

CABINET

15 September 2015

Title: Children's Social Care Annual Report 2014/15	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Social Care	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Summary: <p>This report provides Cabinet with a review of operational service developments, peer reviews and inspections over the 2014/15 financial year within the Complex Needs and Social Care Division (CNSC) of Children's Services. The report also provides an overview of the local demand pressures and sets progress against the Ofsted single inspection improvement plan one year on.</p> <p>The reports provides an update on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), operational for just over 12 months and an overview of the Council's looked after children's population, pressures and priorities for the future, as well as reporting on the work of the Member Corporate Parenting Group in 2014/15.</p> <p>Progress and priorities within the Council's Adoption and Fostering service is included and the report provides an overview of the work of the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board in the last financial year. In particular, the report shares with Councillors the increased focus upon Child Sexual Exploitation and an update on the Home Office Review undertaken in December to March 2014/15.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is asked to note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The service improvement and challenges contained within this report, and the actions taken last year in response to local demand, the OFSTED inspections of services and the financial pressures experienced by the service.2. The areas identified as priorities for 2015/16 following analysis and review of 2014/15. The key priorities are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving services and outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and	

their families.

- Earlier intervention and prevention through our own Prevention Service and via close operational relationships with colleagues providing targeted and universal support, to reduce the demand on social care, and drive down referral rates and the need for child protection plans.
- Reducing the numbers of children in care, and the cost of their provisions.
- Minimising the duration of Child Protection Plans.
- Strengthen means of engagement with young people and their families so that they can 'shape' future services to improve effectiveness and reduce the number of families needing social care support.

Reason(s)

The Leader, Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services have statutory roles to protect children, as set out in national guidance. All Cabinet members and senior officers should act as Corporate Parents for our Children in Care. This report is part of assuring their roles.¹

Cabinet should be aware of the financial and safeguarding impacts of managing the demands on the social care service. The level of referrals to social care and of Child Protection cases has risen disproportionately to the child population. The demographic trend shows increases in the child population and the percentage of the population that are children (32.3% of our population are aged 0-19, compared with 24.6 % in London and 23.8% nationally (ChiMAT June 2015).

Cabinet asked to be updated on progress to address our OFSTED 2014 single agency inspection outcomes and action plans.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The Complex Needs and Social Care Division comprises 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. Responsibility also includes Special Educational Needs (SEN) services in response to the government's Children and Families Bill. 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).

1.3 The Complex Needs and Social Care Division is operating in a continued context of rising demand, including the comparatively high percentage of population aged

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

0-17 years of age, high rates of domestic violence² and increasing housing and homelessness pressures.³ Work has been undertaken to reduce demand, this has been effective in some areas but has not impacted on increased levels of referrals or the numbers of children in need and in need of child protection.

1.4 As well as improving services, the Children's Social Care Division is seeking to reduce financial spend and minimise the negative impact on the wider Council budgets. The priorities of the Division are set out in the Business Plan and are:

- Improving services and outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- Earlier intervention and prevention through our own Prevention Service and via close operational relationships with colleagues providing targeted and universal support, to reduce the demand on social care, and drive down referral rates and the need for child protection plans. .
- Reducing the numbers of children in care, and the cost of their provisions.
- Minimising the duration of Child Protection Plans.
- Strengthen means of engagement with young people and their families so that they can 'shape' future services and are more resilient.

1.5 The demand challenge

Demand on social care has increased rapidly, and is affected by multiple features and dependencies:

- The child population in Barking and Dagenham is increasing by around 3-4% each year, so we would expect the numbers in social care to increase by a similar amount. Child Protection or referral numbers are increasing disproportionately.
- Early Help provision is strong. Children's Centres, voluntary sector and schools provide early intervention to meet families' immediate needs without them having to go to social care for help. This has reduced the number of contacts.
- Referrals to social care (particularly from the police) have increased. There is an expectation now that social care responds to issues such as sexual exploitation, unaccompanied asylum seekers, the prevent agenda, gang membership, teenagers behaving outside safe boundaries. Historically these young people (often teenagers) would not have been referred to social care. This is contributing to the demand on social care.
- There is also a lot of migration into the Borough; 158 children moving into the Borough last year were referred directly to social care.
- Staff instability affects both quality and timeliness of our work. We have struggled to recruit permanent staff and have many agency staff. Time and energy has to be spent on handing over cases rather than working with the families. This causes drift and pressure in the system.

² In 2013/14 there were 292 sexual offences reported in Barking and Dagenham, a 16% increase compared to 2012/13 and the 10th highest in London in terms of rates per 1,000 population. The 2013 Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessment identified a young age profile of reported victims and perpetrators of sexual offences. The predominant profile of victims were white females aged between 10 and 19 years old (52%). (JSNA)

³ In 2012/13 501 families with children presented as homeless (JSNA).

Our challenge is to reduce this demand so that social care is able to manage within its budget and children remain safe.

2. Context

- 2.1 This section of the report provides a high level summary of safeguarding and population data in 2014/15.
- 2.2 Alongside child population growth and in the context of a high population of children and young people aged between 0 and 17 years of age (highest in the statistical neighbour group in 2013-14 and well above London and national averages), the borough has also seen a disproportionate increase in safeguarding and looked after children numbers. This growth continued in 2014/15 with significant increases in the number of social care referrals, the number of assessments completed, rate of section 47 investigations, the number of children subject to child protection plans and fluctuating looked after children numbers.
- 2.3 In 2014/15, 8,515 contacts were made to statutory social care compared to 8,856 in the previous year, a decline of 4%. Despite this decline, the number of contacts progressing to a statutory social care referral significantly increased, rising to 4,084 in 2014/15 (48%) compared with 3,126 in 2013/14 (35%), a real term increase of 31% in total referrals in the last year (table 1.0). Barking and Dagenham's referral rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17 has consequently risen to 716, now slightly above our statistical neighbours (690), but way above national and London rates of 573 and 470 respectively. Reasons for this increase are not clear, but the proportion of referrals from police is 3 times higher than the next highest referring agency (schools). Investigating and addressing this is a priority for 2015/16.
- 2.4 The percentage of contacts progressing to a referral has also increased rising to 48%, way above the borough's historic average conversion rate of around 30%. This has partly been caused by incomplete information at contact stage and urgent steps have already been taken to bring this rate down.
- 2.5 High referral rates do offer safeguarding protection but can overload the system so that priority cases are at risk of being missed. The level this had risen to in 2014/5 was unacceptable and urgent action was taken at the end of the year to drive this percentage down.⁴

⁴ As at the end of July 2015, the conversion rate has dropped considerably to 29% (345 referrals from 1,190 contacts). This has been achieved through promotion of full use of CAF across agencies and the MASH refusing to take incomplete forms unless the children are at immediate risk.

