

CABINET

18 October 2016

Title: Children's Social Care Annual Report 2015/16	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: None	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Director: Ann Graham, Operations Director, Care and Support	
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Summary: This report provides an overview of safeguarding and looked after children activity and performance for 2015-16. An update on progress and priorities within the Council's Adoption and Fostering service is included, as well as updates about the work of the Member Corporate Parenting Group and the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board. The report also provides a progress statement on the Social Care Ambition and Financial Efficiency (SAFE) Programme, which commenced in October 2015 to manage demand and financial costs.	
Recommendation(s) The Cabinet is asked to note the report and, in particular: (i) The service improvement and challenges contained within the report, as well as the actions taken last year in response to local demand and the financial pressures experienced by the service; and (ii) The areas identified as priorities for 2016/17 following analysis and review of 2015/16.	
Reason(s) The Leader, Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services have statutory roles to protect children who are in need or risk of harm, as set out in national guidance. All Cabinet members and senior officers should act as Corporate Parents for our looked after children. This report is part of assuring their roles. Cabinet should be aware of the progress made against managing the financial and safeguarding demand in the social care service in the last financial year.	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. The Complex Needs and Social Care Division consists of four integrated service areas each with a Group Manager lead, namely:
 - MASH and Assessment Service;
 - Care Management Service;
 - Looked After Children Service, and
 - Disabled Children and Special Educational Needs Service.
- 1.2. The Division provides a range of services for children and young people who are in need, at risk of harm and in need of protection and children who are looked after in care. The children and young people have needs which are assessed as being complex or acute and require the statutory involvement of the Local Authority within the responsibilities set out in legislation (Children Act) and national guidance (Working Together). Responsibility also includes Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in response to the government's Children and Families Bill.
- 1.3. Children's Complex Needs and Social Care is operating in a borough with high levels of need. The child population in Barking and Dagenham is increasing by around 2-3% each year and the borough has a comparatively high percentage of the population aged 0-17 years of age (above London averages). The borough has high rates of domestic violence and increasing housing and homelessness pressures. In addition, the children's social care service continues to have difficulties in recruiting experienced social workers, a national problem in social work, and the borough has a high proportion of agency staff. Staff instability affects both quality and timeliness of our work.
- 1.4. The OFSTED inspection of safeguarding and social care services in May 2014 judged that services require improvement. It is important to report that all the actions recommended in the improvement plan have been carried out to provide a framework for improving the quality of practice and outcomes for children. This includes further training for staff, strengthening the arrangements for supervision and management oversight, attention to the quality of assessments and plans, introducing an on line manual of procedures and carrying out audit.
- 1.5. As well as an agenda to improve the quality of services and managing demand there has been a concerted focus on reducing expenditure. An update on progress is provided in the report. This remains a key priority for 2016/17 and beyond.

2. Safeguarding and looked after children trends

- 2.1. In the context of a high population of children and young people aged between 0 and 17 years of age (above London and national averages), services have been managing demand and achieved an overall reduction in safeguarding and looked after children numbers in 2015-16, compared to year-on-year increases over the last 5 years.
- 2.2. It is very important to stress that contacts requesting services are still considered but that alternative ways of managing these are being put in place, most

particularly in close collaboration with early help services, partner agencies and the borough's multi agency panels.

- 2.3. To illustrate this point, in 2015-16, the number of contacts made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (known as MASH) increased to 11,393 compared to 8,515 in the previous year, representing a real term rise of 34%. This increase was largely due to the significant rise in Police notifications (known as MERLINS)) last year, which grew by 66%. An alternative pathway was created to ensure all non child protection Police referrals (Green rated Merlins), were directed straight into the borough locality Multi Agency Panels (MAPs) for onward early help support rather than being allocated for assessment in the children's social care service. This work started at the end of 2015 and was tightly monitored before being signed off as an embedded practice in May 2016. To date, this has reduced contacts in MASH by over 42 cases per week.
- 2.4. Through tighter gate keeping and demand management the number of contacts that progressed to a statutory social care referral decreased to 3,255 referrals in 2015/16 (29%) compared with 4,084 in 2014/15 (48%), a real term decrease of 20% in total referrals in the last year (table 1.0). The referral rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17 has consequently fallen from 691 to 551. This is in line with the national average (548), below our statistical neighbours (715), but above the London rate of 478.
- 2.5. The number of children receiving a statutory social care service has also decreased in the last year. In 2015/16, 2,064 children and young people's cases were open to social care compared to 2,326 in the previous year, a real term decrease of 11% in one year. The rate of open social care cases per 10,000 has fallen from 394 to 349 and this is now slightly above the national rate (337), but below the London rate (371) and similar areas (428).

