

**22 October 2014**

**ITEM: 11(i)**

**Council**

**Cabinet Member Report – Children’s Social Care**

**Report of: Councillor Bukky Okunade**

This report is public.

**1. Introduction**

1.1. This report covers the following areas of council responsibility:

- Family Support – this includes the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and assessment functions, support services for disabled children, children in need, including those on child protection plans.
- Children and young people who are in the Care of the Local Authority and for whom we are corporate parents
- The Youth Offending Team – those young people who have come to the attention of the criminal courts
- The Troubled Families programme
- The Thurrock Local Safeguarding Board

1.2. As the Cabinet member responsible for Children’s Social care I have had the opportunity to follow the child’s journey through the service spending time with the teams and with individual Social Workers visiting families , which has given me a greater insight into the service.

**2. Family Support**

2.1. Family Support Services consist of MASH, Child & Family Assessment Team (CFAT), Four Family Support Teams and a specialist service consisting of two practitioners dealing with Domestic Violence and Drug, Alcohol and Substance Misuse.

2.2. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Thurrock has introduced a new multi-agency model for delivering services to children and families in Thurrock that offers a single point of entry for all referrals and requests for help for children and young people. The MASH brings together a variety of agencies into an integrated co – located multi agency team; where information is shared appropriately and securely on children, families and adults.

- 2.3. The MASH builds on the success already secured by the service in introducing a police officer to the social work duty team and which has been greatly appreciated across both services and served as a pilot for other areas. The MASH IS situated at the centre of the main council offices in Grays, taking advantage of the benefits of the recent office transformation. It will :
- Inform partners in the MASH about the level of need or risk at the first point of contact.
  - Play a lead role in supporting and promoting information sharing. This will improve information sharing and risk assessment at the point of referral.
  - Ensure that the advice and information to parents, carers and partner agencies is appropriate when signposting to services.
  - Support the process that ensures Children Social Care remain responsible for the overall decision making on cases referred to it.
- 2.4. MASH core agencies include: Children Social Care, Essex Police, Locality Senior practitioner , Troubled Families Programme Manager, Health, Probation, Housing and Education Welfare. MASH will only proceed to a formal assessment of need when the threshold for social care intervention is met and referrals are stepped up to CFAT. In the event where referrals do not meet the social care threshold but still require additional support, referrals are stepped down to the Early Offer of help services.
- 2.5. Family Support Teams deal with Children who are deemed as 'Children in Need'. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 imposes on Local Authorities a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children in their area who are 'in need' and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs. Other agencies have a duty to co-operate with Social Care in carrying out their duty to assess the needs of the children in need to provide services as necessary. Family Support teams work with children who are subject to Child Protection Plans. Section 47 of the Children Act requires that where a Local Authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, they shall make necessary enquiries so that they can determine what, if any, action needs to be taken in order to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.
- 2.6 The key priorities of the service have been to ensure more focused and SMART plans for children and families. The service has also introduced a peer auditing process involving all managers and at a senior level. The aim is two-fold: To further drive the service self-evaluation and improvement focus and to extend learning and sharing across the management core. Audit results are being fed into the relevant service improvement settings. These include more observational audit and practice in settings such as case

conferences.

- 2.7. Volume of contacts into the service continues to be relatively high. As at the end of August there were 4162 contacts to the service. This is consistent with the 4472 received at the same time in the previous year. The level of contacts appears to have dipped since July. This will need to be monitored together with the introduction of MASH . Of the total contacts received in year to date, 692 (16.6%) were initial contacts. The rate of initial contacts is currently slightly below that of the previous year (18.2%) and also saw a further dip in August (13.2) from 18.5% in June. The main recorded reasons for contact are child in need and domestic violence. These account for some 90% of all contacts.
- 2.8. Conversion of contacts to referrals to children's social care: There have been 688 referrals since April which is lower than the 730 in same period last year. As with contacts activity, there is a dip in referrals since July – again it is too early to consider a clear trend or pattern. The rate of repeat referrals is currently 17% which is slightly lower than the rate of 18.9% in 2013/14. However, the repeat referral rate in August rose significantly to 27.2% (19.5% in July).The impact on referrals will be monitored now that MASH has been introduced.
- 2.9 This reflects high demands on the service and the need to continue to monitor closely work coming into the Local Authority and the need for good early intervention services to prevent escalation to children's social care. There has been considerable progress on the implementation of the new model for Early Offer of Help with the appointment to the three Locality Managers from Health, Education and Social Care. They are in the process of being inducted into the service but will bring together the work in Children's Centres and the MAG (Multi agency groups) in the three locality areas and ensure effective step up and down processes from the MASH and from cases that no longer need the level of intervention from Children's Social Care.