Table 1. Contacts and referrals to statutory social care

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	1 year % change	5 year % change
Number of contacts received (including multiple contacts on a child)	14,833	9,765	8,683	8,363	8,856	8,515	-4%	-43%
Number of referrals	3,043	2,704	1,812	2,586	3,126	4,084	+31%	+34%
Referral Rate per 10,000	632	546	337	470	525	716	+36%	+13%

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

2.6 The majority of referrals relate to younger children aged 0 – 5 and this reflects the rapid demographic change within the Borough, as well as the pressures experienced in more universal settings such as schools, primary health care services etc. There is also a change in the ethnicity of children requiring support which is a reflection of the demographic change within the borough.

2.7 Although the ethnic make-up of the borough has changed significantly in the last 10 years, white British children remain disproportionately represented in statutory social care cases. For example, 52% of our looked after children and around 46% of children on child protection plans are White British, significantly higher than the overall population of White British children in the borough at 33%. 27% of looked after children and 24% of children on child protection plans are Black - lower than the Black local population of 36% demonstrating an under representation.

2.8 As a consequence of increased demand in referrals, the number of children receiving a statutory social care service has also increased further. In 2014/15, 2,326 children and young people were open to social care compared to 2,184 in the previous year, a real term increase of 7% in one year and 51% over the last five years. This growth is higher than the overall growth in the children population of around 30% aged 0-17. The rate of open social care cases per 10,000 has risen to 408, but despite the increase still remains lower than that found in similar areas (461) although much higher than national (346) and London (368) rates. Despite this increase, the proportion of looked after children has remained stable at 80 per 10,000 compared to an average of 78 per 10,000 over the last 5 years. Work to understand the reasons behind these variations is a priority for 2015/16.

Table 2 Number of open social care cases and rate per 10,000, 2009/10 – 2014/15

	LBBB 2009/10	LBBB 10/11	LBBB 11/12	LBBB 12/13	LBBB 13/14	LBBB 14/15	% change over 1 year	SN Average	London Average	National Average
No. of open social care cases at year end	1482	1545	1714	2161	2184	2326	7%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Open cases rate per 10,000	320	342	344	393	383	408	7%	461	368	346

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

2.9 The overall increase in referral activity has created pressures within the MASH and Assessment Service, impacting on assessment activity and caseloads. At the end of March 2015, 2,952 statutory social care assessments had been undertaken, compared to 2,817 in 2013/14. This represents a further increase of 5%. The number of Section 47s undertaken remained comparable at 1,234 compared to 1,231 in 2013/14, but still represents a considerable rise from previous years. Our rate of S47s per 10,000 at 216 remains significantly higher than all benchmarks - 155 for statistical neighbours, 112 for London and 124 for the national rate.

From 1st April 2015 – 25th August 2015, there were 550 strategy meetings which led to 459 S47's which led to 169 ICPC's. So the 'drop out rate' between strategy meetings to ICPC is around 69%. Additional gate keeping was introduced at the end of the year to ensure each Section 47 enquiry is appropriate.

2.10 In 2014/15, the number of children subject to child protection plans has also continued to increase to 353 – an increase of 10% on the 318 reported in the previous year and a 77% increase over the last 5 years. The rate per 10,000 of 58 has increased to 62 and is now much higher in Barking and Dagenham compared to national (42), London (37) and similar areas (54). Audits in 2013/14 and 2014/15, and OFSTED reports found that threshold rates are appropriate but reducing this high rate is an essential priority for 2015/16.

OFSTED (2014) "The thresholds for children with lower levels of need are not sufficiently understood or applied by all agencies. Although the guidance provided is clear, agencies are not always clear about when a child may be identified as 'in need'."

OFSTED clarified that "Thresholds for those most urgently in need of protection are well understood by the main statutory agencies in the area, enabling consequent response by social care to be effective."

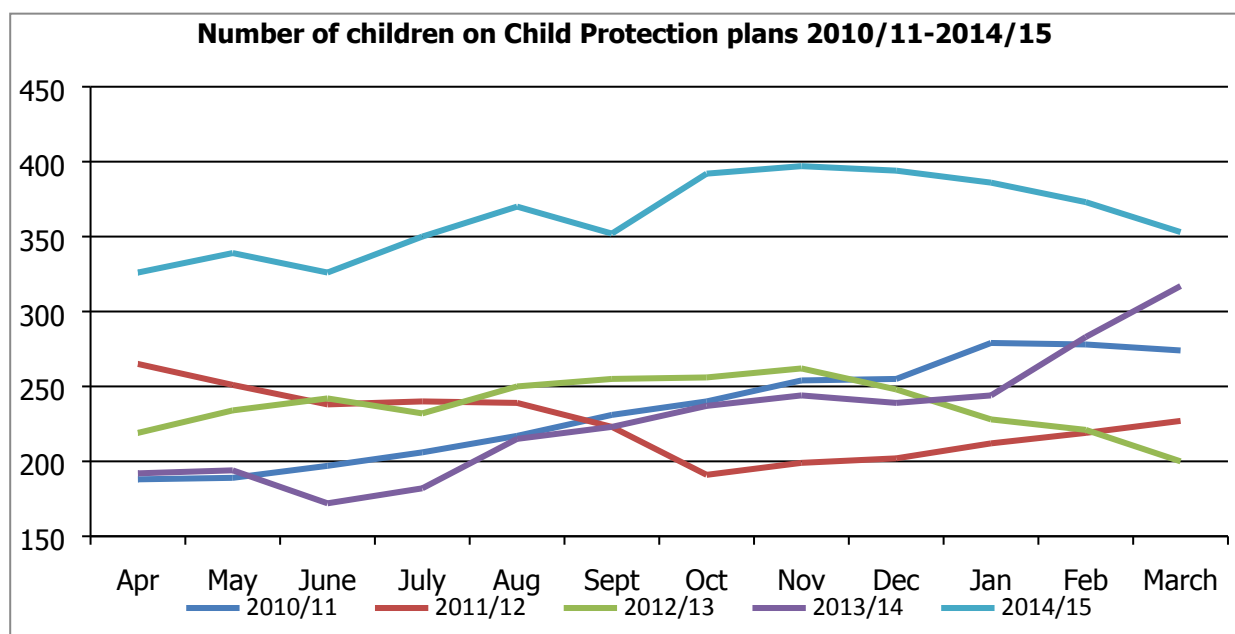
2.11 In total, 440 new child protection plans were initiated with 405 child protection plans ceasing in 2014/15, a higher number compared to previous years Whilst the number of children on child protection plans has been fluctuating throughout 2014 and 2015, the numbers have declined since December 2014.

