social work service with support from Business and Intelligence colleagues, focussing on key

performance data, outcomes of audit activity and quantitative and qualitative performance reports from each area or service, facilitating discussion relating to performance pressures and addressing common issues to support improvement planning.

- 9.2 Performance reports which include data on safeguarding activity are presented regularly to the Children and Adults Directorate Management team and the Delivery Board. We have identified the need to draw into our Promoting Practice action planning our combined analysis of audit outcomes, feedback, complaints, and escalations. The new arrangements support the identification of issues and development of action plans to support this approach, as well as identifying, sharing and building upon good practice.
- 9.3 The Quality Assurance Service co-ordinates the audit programme, which includes regular monthly casefile audits in addition to 'deep dive', thematic audits, and multi-agency audits. The audits provide analysis of practice and impact and have informed the learning and development opportunities we have developed.
- 9.4 Audits are the prime method that we use to understand the quality of front line practice. The key to meaningful file audits is that they are completed alongside the front-line practitioner to allow time for learning and reflection. Since February, new arrangements require auditors to critically evaluate casework, seek feedback from parents/carers and speak with the social worker for their own reflection on their practice. Feedback from the LGA about the new audit arrangement is very positive.

10. Governance

- 10.1 Internal scrutiny is undertaken by the Children's Services Management Team.
- 10.2 The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member) chairs the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council's Children's Services Delivery Board, which has been established to support the Council's priority focus on Children's Services, as well as the Medway Children and Young People's Transformation Board to support partnership working. Monthly 'dashboard' meetings are also held between the Lead Member, the Director of Children's Services and the Deputy Director of Children's Services.

11. Next steps and priorities going forward

- 11.1 Progress continues against all the actions specified in the Promoting Practice plans. This means embedding and sustaining progress on improving quality of practice and monitoring impact on children and families.
- 11.2 We will be providing a rolling programme of Promoting Practice Foundation training; this will also form the induction for social workers.
- 11.3 Our focus is to develop the recruitment and retention of permanent social workers in Medway, to secure higher levels of consistency.

12. Advice and analysis

- 12.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to consider, note and discuss the progress update in relation to Children's Services.
- 12.2 This annual update is brought to Members to support the Committee in its role in reviewing and scrutinising performance of the Council's Children's Social Care Services.
- 12.3 There are no policy or structure implications.

13. Risk Management

- 13.1 Failure to make continued and required progress in relation to Children's Services presents a risk to the Council in relation to future Ofsted inspection grading.

14. Consultation

- 14.1 Our partner agencies are regularly consulted with as part of our vision for strong and effective multi-agency working.

15. Implications for Looked After Children

- 15.1 The implications for Looked After Children are set out within the report, in particular section 4 to the report. Children's Services aim to ensure that services are effectively delivering their role as Corporate Parent.

16. Financial and legal implications

- 16.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising from this report other than ongoing support of the improvement journey.

17. Recommendation

- 17.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress made and continued improvement in Children's Services.

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Background papers

None

Appendices

None