### **3. Children who need help and protection**

- 3.1 The rate of children subject to child protection plans had been on an upwards curve in Thurrock and continued to rise through 2013/14. The rate per 10,000 children in 2013/14 was 75 (288 children). This compares to a rate of 53 in 2012/13 – an increase of 41%. The rate also placed Thurrock significantly above both 2012/13 national (38) and statistical neighbours(34) averages. The number of children subject to Child Protection enquiries (section 47) is almost double that of statistical neighbours.
- 3.2 The service has undertaken auditing of these decisions. The Head of Service has been holding CP surgeries to systematically review all cases where children have been subject of plans for 18 months or more with a further

surgery to focus on children on plans for 12 months or more. It is intended that these surgeries will continue on a quarterly basis with representation from other agencies.

3.3 As a consequence since April 2014 there has been a steady decline in the numbers of children subject to child protection plans. As at end of August there were 194 children subject to plans compared to 236 in the same period in 2013/14 and 287 at year end. 194 children represents a current rate of 49.2 per 10,000 children and brings Thurrock closer to the national average of 37.9 and comparator council average of 33.5. This represents 0.5% of all Thurrock children and young people.

3.4 Disabled children

The Team for Disabled Children continues to provide support for children, young people and their families. Commissioned and In House services offer families a variety of short breaks via sitting and befriending, access to social and leisure activities, residential overnight breaks and overnight breaks in the child's home. These services ensure that as many disabled children and young people continue to live with their families for as long as possible.

3.5. The Team have been involved in the new reforms to Special Educational Needs and Disability. From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014, Statements of Educational Need have been replaced by Education, Health and Care Plans. This ensures that a single assessment and the subsequent plan provides a child centred approach to meeting the needs of disabled children using a multi-agency approach. Parents will have a voice in the development of these plans and will have the choice of having a Personal budget for their child, which will give more control to parents and Carers.

3.6 Thurrock has a newly developed Parent Participation group called CaPa, who have worked alongside the LA in the development of the Local Offer, which is a multi-agency resource directory now available on the Thurrock website.

3.7 The Sunshine Centre continues to offer support to children, young people and their families by providing individual, group activities and additional short breaks in school holidays. The Centre now provides targeted support to those children and young people that need it the most and are making progress in supporting more able children into mainstream activities. The Sunshine Centre continues to provide activities 2 evenings a week to Young Carers aged 4-8 years. These children provide some form of care to either a disabled sibling or parent with drug and alcohol issues, mental health problems or disabilities.

3.8 The Sunshine Centre's services for Early Years were inspected by Ofsted in

August 2014. The Centre received the grading of Outstanding for all the 3 areas inspected.

3.9. 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. They continue to provide a high level of support, advice guidance and activities to older Young Carers aged 8-18.

3.10. Family Group Conferencing

The service has now expanded to 3 coordinators. The service continues to support families in finding solutions in the provision of safe care for children within the family, or finding alternative care for children within the extended family. This will reduce the amount of children becoming Looked After by the LA.

#### **4. Looked After Children and Young People and Care leavers**

4.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee have a Work Programme for 2014/2015, which covers the areas of health, education, housing, the role of IRO's, the review of the Pledge and other matters relevant to our looked after children. A report in respect to our looked after children and care leavers was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in July 2014. Our numbers of looked after children in Thurrock has risen over recent years. In August 2014 the number of looked after children was 307, which equates to 78 per 10,000. Thurrock projection for the year 2014/15 is 73 per 10,000.