Table 3 Number of children and young people with a child protection plan (CPP)

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of children subject to a child protection plan	199	274	227	200	318	353
Total number of new CPP	205	249	226	276	433	440
Total number of ceased CPP	173	174	274	302	314	405
Rate of CPP per 10,000 children	43	55	42	36	58	62

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Figure 1 Number of CP plans by month and year



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

2.12 In the main, the predominant child protection issues the service is currently managing relate to emotional abuse and 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 60% for 2014/15, which is a decline on the 69% reported in 13/14, but still higher than previous years. This is higher than in other Boroughs.

3. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC) and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

3.1 In 2014/5, referral rates for families with no access to public funds have averaged three per week and family profiles have averaged 3 to 4 children (with implications for accommodation requirements). As at 20 May 2015, there were 164 children allocated as NRPF cases for support.

3.2 The continuing rate of referrals along with the length of time taken for the Home Office to resolve cases means that the total number of allocated cases has increased whilst the number of cases closed has not kept pace with this.

3.3 The rapid growth has led to a need to change service management. The NRPF service has been developed to respond to these families and reduce demand and cost. There are now improved systems and processes in place and stronger management oversight. Whilst this has been a significant improvement, the team is not complacent and it is recognised that more can be done to improve the screening, assessment and review of cases, intra-agency working and the best use of resources. The Council has joined NRPF Connect to try to expedite the process. An additional enforcement officer has been recruited and we are seeking to recruit a Home Office link person* to help accelerate the processing of claims.

* recruited August 2015

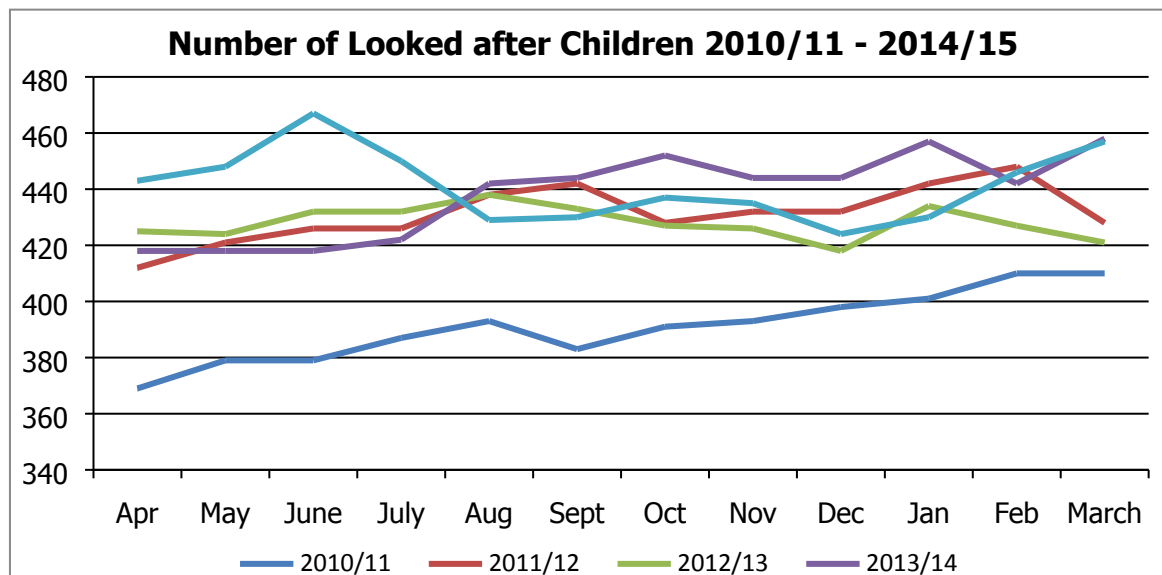
- 3.4 During 2014/15, strong partnership working with Housing reduced the costs of rooms per night by nearly 60% (from £85 to £35). At the same time ensuring that a housing quality framework is adhered to resulting in value for money.
- 3.5 Barking and Dagenham is part of the pan London allocation system for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. Across London Boroughs have been experiencing increased numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers, including those arriving via Italy and Spain. In March 2015 there were 75 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers linked to social care services, 29 of these were 18 or younger. The majority of the older young people are linked to the Learn2Live Team as care leavers, but with lower associated costs. 10 of these young people are attending university courses.
- 3.6 The current government grant does not provide sufficiently for unaccompanied asylum seekers. There is considerable national debate about how best to manage the increasing costs for NRPF and UASC. In Barking and Dagenham the additional cost pressures have been as high as £3,000,000.

4. Looked after Children Numbers

- 4.1 In Barking and Dagenham, the number of looked after children was rising until 2013/14, when the borough had 458 looked after children at the end of the financial year, compared to 420 in 2012/13 and 410 in 2010/11. As of the end of 2014/15, the number of looked after children was 457, a rate of 80 per 10,000 0-17 year olds. Although the proportion has stayed roughly stable over time, the borough's looked after children rates are higher than similar areas (70), the national (60) and London (54) rates.
- 4.2 During the last 12 months, numbers have fluctuated, and fell slightly, but the overall trajectory over time continues to increase in line with child population growth. The number of children in care at the end of the year was lower than in 2013/4 but there was still a net increase over the year. Looked after children numbers varied throughout 2014/15, peaking at 467 (highest figure since numbers recorded) in June and falling to 424 in December. The end of year figure of 457 was similar to 2013/14 (458).⁵ Reducing the number of children in care is a priority for 2015/16.

⁵ This is a "snapshot" figure for a single week, because of the volatility of children in care numbers it is important to review trends, rather than each individual week.

Figure 2 Number of LAC by month and year



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 4.3 The profile of the looked after children population has remained reasonably static. The percentage of looked after children that were female dropped to 49% in 2014/15 compared to 51% in 2013/14.
- 4.4 There was a 5% decrease in the children under 10 years old in care in 2014/15 (falling from 46% to 41%), with the number of children aged 10 years rising by 5% when compared to 2013/14. Although this is lower than the local population (64% are under 10 years old), it is in line with the national average for LAC.
- 4.5 By ethnicity, compared to March 2014, there was a 5% decline in the number of White British children being cared for by the authority in 2014/15 - falling from 52% to 47%. We are also seeing an increasing trend of Eastern European families featuring in our care statistics, and Albanian young people are over represented in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker figures.
- 4.6 The total number of children coming into care decreased in 2014/15; 283 compared to 314 in the previous year and more children left care in 2014/5 compared to 2013/4. The number leaving care was higher at 281(2014/5) compared to 272 (2013/4).