Table 1 Contacts and referrals to statutory social care

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	1 year % change	5 year % change
Number of contacts received (including multiple contacts on a child)	9,765	8,683	8,363	8,856	8,515	11,393	+34%	+17%
Number of referrals	2,704	1,812	2,586	3,126	4,084	3,255	-20%	+17%
Referral Rate per 10,000	546	337	470	525	691	551	-20%	+1%

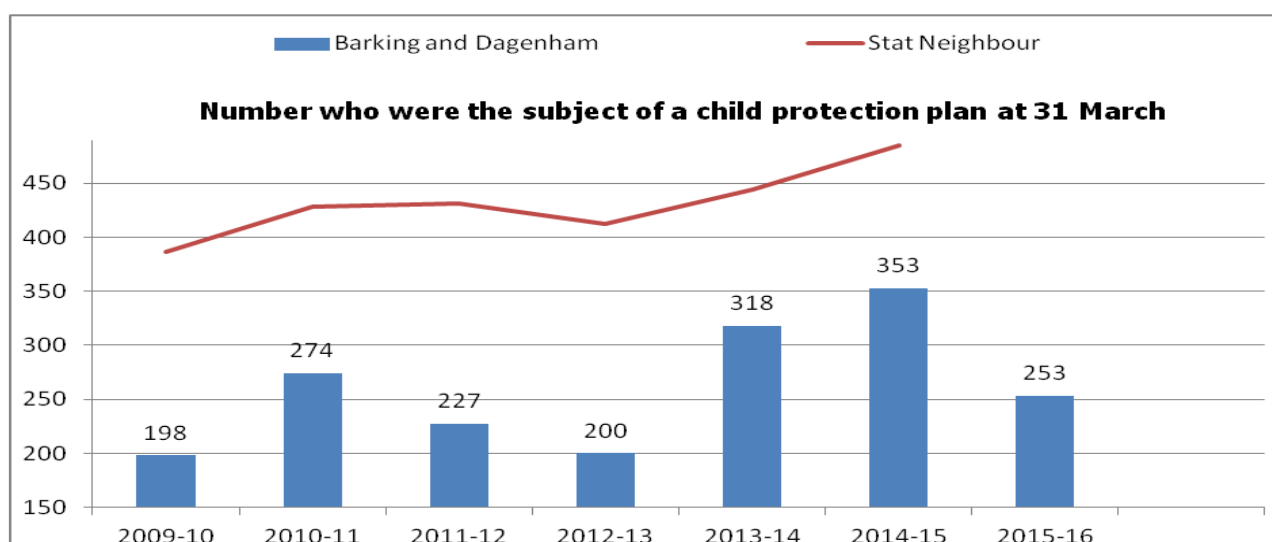
Table 2 Number of open social care cases and rate per 10,000, 2010/11 – 2015/16

	LBBB 10/11	LBBB 11/12	LBBB 12/13	LBBB 13/14	LBBB 14/15	LBBB 15/16	1 year % change	5 year % change	SN Rate	London Rate	National Rate
No. of open social care cases at year end	1545	1714	2161	2184	2326	2064	-11%	+34%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Open cases rate per 10,000	342	344	393	383	394	349	-11%	+2%	428	371	337

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 2.6. Section 47 enquiries are carried out when there is a referral in which a child or children are reported to be at risk of harm. The number of these has also reduced, albeit slightly, to 1,184 compared to 1,234 in 2014-15. However the borough's rate of Section 47 enquiries per 10,000 children aged 0-17 at 200, remains higher than the national, London and statistical neighbours rates of 138, 137 and 186 respectively. There is management oversight to scrutinise each Section 47 enquiry and performance is being monitored by senior management.
- 2.7. In 2015-16, the number of children subject to child protection plans has also fallen to 253 which is a decrease 353 reported in the previous year. The rate per 10,000 children has fallen from 60.0 to 43.0. See comparative figures below.
- 2.8. In total, 310 new child protection plans were initiated with 410 child protection plans ceasing in 2015-16. Figure 1 displays the trend over the last 6 years and that, in 2015-16, the rate of children subject to child protection plan in relation to the borough's 0-17 population is now much more in line with national and London rates, but below our statistical neighbours.

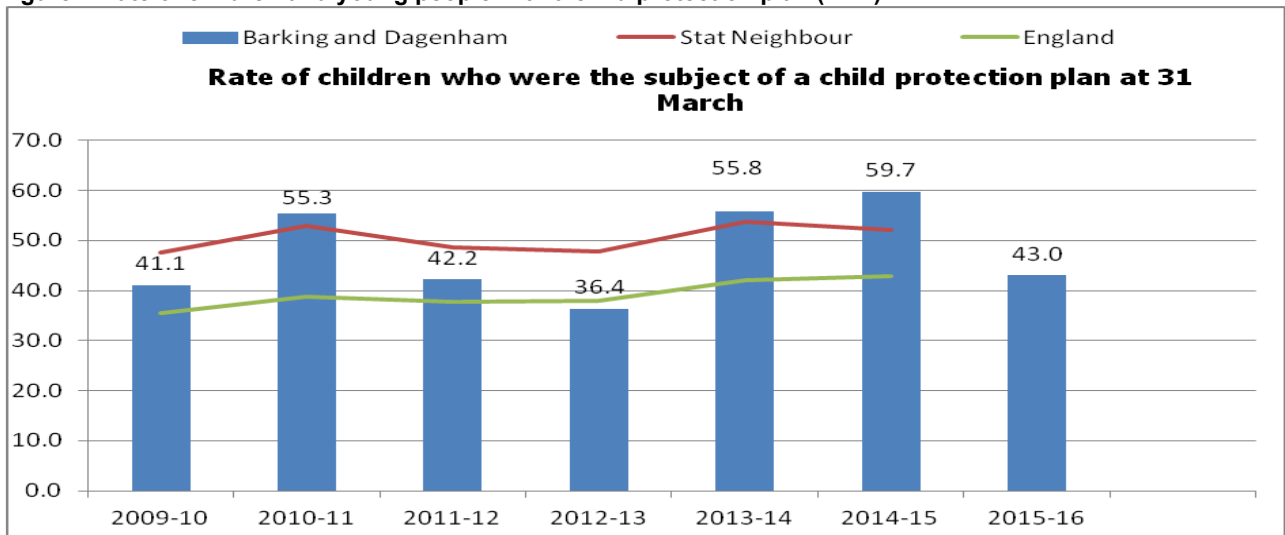
Figure 1 Number of children and young people with a child protection plan (CPP)



