

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

**5 MARCH 2020**

### **ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ADULTS' SERVICES**

Report from: Councillor David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services

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#### **Summary**

This report details the area covered by the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services that is covered by this committee. 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 of the services provided by the Independent Reviewing Officer team, which has responsibility for the chairing of statutory reviews of Looked After Children. In addition, it provides details of the services provided by the Child Protection Conference Chairs team, both that are part of the wider safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service.

#### **1. Background**

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, according to the Council's constitution are:

- Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

#### **2. Demand**

2.1 During 2019 the demand on the Independent Reviewing Officer has remained relatively stable whereas there has been a bigger rise in Child Protection. The table below illustrates:

	<b>Number of Children Subject to Child Protection Plan</b>	<b>Number of Looked After Children</b>
2017/18	343	412
2018/19	355	425
January 2020	438	434

- 2.2 There has been a small increase of 3% of looked after children since the last reporting period which the stability of these figures might suggest that the right children and young people are coming into care. There has been a more significant rise in the number of children subject to a child protection plan and we might hypothesise that this may negatively impact LAC numbers for the next reporting period that will be post ILACS inspection by Ofsted.

### 3. The Child's Voice

- 3.1 In relation to Looked After Children (LAC) reviews it is essential that children and young people participate in these meetings and gain a sense of control and empowerment in relation to decisions made about their lives. The review process should start with the child and end with the child; it should be about enabling the child to talk about themselves and feel good about their life and their care plan. The target set by the department is 90%. Current performance is 85% which is a slight improvement from the 83% last year. Participation includes a variety of mediums; attendance at meetings, consultation forms, use of advocates, direct contribution and many other forms in between. This has remained consistent since last year.
- 3.2 IRO's have a duty to offer every looked after child a visit (s) in between reviews where they are invited to state who they wish to attend, where they would like it to be held and what they would like to discuss. The participation of our children and young people within their Reviews is a key aspect to the role of the IRO. Over the last three months we have focused our attention on the engagement and participation of children and young people and are aspirational for this within the care Planning Process. We have co-produced the re-design of the Consultation Booklet with a group of young people and the support of The Young Lives Foundation and are looking towards the re-design of the LAC Review template through co-production. We are currently collaborating with our Business and Intelligence colleagues how to accurately report this going forward.

### 4. Performance

Performance Indicator	2017/18	2018/19	November 2019
Average IRO Caseload			68
Highest IRO Caseload			70
Average CPC Caseload			87.4
Highest CPC Caseload			95
% of LAC with all reviews in timescale within the last 12 months	88%	83%	79%
% LAC reviews in period completed within timescale	98%	97%	90%
Total number of reviews completed	1182	1191	509 (YTD)
% children whose ICPC was held within 15 working days of strategy discussion	88%	75%	74% (YTD)
Total number of CPCs completed	1121	1721	1337 (YTD)

#### **4.1 Average Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Child Protection Conference (CPC) Chairs Caseloads**

- 4.1.1. This has increased to an average of 68 children per IRO year to date with highest caseloads currently sitting at 70. Numbers for each worker were previously calculated to include both children subject to child protection plans and children in care prior to a restructure of this service to 2 distinct specialist teams (CPCs, and IROs) that was undertaken in October 2018. It is estimated that a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service, including the full range of functions set out in The IRO Handbook. (Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children).
- 4.1.2 We have perhaps seen the greatest increase for CPCs where this has increased to an average of 87.4 children per CPC year to date with highest caseloads currently sitting at 95. For CPCs to confidently track and monitor children subject to CP Plans and provide midway reviews for each child to ensure that plans are being progressed and delay is minimized, an average caseload of 70-80 would enable us to confidently move to this position.
- 4.1.3 There is currently a 19% increase in CPCs held since the last reporting period and if this increase were to continue we will be projecting 2003 total number of CPCs by the end of March 2020.

#### **4.2 Timescales**

- 4.2.1 The percentage of children with all reviews in timescale within the last 12 months is a rolling figure that updates monthly so we are working towards this increasing by the end of March. For this figure to improve we are committed to 99%+ reviews held every month to be within timescales. This is aspirational and right for our looked after children.
- 4.2.2 We are closely scrutinising the percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of strategy discussion. This is rarely due to the capacity of the CPC team, but this figure can be affected by school holiday dates and the need for the attendance of partners. We have had conferences rescheduled due to issues of quoracy and this is now being challenged through the Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) so that we can challenge this with partners.

#### **5. Dispute Resolutions**

<b>Dispute Resolutions</b>	<b>IRO</b>	<b>CPC</b>
<b>Total no.</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>7</b>
Stage 1	50	4
Stage 2	21	3
Stage 3	8	0
Stage 4	0	0