Table 4 Number of children entering and leaving care by year

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of children coming into care	240	245	314	283
Number of children coming into care on Police protection	80	103	134	69
Number of children leaving care	223	247	272	281

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 4.7 OFSTED (2014) prioritised the need to address children coming directly into care through police intervention.

“Too many children experience the trauma of being removed from the care of their parents by the police. This often takes place before enough information has been gathered from other agencies and family members.”

The number of children taken into care through the use of Police Powers of Protection has significantly reduced with good progress made against our local target set. Police Protection numbers from April 2014 to March 2015 declined to 69, representing 25% of all admissions into care. This compared to 134 in 2013/14; 43% of all admissions. Children’s services set a target of 20% reduction in use of police powers by March 2015 and we have achieved an 18% decline in proportionate terms. Based on actual numbers, the reduction is 48% (nearly halved). Despite the good progress, performance is twice the national average of 13%, but we have significantly closed the gap on the London average of 20%. Addressing this was a key priority in our OFSTED report.

5. Safeguarding

- 5.1 This section of the report provides a summary of safeguarding activity during 2014/15, primarily driven by the plan for improvement following the inspection of services carried out by OFSTED in May 2014.
- 5.2 The services for safeguarding children were judged as requiring improvement in May 2014. A number of areas for improvement were identified by OFSTED as detailed in last year’s Cabinet report, incorporated into a detailed Local Authority improvement plan (Appendix 1). This improvement plan has been monitored and evaluated during 2014/15 by Children’s Services Inspection Board, with 6 monthly reports to Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB), Health and Wellbeing Board, Children’s Trust, Children’s Select Committee and Corporate Parenting Group.
- 5.3 Overall, good progress has been made in the last financial year against those areas with key actions for improvement progressing well and the majority are completed or near to completion (Appendix 1).
- Work with colleagues in the Police about the use of powers of protection (Area for improvement 1)
 - Improved practice in strategy discussions (Area for improvement 3)
 - Improving the quality of assessments and introducing the single assessment (Area for improvement 5)
 - Ensuring that children are seen in a timely manner (Area for improvement 6)
 - Strengthen management oversight (Area for improvement 12)
- 5.4 A top priority of the CNSC Division in 2014/15 has been to stabilise the social care workforce; to recruit permanent staff and reduce the high percentage of agency staff across the service, which is costly and reduces service stability even though many of those staff have worked for Barking and Dagenham social care service for long periods of time. The social care managers are working to reduce the agency

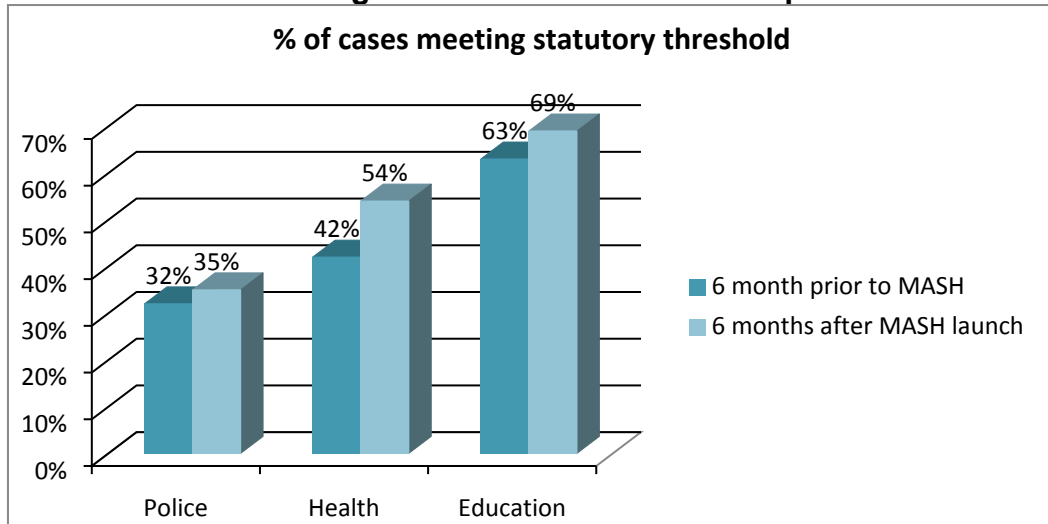
rates from over 50% to the London average of around 25%. This work is extremely challenging but necessary. An update on achievements is covered later in the report (Para 6.13).

- 5.5 2014/15 has also seen very significant developments regarding child sexual exploitation (CSE) as a priority area of safeguarding activity. It has been important to take into account the findings of the key reports such as in Rotherham, and to ensure that action plans are in place. The CNSC Division has a key role to play in collaboration with LSCB partners in the implementation of the action plans so this has become another key area of activity and development.

6. Service Improvement

- 6.1 In 2014/15, a number of significant service developments have taken place to strengthen the 'front door', which include further development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) launched on the 1st April 2014 and the introduction of the new Multi Agency referral form (MARF). Both aim to improve the quality of referrals and the advice and support for agencies in the Borough with the aim to achieve the appropriate services to meet the needs of children.
- 6.2 The Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers carried out in the summer of 2014 reported positively on MASH. The report stated *that "Information sharing between agencies and professionals is timely and effective within the 'triage' and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). The recent co-location of children's social care, health, the police, including a child sexual exploitation officer, and multi-agency panel (MAP) coordinator, is effective in supporting all key services to be fully informed and involved in plans for these children"* (Ofsted, July 2014).
- 6.3 An evaluation of MASH was also undertaken, in house, 6 months following implementation. Overall, early findings were positive with a reduction in contacts. Early evidence suggests this may be as a result of closer working arrangements with partner agencies and enhanced understanding of child protection thresholds. The largest single contacts into the Front Door – Police, Education and Health – referred 20% less in the 6 months after MASH *launched*, compared to the 6 month period prior. In the 6 months prior to MASH launching, only 34% of all contacts into the Front Door hit the threshold for statutory assessment within Social Care. Meaning 66% had no significant safeguarding concerns following MASH screening and risk assessment. In the 6 month period following MASH launching, 54% of all contacts met the threshold for statutory Social Care assessment. Only 1/3 of police contacts met threshold.