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

* Stat neighbour is statistical neighbours

Figure 2 Rate of children and young people with a child protection plan (CPP)

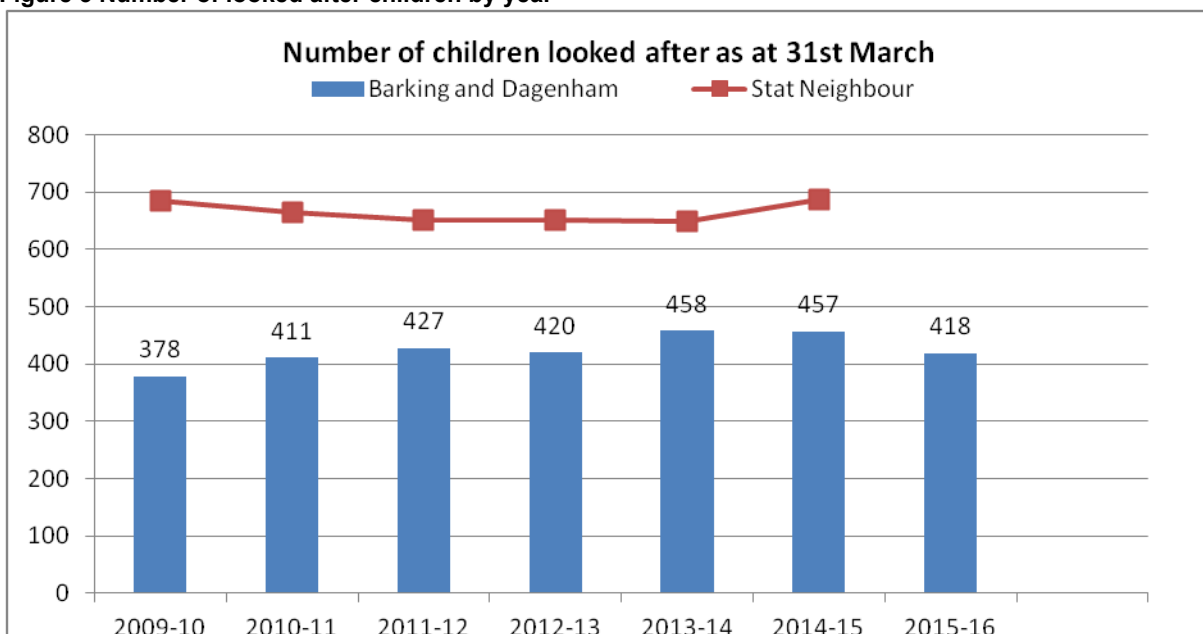


Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

2.9. The predominant child protection issues relate to emotional abuse, including the impact upon children where domestic violence is a factor within the household. The proportion of children subject to child protection plans due to emotional abuse is around 50% for 2015-16, which is a decline from 60% in 2014-15 and the 69% reported in 2013-14. This is still higher than the national average of 36%, London average (43%) and statistical neighbour average (44%).