- 5.1 The highest proportion of escalation raised for both the IRO and CPC teams is due to poor/incomplete/missing documentation at the point of reviews or Conferences. This is most easily resolved at Stage 1 as social workers can rectify their position. However, missing documentation can lead to delay for children, young people and families e.g. if a family has not had sight of a CP conference report prior to a conference or the IRO has not received Part 1 of the LAC Review Report, both can delay the inputting on Frameworki that captures when meetings have therefore been held.
- 5.2 For our looked after children 12 escalations were regarding Care Planning drift and delay and a further 8 specifically due to a delay in Permanence for children; 9 escalations were due to previous decisions not being completed within timescales; 10 where education or health needs, including the Personal Education Plan, not being met and the remaining cover a variety of issues. Whilst escalations of any kind are disappointing for children, it is pleasing that the IROs are now raising escalations in a timely way and following up outcomes for children, especially those of permanency.
- 5.3 One of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. It is expected that IROs establish positive working relationships with the social workers of the children for whom they are responsible. Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, for example in relation to care planning, the implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to it, resources or poor practice, the IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The IRO should place a record of this initial informal resolution process on the child's file. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action. It is the task of each local authority to put in place a formal process for the IRO to raise concerns and to ensure that this process is respected and prioritised by managers. This process is referred to in Medway as the local dispute resolution process. Over the past year the IRO service has continued to focus on improving the efficiency of these alerts, as a result, the number of alerts raised has significantly increased. The IRO Manager reports the numbers and themes of practice alerts and dispute resolutions on a monthly basis to managers from Children's Services. Overall, practice alerts are well received within the local authority, most are resolved at practice or area manager level. When it has been necessary to raise these to Head of Children's Safeguarding, as a dispute resolution the response has been efficient, child focused, and resolution has been achieved. As a result of these responses, it has not been necessary to escalate disputes to Cafcass (the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service). IRO's are acutely aware of the progress of the children allocated to them and we need to continue to be stronger in acting as the Local Authority's challenge.
- 5.4 The CPC escalations are primarily due to poor documentation, as stated, and additionally due to statutory visits of social workers not taking place within timescales.
- 5.5 Understanding the themes of escalations can enable us to take forward planned work and quality assurance of these concerns and focus our attention on the aspect pf practice that need to improve for children. As a Safeguarding

and Quality Assurance Service this is the role that we are pushing forward with.

## **6. Capacity and Staff Establishment**

- 6.1 During the last reporting period we have experienced an unstable workforce. However, at the time of this report the IRO team now has 6.2 permanent IROs and a Fostering IRO, a permanent Operational IRO Manager and a permanent Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.
- 6.2 The successful permanent recruitment to all posts within the IRO team will have a positive impact on the looked after children and young people we have a corporate parenting responsibility for. We are confident that the sustained stability of staff will have an impact on performance and quality of practice. We need to consider the high numbers of looked after children that our IROs work with that currently sit outside of the national statutory guidance of an estimated caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO.
- 6.3 At the time of this report the CPC team has also experienced an unstable workforce over the previous year. However, we have successfully recruited three new CPCs and similarly have a permanent Operational CPC Manager as well as a permanent Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. We have 6 FTE CPCs.

## **7. Innovation within the service delivery**

- 7.1 Mind of My Own App was introduced to Medway in July 2017. Initially, there was a very strong response to this communication method from young people and workers alike although numbers of Mind Of My Own statements received have fluctuated throughout the last year. During this reporting year there were 145 Mind Of My Own statements received. Children and Young People use Mind Of My Own to communicate with their workers regarding a variety of topics including preparing for a meeting (LAC review), reporting a problem, requesting a change or sharing good news. This service is available to Looked after Children and those subject to Child Protection plans with parental consent having been obtained.
- 7.2 Mind Of My Own Express was launched in September 2019 as a result of joint funding from Provider Services, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). This will enable younger children and those with communication difficulties to use the App to share their views regarding the services they receive. This demonstrates an innovative approach for the voice of children with a disability to be heard within Medway.
- 7.3 The IRO service have introduced a national good practice model in the development of a Fostering IRO, with the responsibility for annual reviews for Medway foster carers and completing any Standards of Care reviews in regard to any allegations or concerns raised about a foster carer's conduct. This provides an objective and impartial review which has been received positively across Children's service and directly from foster carers.

## **8. Future Plans**

- 8.1 A great majority of children who become looked after do so because of abuse, neglect or family dysfunction that causes acute stress among family members. Entry into care is usually a traumatic experience and brings with it a significant sense of loss that can be insufficiently recognised in care planning. Older children in care may also experience significant problems at school. For those children and young people who remain in long-term care creating a sense of belonging and emotional security is vital to their health and wellbeing. Medway's IRO service wants to be aspirational for its children in care. We want to focus on the following key areas to improve the quality of care, placement stability and or children and young people's experiences.
- 8.2 We will improve LAC review timeliness and participation of children and young people to 95%, including recording within timescales.
- 8.3 We will improve on quality of practice alerts and provide evidence for the impact these have on young people on their lived experiences; IRO's and CPCs will be using midway reviews to review plans and prevent drift and delay for all children, with a focus on the quality of CP Plans, the quality of care plans and a focus on permanence.
- 8.4 We will Implement and embed Mind Of My Own Express, an app that younger children and those with communication issues can use to share their views, wishes and feelings.
- 8.5 We will accurately report the use of Advocacy services for Looked After Children and those subject to CP Plans and gather feedback from our children, young people and families.
- 8.6 We will improve how we gather, use and act upon feedback from children and young people as well as put partners, to bring about improvements for the lives of our children and young people.
- 8.7 We will move towards a qualitative evaluation of this service and embed the quality assurance function of the IRO and the CPC.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Appendices**

None

### **Background papers**

None