Figure 3 MASH cases meeting threshold before and after period



- 6.4 A direct cost saving to the Local Authority can be attributed to the MASH investigation process, where cases have stepped across to Early Help rather than progressing to statutory assessment as a result of the multi agency risk assessment. Based on social care assessment and management overheads, this represents a financial savings of between £700 and £1175 per case. This, when projected across a 12 month period based on the first 6 months of evidence, represents a potential saving of £325,000. Social Care and Early Intervention teams have been working closely together to shift cases from Tier 3 to Tier 2 provision. The Troubled Families pilot project has been set up, to start in April 2015, and aims to reduce the numbers of cases held in social care.
- 6.5 In 2014/15, a range of measures have been put in place to further improve performance and quality assurance, building on existing arrangements. These include a Quality Assurance Strategy and the introduction of a weekly performance dashboard for managers and social work staff.
- 6.6 The weekly performance team dashboards provide managers and social workers with a weekly check point of information, which can assist and prompt in their planning, for example, ensuring that children are seen and core groups take place in a timely way. The dashboards have taken the emphasis on improving outcomes through performance to a higher level and significant improvements have made in many areas.
- 6.7 The service has seen very significant improvement in performance regarding child protection core groups (86% in 2014/15 compared to 36% in 2013/14) - this is a key element in the service which leads multi agency working on child protection plans to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- 6.8 There has also been improvement in the timeliness of children subject to child protection plans being seen (95% in 2014/15 compared to 76% in Q2 2014/15). Based on progress made and the usefulness of the weekly dashboard, the service has also now introduced a new standard of frequency which sets a minimum of visiting in 4 weeks rather than previous standard of 6 weeks. Both 4 and 6 weekly frequencies are currently reported.

- 6.9 The number of children taken into care on police protection has been very high in previous years and was identified as an area for improvement following the Ofsted inspection in 2014. Significant progress has been made in 2014/15 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 and the impact of trauma on individual children. A revised Police Protocol and Strategy was produced in June 2015 and all children taken into care via police protection have been audited in detail by the Quality Assurance Manager based in the Child Protection Reviewing Service. The audit findings and outcomes are discussed at the 6 weekly Police and Social Care meetings to ensure practice is reasonable and also to consider alternatives. This has led to agreed actions to reduce the number of these admissions by considering alternative approaches whilst still safeguarding children as for example making arrangements with other family members. This continues to receive close attention through a constructive and regular monthly meeting with senior Police officers to review performance and consider individual cases highlighted in the audit work. This meeting will be used to work with the police to reduce all contacts.
- 6.10 In 2014/15, the CNSC Division launched a new supervision framework, which sets out standards for supervision along with the expectations on staff and managers. This was reviewed in January to check that supervision agreements were in place and that supervision was taking place and planned at the appropriate frequency of at least monthly. Further work is planned to provide training for managers about supervision and provide guidance about recording supervision on case records.
- 6.11 The CSE action plan is in place and will provide a positive framework to develop expertise and practice in working with children, young people and their families at risk of sexual exploitation. Barking and Dagenham Children's Services were also selected to take part in the Home Office pilot project aimed at improving cross agency response to CSE. This pilot took part between December 2014 and March 2015 and, as a pilot borough, we were praised by the Home Office for our innovative prevention work, for example, using ARC Theatre in schools and for our creative practice in engaging vulnerable young women to stop them from running away.
- 6.12 As part of our data protection processes all staff in Children's Social Care are mandated to undertake the Managing Information on line training. Implementation of this mandate has been further strengthened by monthly reports to Managers and no new permanent member of staff is able to start work in social care until this has been completed. We have identified a need to ensure the same rigour is applied to agency staff.
- 6.13 Improving recruitment and retention is a top priority and the CNSC Division has heavily focused on stabilising the workforce. Recruitment of social workers and team managers as part of an ongoing programme is underway but has proved to be particularly challenging. A specialist Recruitment Manager has been in post since September 2014 to drive forward this agenda. In 2014/15, a new social care recruitment website has been introduced and is now live. A package of benefits for working in LBBDD has been put in place to enhance the recruitment process, including a comprehensive overview of the local housing offer and benefits in the borough. Since September 2014, 27 social workers – 17 NQSW (ASYE) have been recruited. Although this is an improvement rates remain far too

high and this has a significant financial pressure for the services – around £3,000,000 per year as well as a negative effect on outcomes for children. Addressing this is a major imperative. A Business Case has been developed to support working with an employment agency on a recruitment project in 2015/16.

- 6.14 As part of the service's approach to recruitment and retention, the period of 2014 - 15 saw the launch of the Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE). Two cohorts of 8 newly qualified social workers have gone through the programme with two further cohorts planned for 2015-16. These social workers have received the additional support provided in the programme through training, more frequent supervision and managed caseloads.

7. Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board – Update

- 7.1 The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board agreed its Annual Report in September 2014 covering activity for the year 2013/14. The 2014/15 report will be agreed at the Board meeting in September 2015. The report reflects the requirements in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015.
- 7.2 The Annual Report will be published on the LSCB's website and is drawn to the attention of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Local Authority Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.
- 7.3 In May 2014, Ofsted undertook a review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board as part of the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers. The LSCB was graded as "Requires Improvement". Areas of strength and areas for improvement (5 in total) were identified and an action plan has been developed in response to those areas for improvement (refer to Appendix 1). Good progress has been made against the action plan with the majority of areas now RAG rated green (refer to Appendix 1 for detail).
- 7.4 The Board's full report can be accessed via the BDSCB website.
- 7.5 Key achievements of the Safeguarding Children Board as set out in the annual report in 2014/15 are:
- Improved attendance by partners at the Board;
 - Strengthened sub-group working feeding back to the Strategic Partnership
 - Improved challenge to other agencies to ensure practice is robust, including evaluation of risk, and reporting on actions taken between boards;
 - Stronger links to the Health and Well Being Board with formal protocols to ensure transfer of information and understanding of roles and responsibilities;
 - There has been a reduction in the percentage of children coming into care through police protection;
 - A review of the impact of multi-agency training has been undertaken and has informed the LSCB Training Strategy for 2015-16;
 - Social Workers have become more active participants in our practitioners Forums; and
 - Private Fostering has been discussed at the Board and an Annual Private Fostering Report has been produced for 2014/15.

7.6 The Independent Chair of the Board has 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.

8. Local Authority Designated Officer for Managing Allegations against Staff and Volunteers

8.1 The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for the management and oversight of all investigations into allegations against those working with children and is responsible for preparing the annual and 6 monthly report to the Barking & Dagenham Local Safeguarding Children Board and establishing processes to disseminate learning throughout the children's partnership.

OFSTED (2014) commented:

“There is a prompt and effective response to the allegations of harm involving those working with children or vulnerable adults. Referrals from a range of agencies are subject to timely and proportionate enquiries, particularly so in relation to educational settings. Awareness of the Local Authority Designated Officer role is promoted well amongst local organisations including faith groups, with well established relationships with local churches and mosques.” This high standard is being maintained.