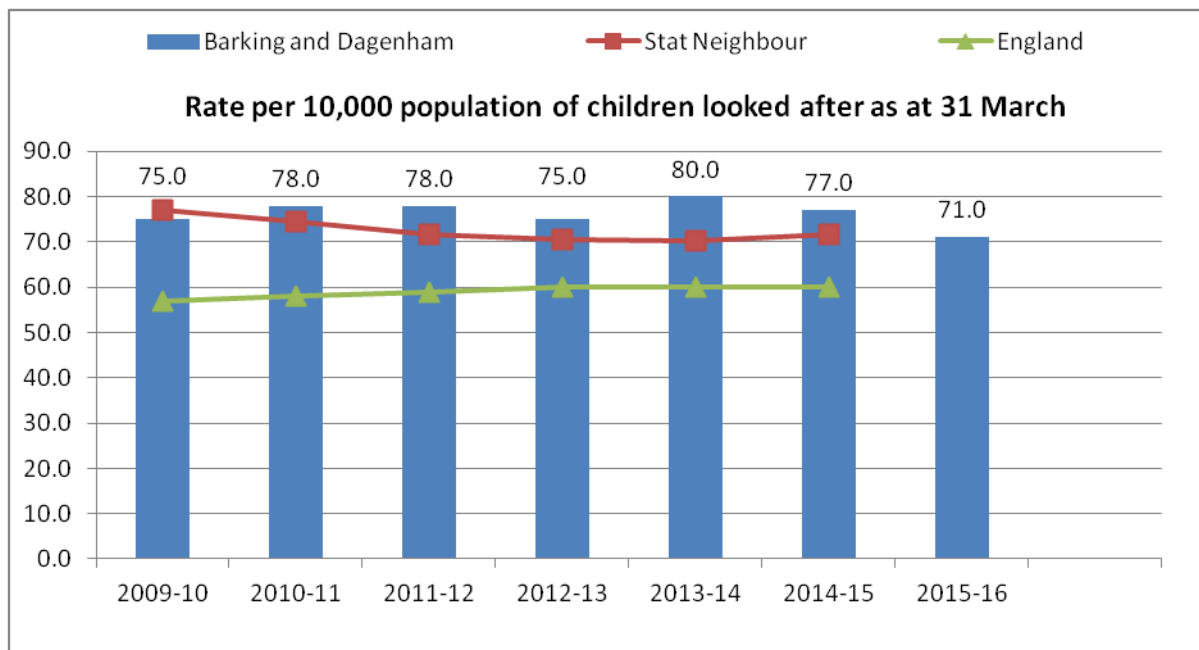
2.10. In Barking and Dagenham, the number of looked after children (LAC) rose to 476 – the highest number reported - in June 2015, followed by a downward trajectory post June and stabilising around the year end figure of 418. This compares to the year end figure of 457 in 2014-15. Our rate per 10,000 has fallen from 77 to 71 over the last year, but remains higher than statistical neighbours (69), national (60) and London (52) rates. The total number of children coming into care decreased in 2015-16; 220 compared to 283 in the previous year and fewer children left care in 2015-16 (249) compared to 2014-15 (281).

Figure 3 Number of looked after children by year



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Figure 4 Rate of looked after children per 10,000 by year



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 2.11. The percentage of female looked after children remains at 49% and though this is above the national position of 45% female LAC, our figures reflect the proportionate gender split in the wider child population of the borough. There was a 7% decrease in under 10 years old in care in 2015/16 (falling from 41% to 34%), with the number of children aged 10 years and over rising by 7% when compared to 2015/16. This is lower than the local population (64% are under 10 years old) and lower than the national average for LAC (41%)
- 2.12. By ethnicity, compared to March 2015, there was a 3% increase in the number of White British children being cared for by the Local Authority in 2015-16 – rising from 47% to 50%. We are also seeing an increasing trend of Eastern European families featuring in our care statistics (increasing from 9% to 11% over the last year, and 6% in 2012), and Albanian young people are over represented in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker figures.
- 2.13. In 2015-16, there were a total of 176 young people who were care leavers and aged 18 and over in the borough which is an increase on the 154 in the previous year.

3. Safeguarding and the Children’s Social Care Service

- 3.1. As referred to in the report about trends in safeguarding activity, the number of open cases across the service has fallen by 262, a reduction of 11% over the course of the year. The reduction in open cases has benefits in managing social worker caseloads and the emphasis on improving quality in social work practice. This is also important for the recruitment and retention of social workers which is a key priority for the service.

- 3.2. There is no single reason for this trend. The reductions in referrals and open cases reflect a number of actions being taken to both manage demand and improve practice. These include the alternative arrangements to divert cases or step down cases to early help/targeted services; work with key partners such as the Police about notifications and about reducing the number of children who come into care through the use of Police powers of protection a sharpening of focus on practice to progress plans and work in a timely way; tighter management oversight and supervision of cases; reviewing cases, tackling drift and closing work which had been unnecessarily open ; and identifying cases of ‘children in need’ for particular attention with social workers dedicated to working on these and involving the ‘Early Intervention’ Workers from the Troubled Families programme.
- 3.3. As a particular example, the OFSTED inspection identified the need to address the high number of children coming directly into care through the powers of police protection. Significant progress has been sustained in working closely with colleagues in the Police to reduce the number of children being admitted to care through the use of Police Powers of Protection. The number of children subject to Police Protection fell during the 2015-16 period to 54, representing 24.5% of all admissions into care. This compared to 134 in 2013-14 which was 43% of all admissions and 69 children, which was 24% of all admissions in 2014-15.

Table 4 Number of children entering and leaving care by year

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of children coming into care	245	314	283	220
Number of children coming into care on Police protection	103	134	69	54
% of children coming into care on Police protection	42.0	43.0	24.0	24.5

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 3.4. Despite good progress, local numbers remain twice the national average of 14%, but we have significantly closed the gap on the London average of 20%. This continues to receive close attention through a very constructive and regular monthly meeting with Senior Police Officers to review performance and consider individual cases highlighted in audit work.
- 3.5. The single assessment was introduced on 1st September 2015 after a pilot programme and all staff have received training. This is intended to improve and streamline the assessment process for families and their needs. Alongside this, there was an increase in performance in completing assessments within required timescales in 2015-16 – an increase from 71% to 76%, but further improvement is required to reach the local target set at 80%.
- 3.6. As indicated in the report about trends in activity, figures for the year end indicate that the rate of Section 47 enquiries and subsequent investigations have continued to be higher than statistical neighbours, other London Boroughs and the national rate. Managers in the service continue to check and understand this higher rate of investigations and an independent report in 2015, based on an audit of cases, found that *‘in general the decision making and the application of*

thresholds for child protection investigation was found to be safe and appropriate, and the number of cases where over cautious practice occurred was small’.

