

26th February 2014	ITEM: 14(i)
Council	
Cabinet Member Report - Children's Social Care	
Report of: Councillor Bukky Okunade	
This report is public.	

1 Introduction:

This report covers the following areas of council responsibility

- Family Support (including the support of Disabled Children and their families)
- Children and Young People who are looked after or for whom we are all corporate parents
- The Youth Offending Service
- The Troubled Families Programme.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board

2 Child Protection:

2.1 Child Protection in Thurrock has not been re-inspected during this municipal year so we remain one of only three councils in the Eastern Region (together with Southend and Luton) who have achieved the grading of Good. OFSTED have now introduced a new framework for inspections which will present new challenges for the council. The Service arranged a mock inspection which has created a useful action plan for how we can achieve the new style outcomes which emphasise the evidence provided by practitioner staff and children and young people themselves. Whilst the mock inspection is a much smaller exercise than a real inspection, the two very experienced inspectors were highly complimentary about the professionalism and commitment of social work and ancillary staff in the service who displayed very positive attitudes towards their duties and loyalty towards the council and their emphasis on Thurrock being their employer of choice. This was particularly encouraging in the light of the changing pattern toward Social Workers being self employed and our reliance on this in Thurrock.

2.2 The Service receives a high number of referrals, which are difficult to compare with other councils as there are different arrangements across the country as to how enquiries are processed to become referrals. The service demand is high across the service with resulting high numbers of children on Child Protection plans. At the time of writing, there are 271 children on plans under categories of neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse. Children are placed under a range of categories - 47% of children under neglect; 28%

emotional abuse, 6% physical abuse and 3% sexual abuse. 16% of children have been placed on plans under more than one category. Thurrock numbers mean that we have a higher percentage of local children on plans than other Councils including the Councils who form our statistical neighbours and with whom we have the most in common.

- 2.3 It is important for the Service to constantly test that these numbers reflect the real need and that it is not a matter of decision making here being different from elsewhere and creating unnecessary high figures. In Thurrock, this has been repeatedly tested in our mock inspection and in our short term commission of an external consultant this year. Decision making is ratified and we have to acknowledge that we have some children within our borough with very high needs for protection and Social Work support.
- 2.4 The Social Work Service is working with colleagues in wider Children's Services to modernise our structure and Members will have seen that we continue to develop the Early Help available through children's centres, schools and the voluntary sector. Our ambition is for this to help children at an earlier stage in their families' problems and to reduce the numbers needing child protection services. As from April, there will be a single point of contact through a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which will assess all the service requests, whether for Early Help or Social Work intervention. It is anticipated that the continued development of Early Help to families will not only meet inspection and court requirements but will improve the life chances of local children and impact into the high level of statutory social work needed in the borough.
- 2.5 Thurrock has already become the first Council in greater Essex to have a Police Officer working alongside our Social Workers on cases of domestic abuse, which is the largest category of referrals currently, and a serious risk to children. Our Police Officer has added substantially to the quick response to referrals and has become an integral member of the team.
- 2.6 Another of the initiatives which has been achieved this year is that we have a Munro Principal Social Worker in post who will, among other duties, lead on the Local Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls. Like other Councils, we are increasingly aware of the risks to older children and teenagers (not all girls as boys are also victims) through child sexual exploitation and the service is dealing with this serious issue in co-operation with the Police, the Voluntary Sector and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- 2.7 The LSCB is going from strength to strength and has organised a stimulating conference of both local and nationally known speakers on the theme of "The Voice of the Child". Upcoming LSCB events include a forum on safeguarding in faith settings and training on e-safety for 5500 children in the borough. The new inspection framework will include evaluation of the LSCB. Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report from the Independent Chair in January and was pleased to note the progress achieved over the last year.