8.2 In Barking and Dagenham, the LADO responsibility is invested in Teresa DeVito, Group Manager for Safeguarding, Quality and Reviews and the operational function of the LADO role is delegated to:

- Alec Parsons, Safeguarding Manager, for all non-Education allegations, and;
- Mike Cullern, Safeguarding Lead for Education, for all allegations against Education professionals

8.3 Nationally, all agencies and settings that provide services or staff working with children are required (under statutory guidance – Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015), to have clear procedures for responding to allegations against staff, whether they are paid or voluntary. Within education services, additional guidance (previously Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education, 2007, updated April 2014 to Keeping Children Safe in Education), outlines specific requirements considered when managing allegations against staff working in education settings. The requirements of the LADO process are set out in the Pan London Safeguarding Procedures and are followed by all London boroughs.

8.4 The number of calls to the LADO service for consultation and allegation management support remains high. Between April 2014 and end March 2015, the

LADO's recorded 221 formal allegations against the children's workforce in Barking & Dagenham. This represents a 4.98% increase on the previous year (210). The vast majority of allegations come from education (58%).

Allegations/Concerns referred by type of Professional

Agency	2014-2015
Education	128
Foster Carers	43
Church leaders/Organisers	9
Health Professionals	8
Youth Workers	7
Reg. Social Workers	2
Residential Workers	4
Registered Child Minders	3
Un Registered Child Minders	4
Football Coaches	2
Others	11

8.5 Outcomes from investigations were as follows:

Table 5 Staff Allegations Summary

Substantiated – proof that allegation is true	23
Unsubstantiated – insufficient evidence to prove or disprove allegation	22
Advice only – Threshold not met for strategy meeting but agency needing advice about dealing with allegation	146
Malicious – allegation was untrue and made with the intention of malice towards the individual	2
Unfounded – the evidence suggests that the allegation is unlikely to be true	28
Total	221

8.6 Each of the 23 substantiated cases has been followed through, working closely with the police with referrals to appropriate statutory bodies and disciplinary action taken where required.

Of these:

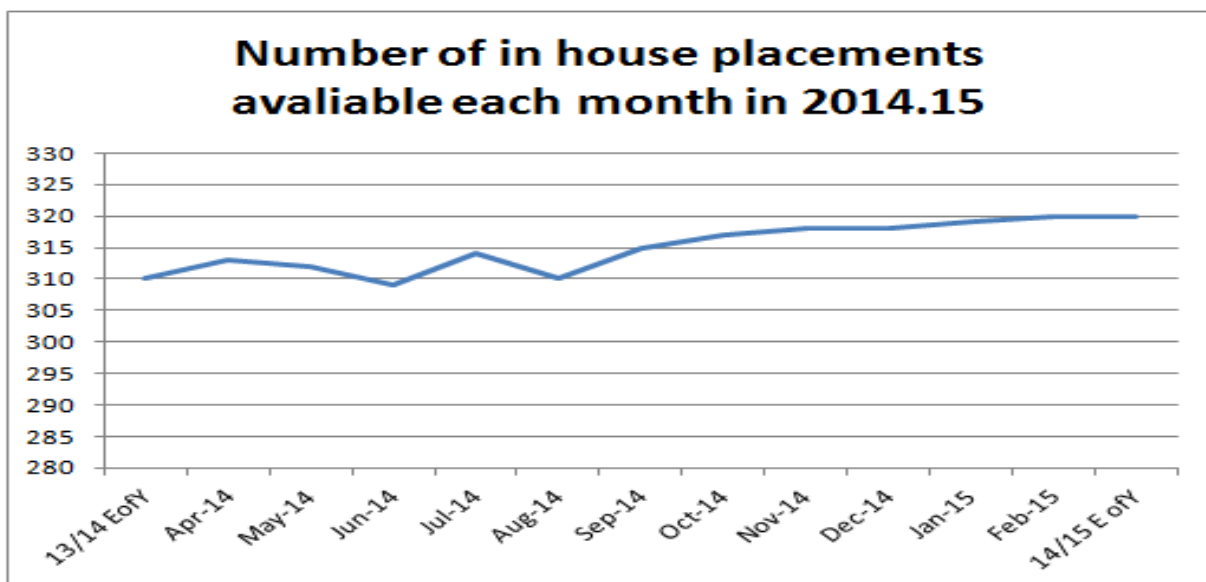
- 4 were cases where the allegations related to matters outside the individual's professional role;
- 11 involved hitting or pushing children, or inappropriate use of physical constraint or undue levels of anger;
- 4 involved sexualised behaviours with children or inappropriate adult-child relationships;
- 2 were cases where children who had been hurt were not looked after sufficiently well;

- 2 were cases of emotional abuse of children, one involving an adult alleging that a child was a witch; and
- 2 led to criminal prosecutions and 15 were referred to professional bodies or DBS.

9. Fostering Service Update

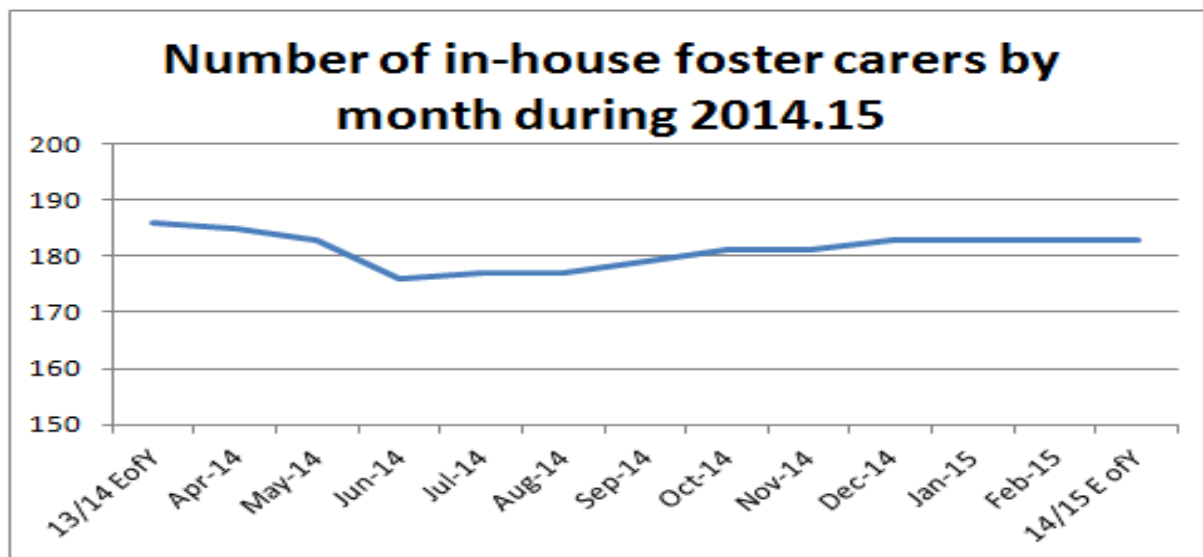
- 9.1 The Fostering Service consists of one team dedicated to all fostering activity including recruitment, assessment training, support to approved foster carers connected persons and private fostering. The performance of the Barking and Dagenham Fostering Service has made a huge contribution to some key areas of performance with regards to our looked after children population. As noted by OFSTED (May 2014) *“fostering recruitment campaigns have been continuous and effective, helping to ensure that looked after children are placed with local foster carers. Recruitment strategies are appropriately based on recently assessed need, with strong recruitment in adjoining boroughs.*
- 9.2 The Fostering Service Annual Report sets out the key achievements and challenges of the service covering the period of 2014/15. The report provides a snapshot of the service, activity during the year and progress made to address recommendations. The Private Fostering annual report for 2014/15 is being presented to the BDSCB in September 2015 and reports on progress made against Ofsted recommendations.
- 9.3 As at the end of March 2015, the service had 183 fostering households compared to 186 in March 2014. Although this represents a slight drop overall, 320 looked after children’s placements were offered by the 183 fostering households compared to 310 children at the end of March 2014. This is a net increase of 10 placements in the year. The team’s performance is in direct contrast to that of neighbouring boroughs who continue to struggle to recruit new, quality carers.