- 3.7. Alongside the reduction in numbers of children subject to child protection plans from 353 to 253 in 2015-16, the performance in relation to social workers seeing children who are the subject of child protection plans has increased slightly from 95.5% in 2014-15 to 97% in 2015-16. This continues to be a positive improvement which has been sustained. It is also positive that performance regarding child protection core groups being held has been sustained with only a slight reduction from 86% in 2014-15 to 84% in 2015-16. However, this continues to be a vast improvement from the 2013-14 position of 34%.
- 3.8. There has been continued and close attention to the strategies to address child sexual exploitation (CSE) and missing children and plans are in place for the children involved.
- 3.9. Families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) have been a key focus area as these families continue to pose challenges to the local authority with regards to demand and financial costs. In 2015-16, referral rates for families with no access to public funds increased again, and this is likely to continue due to the levels of poverty and deprivation faced by these families. Our role has been to carry out effective assessments and reach fair decisions in a child focused, evidential way in this area of complex social care and human rights law.
- 3.10. The local authority has responded to the increase in demand through effectively managing the “front door”, developing a robust screening process with an in-depth initial assessment and then, if appropriate, progressing to a formal full assessment of need. The NRPF service has been developed to respond to these challenges: it is finely balanced to respond both fairly to families and to reduce the demand and cost to the local authority. We have invested in efficient systems such as NRPF Network Connect Data Base, put processes in place and developed stronger management oversight.
- 3.11. In addition, the local authority has invested in a multi-disciplinary staff team, employing a Fraud Investigation Officer, a Home Office employee and social workers, who together examine the evidential basis of applications and carry out assessments at the point of referral. The value of a specialist “front door” service is immeasurable – the need to respond in detail to families simply walking in with suitcases and managing that approach takes careful handling. We estimate that the effective “front door” service has provided cost avoidance of at least £485,577 for the period of monitoring with at least 27 families not entering children’s social care. In 2015-16, the embedded Home Officer’s direct involvement in resolving long term supported cases has led to case closures of 32 families. The cost of these 32 families from the date we started support with accommodation and subsistence to the discharge date was £764,462.
- 3.12. In summary, in 2015/16, there has been success in increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the area of NRPF in the face of higher demand and higher threats of judicial reviews. We have built an effective multi-disciplinary team with specialist knowledge and skills in specialist child in need assessments, financial assessment and human rights assessment and have succeeded in keeping local authority costs down. We have worked with internal audit to review our financial

processes and worked with the Courts to ensure that we are fair and prudent yet meet the requirements of the law.

- 3.13. Managers and staff continue to be supported by the performance dashboard which provides easy access to information about a range of key performance indicators. A programme of audit work was also in place by the end of this period and due for full implementation in the 2016-17 financial year. The content set out in the on line manual of procedures (TriX) has been reviewed and updated during the year
- 3.14. Recruitment of experienced social workers to safeguarding work in the Borough continues to be problematic. The return for DfE in the 2015 -16 period shows a rate of 45% of vacancies covered by agency staff. This is despite strenuous efforts to recruit and means that there is an over reliance on agency social workers with implications for additional costs and workforce instability. A plan of recruitment activity is in place to address this as a priority.
- 3.15. It is important that the service can build a reputation for good and improving practice alongside a positive approach to staff support and development. There have been significant steps taken in supporting staff through training and the introduction of the model of relationship based practice with input from Professor David Shemmings from the University of Kent. This fits well with existing 'strength based' approaches used in the service's safeguarding work. There is also an increasing emphasis on learning from research and best practice with access for staff to on line materials and face to face training. Arrangements for supervision are being strengthened with training for managers planned for the coming year.

4. Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board – Update

- 4.1. The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board (BDSCB) is the key statutory body overseeing multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements across Barking and Dagenham. Governed by the statutory guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Regulations 2006, the BDSCB is comprised of senior leaders from a range of different organisations. It has two basic objectives defined within the Children Act 2004;
 - to co-ordinate the safeguarding work of agencies
 - and to ensure that this work is effective.
- 4.2. The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board will agree its Annual Report in September 2016 covering activity for the year 2015/16.
- 4.3. There is a clear expectation that LSCBs are highly influential strategic arrangements that directly influence and improve performance in the care and protection of children. There is also a clear expectation that this is achieved through robust arrangements with key strategic bodies across the partnership. During 2015/16, engagement continued with the Safeguarding Adults Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Community Safety Partnership.
- 4.4. The Independent Chair of the Board set challenging priorities for 2015/16:
 - Board members will strengthen arrangements across agencies to identify and safeguard groups of children who are particularly vulnerable;

- Board partners will own and share accurate information, which informs understanding of safeguarding practice and improvement as a result;
- The Board will see children and young people as valued partners and consult with them so their views are heard and included in the work of the LSCB;
- Arrangements for Early Help will be embedded across agencies in Barking and Dagenham who work with children, young people and their families, ensuring more effective early intervention to reduce need and dependency; and
- Board partners will challenge practice through focused inquiries or reviews based on performance indicators, practitioner experience and views from children and young people. Collectively we will learn from and improve from these reviews

An evaluation of progress against the 2015/16 BDSCB priorities is detailed in its annual report.