4.2. All of the looked after children must have a registered placement and the service budget has been substantially strained for several years and remains so even after significant adjustment last 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. A report in respect to Thurrock's performance on Adoption was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in September 2014. In summary, for the period of January 2013 – July 2014 , 20 placements were made. This figure is slightly above the intended target and represents a significant improvement on the last score card figures.

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. At the 31 March 2014 Thurrock had a total of 98 fostering households with a potential occupancy of 181 children. Since April 2014 there have been 45 enquiries, which have led to 18 initial visits. Thurrock currently has 8

households in training.

- 4.4 Thurrock currently has 95 young people that are entitled to a service from our After Care Team. Due to the current changes in reporting to the DFE for our 19, 20 and 21 year olds, in respect to those in suitable accommodation and employment, education and training, at the time of writing this report I am currently awaiting updated data.
- 4.5 A major challenge for the service has been the implementation of the Family Justice review which has required Care Proceedings to be completed in a maximum 26 week timescale. This has led to tighter timescales and expectations for Social workers and solicitors within the Local Authority.
- 4.6 Our key priorities are to ensure only the 'right' children come into care and the 'right' time into the 'right' placement. A number of actions have been put in place to address this ; a Looked After Children's Surgery is chaired monthly by the Head of Service, a new weekly Threshold to Care Panel chaired by the Head of Service, Early Offer of Help strategy including 'Troubled Families' and timely permanency decisions for those children for whom this is an appropriate long term option to leave the care system. We also need to develop services that meet the needs of children/young people at the 'edge of care'. We need sufficient appropriate accommodation for looked after children and care leavers and to increase the numbers of foster carers, as well as developing the commissioning of suitable and cost effective accommodation for children and young people.

## **5. The Youth Offending service**

- 5.1 YOS is a statutory agency responsible for the enforcement of all criminal court orders in respect of 10-18 year olds and for the delivery of interventions attached to those orders plus the planning and through care of those young people serving custodial sentences. The YOS is multi-disciplinary staffed and funded by partner agencies in Police, Local Authority, Education, Probation, Health and the Ministry of Justice via the Youth Justice Board to whom it reports. It has a governance board, comprising senior members of partner agencies with a dual reporting line to the Community Safety Partnership and the Children and Young People's Partnership Line management of staff is through the Council and YOS manages staff from the partner agencies.
- 5.2 Annually Thurrock continues to perform well in the reduction of first time offenders compared to the baseline figure (10-11), we are performing above the national and family average. The figure for 13-14 is the lowest we have ever had and could be a result of the extension and promotion of YOS preventative service. This is based on local data. The National Data data from the Police National Computer does record a 72% reduction in FTE's for

Thurrock based on the pre-TRIAGE baseline of 09-10, this compared with a national figure of 65%.

- 5.3 The final figure for 13-14 (reported on in Q1 14-15) shows a significant reduction in offending on the previous year with a rate of 27% . In fact it remains the lowest youth re-offending rate since the implementation of Thurrock YOS in 2000. Again this is based on local data. The national data for re-offending is again based on the Police National Computer and is two years old, however this also shows good performance nationally with Thurrock being significantly lower than its predicted rate.

## **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 a 'payment by results' programme and as at August 2014 Thurrock had claimed for 136 families. Thurrock's troubled families service is currently working with their 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort and the programme is becoming fully embedded into services within the Local Authority. The government has extended the programme from 2015 for 5 years with initial funding agreed for 2015/16. The remit of Troubled Families will be extended to include younger children.