Figure 3



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Figure 4



Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Placement type

9.4 Table 6 provides a breakdown of looked after children by placement and whether in or out of the borough between 2011/12 and 2014/15. In 2014/15, 341 (75%) looked after children in the borough were placed in foster care (254 in house and 87 in agency placements), a decline on 2103/14 figure of 377 (82% - 261 in house and 116 in agency placements). This decline can be partially explained by the increased use of residential placements, rising from 23 in 2013/14 to 37 in 2014/15 and the reduction in the use of Agency placements. This increase is due to the increasing complexity of children's needs and increased breakdowns in foster carer placements, particularly for older children. Residential placements are all required to be agreed by the Corporate Director, since they are particularly expensive and care needs to be taken to be certain those placements are in the child's best interests. The increase in residential placements has had a strong negative impact on the placement budget. Of the 37 looked after children placed in residential at the end of 2014/15, 79% were teenagers (29/37).

Table 6

	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Number of Children In Care	427	420	458	457
Number in Residential Care	29	22	23	37
Number in LBBB Foster Care	242	248	261	254
:of which in Borough	110	113	118	128
:of which out of Borough	132	135	143	126
Number in Agency Foster Care	87	81	116	87
:of which in Borough	15	10	12	8
:of which out Borough	72	71	104	79
% of all CIC in Foster Placements	81.0%	81.7%	82.3%	74.6%
Number of Private Fostering Arrangements	10	7	12	10

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 9.5 A key strength of the Fostering Service is the ability of the staff team to remain child focussed whilst providing a high level of support to the cohort of foster carers. Over the last year, there has been an increase in the number of children needing long term or permanent placements and a significant number of requests to place siblings groups of three or more children. The team has continued to work hard to keep young people in local, in-house foster placements thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.
- 9.6 The table (7) below offers some information regarding placement proximity to the Borough. Whilst 254 looked after children are cared for by our Borough foster areas, not all foster families reside within the Borough itself. This is largely an issue of housing stock; the Borough has a very large 'council housing stock' which does not lend itself to surplus bedrooms and sufficient space in general to be available to make fostering an option for prospective families, hence the need to recruit carers from beyond the borough boundaries. However, as the table illustrates, 'out of borough placements' are in the main within neighbouring boroughs or authorities within a short distance of Barking and Dagenham itself; Havering, Redbridge and Essex, ensuring that contact with professionals is easily maintained and that some services provided within the Borough are still accessed by young people who do not strictly reside with us.

Table 7 Looked after children placement by area (March 2015)

Area	Number	%
LBBB	174	38.1
Havering	86	18.8
Redbridge	56	12.3
Essex	33	7.2
Kent	18	3.9
Placed for Adoption	15	3.3
Thurrock	9	2.0
Enfield	6	1.3
Tower Hamlets	6	1.3
Newham	5	1.1
Hounslow	4	0.9
Medway	4	0.9
Southend-on-Sea	4	0.9
Waltham Forest	4	0.9
Hampshire	3	0.7
Norfolk	3	0.7
Barnet	2	0.4
East Sussex	2	0.4
Lancashire	2	0.4
Shropshire	2	0.4
Anglesey	1	0.2
Bromley	1	0.2
Cambridgeshire	1	0.2
Darlington	1	0.2

Devon	1	0.2
Durham	1	0.2
Hackney	1	0.2
Hertfordshire	1	0.2
Leicestershire	1	0.2
Liverpool	1	0.2
Milton Keynes	1	0.2
North Lincolnshire	1	0.2
North Yorkshire	1	0.2
Richmond	1	0.2
Staffordshire	1	0.2
Surrey	1	0.2
Tameside	1	0.2
Warrington	1	0.2
West Sussex	1	0.2
Total	457	100.0

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

9.7 Key achievements of the Fostering Service as set out in the annual report in 2014/15 are:

- Improved foster carer recruitment initiatives, using the expertise of the Marketing Officer funded by the Adoption Reform Grant and shared with Adoption Team
- Increased diversity of foster carers recruited. The Fostering Service has successfully recruited foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds which reflect the rapidly changing local population and has been a major achievement that has not been reflected with our consortium partners. This success needs to continue to be built upon to ensure that children are provided with local placements with carers who can meet their needs. The carers approved over the last 3 years include: Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Eastern Europe, Nigeria, Ghanaian, Italian, Caribbean, Philippines, Italian, couples from different ethnic backgrounds, and same sex couples
- Positive feedback from foster carers to Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) during annual reviews regarding support received from the Fostering Service. Also positive feedback from IROs who compare with other Fostering Services they work for
- Foster carer annual review performance has remained at 100%.
- Comprehensive training programme for foster carers including 12 week Fostering Changes behaviour management programme
- All 8 allegations received against foster carers (under Section 47) were investigated and judged unsubstantiated, malicious or unfounded.
- Effective and committed Fostering Panel
- No complaints within the Fostering Service in 2014/15 and no matters have been referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

9.8 The Fostering Service has set a number of challenging priorities for 2015/16:

- Recruit 35 new foster carers by the end of March 2016 with increased capacity
- Identify suitable Foster Carers in line with our Sufficiency Duty Plan