- 4.5. During 2015/16, the Board completed two Serious Case Reviews and has held learning events and communicated lessons arising from the reviews. Ongoing monitoring of the respective agency action plans will continue to ensure these are completed and that the delivery of those action plans results in a positive impact on local safeguarding arrangements. Serious Case Reviews are undertaken to learn lessons and improve the way in which local professionals and organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

5. Fostering Service Update – also see attached Annual Report

- 5.1. The Fostering Service sits in the Complex Needs and Social Care division and is committed to working inclusively with all children's social work teams. The service consists of one team dedicated to all fostering activity including recruitment, assessment training, support to approved foster carers connected persons and private fostering. The team is managed by the Group Manger for Looked After Children and comprises of 1 Team Manager, 1 Deputy Manager, 2 Assessors, 9 Social Workers, 1 Private Fostering Social Worker and 2 Business Support Officers
- 5.2. The Fostering Service Annual Report, a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Services: National Minimum standard 25.7 sets out the key achievements and challenges of the service covering the period of 2015/16 along with priorities for the 2016-17 period.
- 5.3. During the year the Fostering Service has provided in house foster carers for 203 looked after children and an increased total number of placements for looked after children in the 2015-16 period - 331 compared with 320 in 2014-15.
- 5.4. There was a slight increase – from 38% to 39 % - of children placed within the Borough whilst the majority of looked after children - 84% - are placed within 20 miles of the Borough
- 5.5. The service maintained its track record of recruitment with 25 new in-house carers recruited and has successfully recruited foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds which reflect the borough's changing local population.

- 5.6. A number of the arrangements in the Fostering Service are reported as working well, as shown by positive feedback from foster carers to Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) during annual reviews regarding support received from the Fostering Service; Foster Carer annual review performance has remained at 100%; there is a comprehensive training programme for foster carers which is well received; there is an effective and committed Fostering Panel; and there have been no complaints within the Fostering Service in 2014/15 and no matters have been referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).
- 5.7. The Fostering Service continues to play an important role in the SAFE programme with a focus on value for money and appropriate savings regarding costs for caring for looked after children. Budget performance is closely monitored.
- 5.8. In 2016/17, the Fostering Service will be giving particular attention to performance regarding placement stability for looked after children as this emerged as an area for improvement in the figures for the 2015-16 period.

6. Adoption Service Update – also see attached Annual Report

- 6.1. The Barking and Dagenham Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011), Adoption Regulations 2013 (which came into force in July 2014), associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards. In line with statutory guidance, the Adoption Service produces an annual report, which provides an evaluation of adoption and permanence practice in Children's Services in the borough, outlining developments for improving service delivery.
- 6.2. The service is managed by the Group Manager for Looked after Children and consists of a team manager, deputy team manager, one and half post adoption social workers, a play therapist, a training and life story social worker, three adoption social workers and two special guardianship workers.
- 6.3. The Adoption Service was last inspected in April – May 2014, as part of the wider inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The service was judged as requiring improvement as were all other areas covered in the inspection. This led to an improvement plan, which has been implemented. There were a number of actions identified and all have been implemented. These were to introduce a tracker for timescales on individual cases; to ensure that plans are in place for permanency for children through checks by independent reviewing officers; to introduce a permanency policy; and to support social work staff through training and supervision about permanency planning for children.
- 6.4. The adoption of children from care has continued to receive national attention. This has been a key priority for over a decade with the overarching aim being to enable more children to be adopted and in a timely way. Whilst the aspiration is very positive there are significant challenges in finding suitable adoptive parents who want to adopt children who are regarded as harder to place through factors such as disability, age, ethnicity and being part of a sibling group. The government is concerned about the national reduction of children being placed for adoption and is reviewing the situation with a view to considering the introduction of legislation to counteract the impact of case law.

- 6.5. In March 2016, the government document "Adoption: A vision for change" was released. This document sets out the way Adoption will be developed over the next five years until 2020. The government aims to reform the quality of the children's social care system. Adoption reforms will be part of the wider reforms in social care.
- 6.6. Services have also had to work with the ongoing impact of recent case law (Re B, Re BS and Re T), that is continuing to have far reaching implications for local authorities when considering permanency for children, for whom adoption would usually be the plan. This has included an increase in the number of parental challenges, to Placement Orders already granted - a Placement Order is an Order made by the Court that enables the local authority to place a child with a new family to be adopted. There have also been a number of challenges by the parents to Adoption Orders made, which has meant that the granting of these orders is taking longer, and as the child is already with the adopters creates uncertainty.
- 6.7. In 2015-16, 28 children were adopted (this is the 3rd highest performance amongst the London Boroughs), most with special needs, compared to 32 in the previous year. Although this is a decline it is important to put this in context of the number of children placed who have needs which mean that they are harder to place; that there has been a sustained number of 'should be placed for adoption' (SHOPA) decisions, which is not reflected nationally; and positively, that there have been no disruptions for children whose situation is either pre adoption order or post adoption order.
- 6.8. Adoption timeliness is an area for improvement in the borough and nationally. The Adoption Scorecard is used to measure performance about the timeliness of achieving adoption for children reported as a three year rolling average and published by the Department for Education (DfE). The 2 key adoption indicators are:
- **A1** - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days); and
 - **A2** - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days).
- 6.9. The three month rolling average for the A1 indicator has increased from 647 days for 2012-15 to 721 days for 2013-16. This is due to our 2012-13 good performance (585 days) being removed from the calculation and our 2015-16 performance (769 days) being added. We are now 295 days above the DfE threshold, and this will be addressed in the coming year. This time period takes account of the date of entry into care, rehabilitation options to family, length of care proceedings, match being approved by Adoption Panel and ADM and introductions period prior to placement.
- 6.10. Whilst the Adoption team at Barking and Dagenham have successfully placed children considered 'hard to place' which has been a good outcome for those children this has meant that the timeliness in relation to the scorecard has been affected as the children have waited longer to be placed.