3 Family Support and Disabled Children:

- 3.1 The law requires the council to support children and young people in their own families whenever possible. This is especially true for disabled children who are automatically classified as “children in need” by virtue of their disability. The arrangements for disabled children will change from September when the Special Educational Needs and Disability aim for children to have a single plan to cover their health, education and social care needs will come into operation. Thurrock has been planning these changes and a new support group for parents has been formed in order to enhance the voice of parents in service provision around what will be known as the “Local Offer” to disabled children.
- 3.2 The service for disabled children leads on the commission of an organisation called “Young Carers of Barking and Dagenham” who co-ordinate our young carers group for children and young people who have a disabled sister or brother or a parent who suffers from a physical or mental illness or substance misuse problem.

4 Looked After Children and Young People:

- 4.1 This is the second year in which the Council has had the Corporate Parenting Committee specifically covering the welfare and progress of our 285 looked after children and young people. The committee has discussed the health, education, future employment and quality of care available for Thurrock looked after children. Our numbers of looked after children in Thurrock has risen over recent years but this rise is in the middle range for our statistical neighbours but the rate of looked after children per 10,000 children aged 0-17 remains in line with our statistical neighbours – Thurrock, a rate of 68 compared to a rate of 67 across our statistical neighbours
- 4.2 All of the looked after children must have a registered placement and the service budget had been substantially strained for several years and remains so even after a significant adjustment this year. Children are placed in foster care whenever possible and the service has followed the requirements of the government’s emphasis on adoption by increasing the numbers of children having this opportunity. Numbers of children adopted are understandably showing that this is an outcome which is suitable for only a minority of Looked After Children (2010/11 = 7, 2011/12 = 8, 2012/13 = 10) It is anticipated that we should see an increase in this number this year as we have more children waiting to be adopted, having had this agreed as their plan.
- 4.3 The placement of choice for most children is a foster home registered directly with the council, thus ensuring effective co-working with the social work teams, continuity of school and family and friends contact, as well as better value. This year a successful growth bid has made up for some lost ground in comparison with other councils in terms of the financial support available and interest in becoming a foster carer here is showing signs of improvement. At the end of 2012 there were Foster-Carers in 107 households and at the end of 2013, we had Foster-Carers in 111 households. There is a higher rate of enquiries and

interest since the recruitment materials have been refreshed and can now include our improved financial support.

- 4.4 The only statutory inspection which has taken place since the last Portfolio Holder report was the inspection of the Fostering service in March which achieved the grading of Good, representing a move up from the previous satisfactory grading. This result reflects the high standard of care and the devotion to the task which is well known as a feature of Thurrock foster carers and their unique role is much appreciated as a corner stone of the service to looked after children. Such an inspection will not take place in the future as the same work will be incorporated in the new inspection framework.
- 4.5 Many costs are involved in the new requirements for courts dealing with looked after children to see evidence of preventive work with parents and children- both early help and specialists services for specific family problems. These costs rise as numbers rise and staff have been in close liaison with the local courts to reduce the reliance on external specialist reports and use a model of local community based assessments which is being developed.

5 The Youth Offending Service:

- 5.1 The Youth Offending Service is a partnership organisation amongst police, health and probation and has delivered substantial changes in outcomes for children and young people who are vulnerable to becoming offenders. For example, the rate of reduction in the proportion of young offenders who re-offend in Thurrock fell by 7% between 2011 and 2012. This compared to a fall of 0.3% across England and Wales in the same period. Overall the Service is concentrating on the prevention of offending as the first priority, which means that those young people who do go on to offend or re-offend are those who are most difficult to divert from those undesirable choices.

6 Troubled Families:

- 6.1 The national Troubled Families programme focuses on families with worklessness, poor school attendance and anti-social behaviour as problem features. This is operated locally under the national descriptor and uses programme managers to work to support the lead professional for each family, as is identified in the early help model of delivery. This is a “payment by results” programme and by the end of February we anticipate a further 30 to 40 families having met their desired results, adding to the 38 families who have already done so.

Conclusion:

OSTED will bring their new framework for inspection to Thurrock and alongside the focus on the voice of children and young people themselves staff in the field giving evidence, their expectations of councillors are clearly set out as follows.