## **7. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board**

- 7.1 The board has been proactive with the community this year raising awareness on safeguarding with parents and children and has participated with an exhibition stand at the Big Lunch in Grays and Tilbury Family festival. The board has distributed over 2,000 leaflets and posters across the borough at various events and locations supporting the safeguarding and welfare of our children and young people. The Walk on line e-safety roadshows to all our schools, reaching over 5500 children, was a great success and this initiative will now become an annual event for our year 5 pupils.
- 7.2 The LSCB conference 2014 will be held on the theme of Neglect which has been the focus of their work this year.
- 7.3 The Safeguarding board will be publishing a serious case review 'Julia' and are commissioning a further Serious case review 'Megan' which will be published in the New Year.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Thurrock was last inspected by OFSTED in 2012 – it is expected in the next year that there will be an inspection from OFSTED under the new

Framework. This incorporates the Safeguarding inspection , with Looked after children , including care leavers but this also includes the previous separate inspections of the fostering and adoption service. There is also a separate inspection of the LSCB that happens concurrently. In the wake of the Rotherham report . OFSTED have announced there will be thematic inspections for on Child Sexual Exploitation.

8.2 In light of that report and the challenges that it made around corporate leadership and involvement at the highest level in the organisation, it is recognised that we must not be complacent about safeguarding children within the council and they must remain our highest priority and focus.

## 9. 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.)

9.1. The current budget for Care and Targeted Outcomes is £28.7M. The details of the current out turn and variances are detailed below.

Cost Centre	Sum of Original Budget 14-15	Sum of Revised Budget 14-15	Sum of 14-15 Actuals To Date	Sum of 14-15 Projected Out-turn	Sum of Variance budget v projected Out-turn
Youth Offenders Service Int Agency	969,220	726,346	84,770	493,059	233,287
Social Care - Service Managers	1,023,537	1,082,929	288,574	900,721	182,208
Legal Proceedings	707,678	1,207,678	270,093	1,148,158	59,520
External Purchasing	9,023,135	9,023,135	3,486,679	9,009,154	13,981
Internal Fostering and Adoption Costs	7,818,547	7,688,531	2,295,655	7,318,554	369,977
Thurrock Access to Resources Panel	107,000	107,000	88,657	212,776	(105,776)
Initial Response Team	499,690	499,690	410,070	980,303	(480,613)
Family Support Services	1,316,840	1,316,840	749,837	1,675,639	(358,799)
Troubled Families	246,663	246,663	69,332	246,663	0
Other CATO Services	6,547,739	6,809,839	1,677,353	6,721,784	88,055
<b>Total Care and targeted outcomes</b>	<b>28,260,049</b>	<b>28,708,651</b>	<b>9,421,021</b>	<b>28,706,811</b>	<b>1,840</b>

9.2. The largest budget pressures are:

- External placements / rises in numbers of LAC
- Section 17 budget
- Agency staff
- Legal fees



### 9.3. External placements

This budget covers all external fostering placements with Independent fostering agencies, residential placements, semi-independent provision and also includes costs for secure placements. This budget has been added to by the council over the last two years to meet the growing demand. This demand continues but measures to try to manage it have been put in place . We have introduced a weekly threshold panel to scrutinise every decision for a child to become accommodated as well as monthly LAC surgeries to ensure permanence plans are progressed rapidly and challenge if children and young people remain in residential care longer than they need. We are also focusing on increasing in house foster carers and more robust commissioning.

### 9.4. Section 17

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 deported. However, this process can take some time to resolve. There are growing numbers of families making claims following more robust focus on illegal working and changes to claiming benefit . There are currently 9 families receiving support with another three being assessed. A holistic review of Section 17 spend takes place on a monthly basis to ensure resources are distributed equitably.

### 9.5. Agency staff

The service is committed to establishing a diverse permanently staffed workforce to meet the needs of the community. Through proactive recruitment process involving the Human Resources and Workforce Development team, we are trying to reduce levels of agency staff to promote continuity, consistency and reduce cost in the service.

### 9.6. Legal fees

This budget covers the cost of Court fees, legal representation for the Council and any specialist reports requested by the Court. As highlighted in the main report new guidance has increased the expectations and reduced timescales but this may also impact on a reduction of external independent experts. The threshold panel involves legal representation so we anticipate this will reduce the need for a number of Legal Planning Meetings and therefore some legal costs.

9.7 The service has challenges ahead to bring the budget on line with increasing demand and expectations as well as making the required budget savings that have been identified.