- 6.11. There have been 10 domestic adoptive families (not inter-country) recruited by LBBD in 2015-16, and a number of matches have been made both with internal adopters who have been waiting, and children matched with adopters from other agencies. LBBD has also provided 2 adoptive families for other local authorities both within the consortium and other local authorities.
- 6.12. The Adoption Improvement Group was put in place during the 2015-16 period and will be monitoring the performance, the actions put in place and ensuring that there is no drift in developing permanency plans for children from the time they enter care. In addition, the performance within care proceedings and meeting the deadline of 26 weeks will continue to be scrutinised in conjunction with our Legal colleagues

7. Members Corporate Parenting Group (MPCG)

- 7.1. In 2015/16, progress has continued to be made in this area and we have further strengthened the Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure strong elected member representation including the Lead Member, through the Members' Corporate Parenting Group. The Corporate Parenting Group elected a new Chair in June 2015 post election.
- 7.2. The membership and terms of reference were reviewed in 2014-15 and the work of the MPCG has been governed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy (April 2015-2016) and an annual corporate parenting report.
- 7.3. In response to the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group requesting a more detailed and analytical report on looked after children and care leavers, the local performance dataset has been revised and expanded considerably. The report and appended dataset provides an update on numbers and trends, as well as trends in safeguarding, education, employment and health outcomes with benchmarks and analysis. The revised dataset has enabled detailed discussion in strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- 7.4. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan has been refreshed and agreed with Members at Panel in June 2015. This updated strategy sets out the collective responsibilities of the Council and its partners to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after in public care. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is in place for the period from April 2015 to April 2016 and a range of actions are proposed to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people in care. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Group, which is led by Elected Members. There will be an annual report for looked after children, which will include progress in the strategy and inform further action. There will be feedback from children and young people in care
- 7.5. After the June 2015 elections a training session for new members was delivered to 20 Council Members regarding the work of the Children in Care Council (Skittlz) to raise awareness. The session was very well attended and received by Members, who reported that they felt their knowledge and understanding of Skittlz, looked after children and their corporate parenting role had increased.

- 7.6. Over the course of the 2015-16 period the panel has met regularly on a bi-monthly basis and elected members have attended regularly as have partners from health, social care, leisure services, education and the corporate management team. The Council's Rights and Participation Team have continued to attend and support the Borough's Children in Care Council (Skittlz) at the MCPG meetings. The meetings themselves have focussed on a range of standard agenda items (including health, education and social care performance) as well as 'thematic' discussions which have been generated by young people themselves.
- 7.7. As recommended by Ofsted, the pledge to looked after children in care - 'Our Promises' has been produced with our children in care council, published and disseminated. This now forms the basis of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the action plan which supports this. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report provides information about areas of progress and areas in need of improvement for the outcomes for children who are looked after in care. A Leaving Care Charter is also in place to recognise the particular issues regarding young people who leave care.
- 7.8. The Children in Care Council (CiC) consists of 10 members and work continues to engage more children in this invaluable source of experience, feedback and consultation. This includes the annual 'social work appraisal' report which provides feedback to the service. The CiC contribute to each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Group each meeting, with at least one meeting a year acting as a 'Skittlz Takeover'.
- 7.9. A progress report about the 'promises' to children in care and care leavers and actions in place to address these has been produced as part of the Corporate Parenting annual report. This also identifies key areas for further action in the 2016-17 period. These include continued attention to the placement needs of children, social worker involvement, care plans, addressing health needs, improving education plans and opportunities for young people to be in education, employment or training.

8. Social Care Programme (SAFE)

- 8.1. In July 2015, Cabinet considered the year's first Budget Monitoring Report which highlighted that the additional demand on children's social care was likely to create a projected overspend for Children's services of £7.153m. The September 2015 Cabinet Report showed that the demand was still increasing, leading to a worsening financial position for Children's Services with a total budget pressure of £11.65m projected overspend.
- 8.2. The Director of Children's Services implemented a number of initiatives to address the overspend and to reduce demand; to support this it was identified that additional capacity would be required and an Outline Business Case was presented to the October 2015 Cabinet. This proposed a formal cost saving programme including programme management and business analysis capability. The Outline Business Case was approved on 2nd October 2015. As a result the Social Care Ambition and Financial Efficiency (SAFE) Programme commenced.
- 8.3. The aims of the SAFE Programme were:

- 'To prepare a business case for resourcing change required to significantly reduce service budgets;
- To document and evidence the impact of work that had already taken place in 2015/16 to manage and reduce demand and cost;
- To ensure delivery of already identified savings and demand management proposals; and
- To work with colleagues, across the Council, to identify any areas of efficiency/change which can help drive down a £11.65m predicted pressure this year and prepare for further budget restrictions in the future.'