Leadership, management and governance are likely to be judged good if:

- Local authority senior managers, leaders and elected members discharge their individual and collective statutory responsibilities. There are clear lines of accountability and governance with a clear distinction between political, strategic and operational roles. Leaders, including elected members and managers, have a comprehensive and current knowledge of what is happening at the 'front line' and how well children and young people are helped, cared for and protected.
- The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent that knows the children and young people it looks after well. It is an effective and successful champion of their progress (particularly in education and learning) and an ambitious corporate parent, ensuring that each child has every opportunity to succeed. It actively challenges and engages partners where appropriate to support children and young people, such as engaging the local authority strategic housing function.
- The DCS works closely with the LSCB chair. The Chief Executive, drawing on other LSCB partners and, where appropriate, the Lead Member will hold the chair to account for the effective working of the LSCB.
- The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness. It demonstrates a track record of dealing rigorously and effectively with areas for development. Leaders, including elected members and managers, have a comprehensive and current knowledge of what is happening at the 'front line' and a track record of responding appropriately and quickly to service deficiencies or new demands

Outstanding

Leadership, management and governance are likely to be outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders (both professional and political) and managers are inspirational, confident, ambitious and influential in changing the lives of local children, young people and families, including children who are looked after and those who have left or who are leaving care. They innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services, including early help services, for all children and young people. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and can provide evidence of improvement over a sustained period of time. Professional relationships between the local authority and partner organisations are mature and well developed. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement of the quality of help, care and protection that is provided.

Financial Information:

(A Motion agreed by the Council on 23 January 2013 requires the Cabinet Member to cover all finance and budget issues of their portfolio that they consider relevant, including (but not limited to): fiscal management; budget responsibility of the cabinet member; receipts and actual spend vs. predicted spend; the levels of virements; and value for money.)

The current budget for Care and Targeted Outcomes is £25,334,291 and as at the end of January 2014 the actual spend is £20,908,675 the projected outturn position as at the 31st March 2014 is predicted to be £25,561,163 making an overspend of £227k. Although it should be noted there has been a £2m increase in the budget during the year.

The table below details some of the bigger variances within Care and Targeted Outcomes.

Cost Centre Code	Original Budget	Revised Budget	Ytd Actual	Outturn as at 31/3/14 including Actuals To Date	Variance
1. External Purchasing	7,077,539	9,075,955	7,819,824	9,469,638	393,683
2. Thurrock Access to Resources Panel	105,884	107,000	219,420	252,000	145,000
3. Legal Proceedings	748,496	707,678	900,674	1,028,231	320,553
4. Initial Response Team	737,033	846,349	741,697	990,896	144,547
5. Youth Offenders Service Int Agency	516,239	771,848	336,856	411,366	-360,482
6. Family Support - West	1,450,386	1,453,386	1,399,427	1,679,282	225,896
7. Foster Care	3,860,604	3,842,652	2,766,810	3,330,214	-512,438
8. Youth & Connexions Targeted	569,313	569,313	397,943	477,151	-92,162

- Budget buys all the externally purchased Fostering Placements and the children's homes placements. Overspent due to the need for very expensive secure placements and other expensive placements.
- This budget covers Section 17 of the 1989 Children Act, the Council's duty to spend money on families when this will prevent children coming into care. This includes that, like other Councils, we must pay the living costs of parents who have no recourse to public funds pending their applications for British Citizenship. If successful, the families (usually deserted mothers and their children) can claim benefits. If not successful, they are likely to be deported. At present, we are financially supporting 12 families, the highest ever number, hence the overspend.
- This is the cost of Court fees, legal representation for the Council and any specialist reports requested by the Court. The overspend represents increased demand.
- 4&6. These are budgets for Social Work salaries and we have a high percentage of self employed Social Workers, reflecting the national trend towards self-employment and therefore increasing staffing costs. The decision taken centrally to reduce this budget aggregates the problem.
- YOS has had some vacancies due to the secondment of four staff to the Troubled Families programme and has also not had as many remand costs as we have

created the budget for.

7. The budget for Foster Care is large enough to encompass additional recruitment which would be a highly desirable overall cost reduction.
8. This team has seconded a member of staff to Troubled Families and is also currently recruiting for another post which is vacant.