- 8.4. The SAFE Programme established a range of projects and workstreams based on the work already underway in the service, each led by a Business Lead from Children's Social Care, across a series of key areas, including: Demand Management and Costs Modeling; Information Workflow and Financial and Performance Governance; Commissioning; Early Help and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); Effective Workforce; Care Management and Assessment; and families with No Recourse to Public Funds and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- 8.5. The first year of the SAFE Programme, together with corporate funding and SEND Funding, Children's Social Care reported an overspend of £5.67m (including the SAFE project team). However, this was a significant improvement on the £11.65m pressure reported to Cabinet in September 2015. The SAFE Programme will continue to March 2017 with the aim of delivering a balanced baseline budget for 2017/18.
- 8.6. The wider economic context, nationally and specifically in London, continues to present very significant challenges to Children's Social Care and the component projects of the SAFE Programme. The recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced Social Workers is a core element of SAFE, and despite investment in a new strategy led by Penna, an established recruitment agency, targets to attract new, permanent Social Workers were not met. This is a reflection of difficult market conditions, with limited supply of qualified workers and high demand across other London Boroughs and regional local authorities. We have now reverted to our own recruitment processes (that led to a saving of over £1.4m on staffing) and a programme to work across agencies to seek permanent employees.
- 8.7. The availability of appropriate housing stock in the Borough is also key; historically, there has been no problem providing sufficient appropriate accommodation for care leavers, but this has become increasingly difficult as pressure on the housing market increases. In 2015/16, Housing were able to identify 7 suitable properties of the 10 they hoped to provide for the programme. There is a target of 40 properties for 2016/17 and a range of strategies are in place to deliver this.
- 8.8. Overall in 2015/16 the SAFE Programme, alongside wider work to promote good practice, has contributed to a significant reduction of children open to the social care system -from 2367 (at its highest in 2015) to 2060 by the end of the financial year. This has enabled caseloads to reduce so that the quality of social work is improving which should help reduce the amount of time children remain in the social work system and allow more time for early intervention and family work.

9. Financial Issues

- 9.1. Children's Social Care budgets were under significant pressure in 2015/16 with the Complex Needs and Social Care division overspending by £5.67m. For Children's Services overall, the 2015/16 figure was an overspend by £5.215m, after the use of Corporate funding and SEND funding. This was a significant improvement on the £11.65m pressure reported to Cabinet in September 2015.
- 9.2. The main reasons for the overspend were due to continued pressures on placements and also difficulties in permanent recruitment of Social Workers. The Council has a statutory duty with regard to vulnerable children and the overspend reported is mainly reflective of the pressures in meeting this statutory requirement. There continues to be a pressure on supporting families with No Recourse to Public Funds and Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. It should be noted that a priority initiative to increase the number of permanently employed staff continues.
- 9.3. Financial pressure continues within the Complex Needs and Social Care budget in 2015/16. This will be addressed through the Children's Services Efficiency Programme through demand modelling and the need to manage down risk and reduce the escalation of children referred into the service. This will be reported separately to Cabinet.
- 9.4. Significant demand pressures within the Children's Care and Support service block have continued from 2015/16 into 2016/17. At the start of the financial year the service faced a potential pressure of £9.465m on its budget. To mitigate this pressure, savings proposals totalling £5.911m were identified by the service and agreed by CPG
- 9.5. There is continued risk to the SAFE programme delivering on budget by the end of 2016/17. The ongoing projects are projected to close the current budget gap considerably in 2016/17 but it should be noted that continuing demand pressure on the service places a significant risk to the 2016/17 position.

10. Legal Issues

- 10.1. The responsibility of corporate parenting applies to the Local Authority as a whole and not just the departments directly responsible delivering services to children and young persons.
- 10.2. The Children Act 2004 and statutory guidance specifies that the Cabinet Member for Children Services has the lead political role in respect of looked after children and young people contributing to and being satisfied that the Local Authority has high standards of corporate parenting.

11. Other Implications

- 11.1. **Staffing Issues** - There are no specific staffing issues contained within this report. Recruitment in social care and reducing the level of agency staff is a key project of the Social Care Programme as discussed above.
- 11.2. **Customer Impact** - The report highlights the areas of service improvement, as well as the areas where performance continues to be addressed.

- 11.3. **Safeguarding Children** - Services are determined to continually improve but such aspirations are an ever increasing challenge within a local context of growing demand and fiscal austerity.
- 11.4. **Crime and Disorder Issues** - The MASH element includes Police and Probation colleagues and is a route whereby early identification of sexual exploitation, gang membership and other crime and disorder issues may be identified and is therefore seen as a positive support process for reducing crime and disorder.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report

- 'Working Together to Safeguard Children, Department for Education, April 2013', Children & Families Act, March 2014;
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>
- Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board (published report July 2014 – link
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/barking_and_dagenham/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
<http://www.barkinganddagenhamjsna.org.uk/Pages/jsnhome.aspx>

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Adoption Report 2015/16
Appendix 2 – Fostering Report 2015/16