- Develop a robust, targeted marketing plan to recruit carers for specific requirements (parent and child placements; caring for children with challenging behaviours and disabilities, white UK)
- Meet with Marketing Service on a 3 monthly basis to review new opportunities for advertising/events
- Revise and update annual training manuals for LBBB approved Foster Carers, Connected Persons and Private Foster Carers in line with Fostering Regulations
- Review foster carers training needs by using feedback from foster carers;
- Offer training on core areas of Fostering as indicated in Regulations 2011 – Safeguarding Children, Safe Care, First Aid, Restraint, Behaviour Management, Disability, preparation for independence
- Offer on line training for carers in hard to reach areas (out of borough to a significant distance) as per reg 20.8
- Monthly meeting with Placements Finance Officer to monitor Placement Budgets and expenditure
- Recruit to the Fostering Central List to broaden Panel membership. The Fostering Central List is a cohort of Panel members that can be called upon to ensure Fostering Panels are quorate in the absence of a Panel member. Three monthly scrutiny of the Central List membership will be undertaken
- Continue to be an active part of London Care Services Steering Group to discuss fee structures, contract issues and share practise issues

10. Adoption Service Update

- 10.1 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. The aim of these changes is to reduce potential barriers, reduce delay in approving families as adoptors and, therefore, increase the number of placements available for waiting children. Local authorities also now have a duty to provide information to adoptive and potential families regarding the support services available in the local authority's area.
- 10.2 On the 13th March 2013, the Children and Families Act 2014 was given Royal Assent placing on statute changes to the adoption services already implemented. Councillors will also be aware that the Government has raised the profile of adoption services nationally and have considered the performance of both local authority and independent adoption agencies.
- 10.3 Alongside the statutory and regulatory changes, it is important for Cabinet to note the continued impact of case law (Re B, Re BS and Re T) and it's far reaching implications for local authorities when considering permanency for children, for whom adoption would usually be the plan. The clear message from case law is that adoption should be seen as the last resort, e.g. when "nothing else will do".
- 10.4 As predicted in last year's annual report, the effect of this has been seen in 2014/15 with a considerable drop in the numbers of children with a "should be placed for adoption" (SHOPA) decision. This is a national and London wide trend. According to the Adoption Leadership Board, "*...data suggests that the number of new decisions has continued to fall from 1,830 in quarter 2, 2013-14 to 960 in quarter 1, 2014-15, a decrease of 47%*". National data is also showing a similar trend in the numbers of Placement Orders being made, "*...data suggests new*

placement orders have continued to fall from 1,550 in quarter 2, 2013-14 to 760 in quarter 1, 2014-15, a decrease of 51%.”⁶

- 10.5 The case law outlined above has had a significant impact on the number of children referred for adoption in Barking and Dagenham in the last 12 months. The number of children with SHOPA decisions dropped from 46 in 2013/14 to 14 in 2014/15, a 70% decrease in real terms.
- 10.6 Adoption Services until September 2013 were inspected separately by Ofsted. The new Ofsted inspection framework now incorporates judgements on Adoption services into the overall Ofsted Children’s Service inspection. The Adoption Service was inspected in 2014, as part of the wider inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers (April 29th – 22nd May 2014). The Adoption performance was judged as requires improvement. The timeliness of our adoption processes is a weakness in our provision but our adoption support was seen as a “clear strength”.
- 10.7 The length of care proceedings impacts on our adoption performance. Our average length of care proceedings has improved reducing to 53 weeks in 2014/15 compared to 62 weeks in the previous year. Although this has improved, performance remains worse than the national and statistical neighbour’s average of 48 and 51 weeks respectively.
- 10.8 In January 2015, members of the Adoption Leadership Board visited Barking and Dagenham Children’s Services senior management to discuss the number of children waiting for adoption over 18 months. The meeting was very positive and the work being undertaken by the Local Authority Adoption Service was noted as comprehensive.
- 10.9 In 2014/15, the adoption service has expanded through a mixture of internal investment and the Department for Education financial assistance in the form of Adoption Reform Grant (ARG). This financial investment has proved beneficial to the service as monies from this grant funded a Deputy Team Manager, 2 family finding social workers and a Marketing Officer. This grant ended in April 2015 so the service will need to restructure. The ARG has also enabled the service to place children in interagency placements, which has helped in achieving the significant numbers of placements and Adoption Orders. Interagency placements occur when LBBDD places children with another local authority or voluntary adoption agency.
- 10.10 The DfE target will reduce from 487 to 426 days in 2016, which is around 14 months, which makes achieving this target even more challenging. To meet this, we will have to reduce the time taken between a child entering care and moving into its adoptive placement by 221 days (7 months), which is a challenging task.
- 10.11 Our three year rolling average for A2: the average time taken from when the authority receives a Court Order agreeing to a child being adopted and the child is matched with an appropriate adopter has increased to 220 days in 2012-2015 compared to 175 days in the preceding three years (2011-2014). Performance is 99 days above Government threshold for this adoption measure set at 121 days in

⁶ Adoption Leadership Board headline measures and business intelligence 2013 to 2014 and quarter 1 2014 to 2015 update: November 2014.

2012-2015. This is partly affected by the very large number of adoptions completed, placing a strain on available resources, and partly due to the adoption team negotiating placement for sibling groups and children with disabilities. Nonetheless, this is too long a period for a child to wait. Tackling and reducing this will be a key priority next year.

10.12 Key achievements of the Adoption Service as set out in the annual report in 2014/15 are:

- 32 looked after children were adopted in 2014/15 – the highest number the borough has ever had.
- Successful placements of 'harder to place children' – 10 sibling groups, 1 autistic child, 2 children over 8 years old, 8 children from BME backgrounds.
- Participation in 3 Adoption Activity Days in conjunction with British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), which resulted in matches for 5 children.
- Success of the first Fostering to Adopt placement.
- Adoption performance (DfE Scorecard) - the borough's 3 year average 2012-2015 has fallen from 672 to 647 days, meaning we are placing children quicker from the time they enter care to their adoptive family. No placement disruptions pre or post adoption order.
- Improved adopter recruitment initiatives, using the expertise of the Marketing Officer funded by the Adoption Reform Grant. 11 adopters approved last year.
- Effective and committed Adoption Panel.
- Improved joint working within the East London Adoption Consortium.
- Improved support to Special Guardians by having a dedicated social worker undertaking this work.

10.13 The Adoption Service has set a number of challenging priorities for 2015/16:

- Reduce timescales for placing children and approving adopters
- The government grant to support adoption services has been cut; the financial impact of this will need to be managed
- Prioritise the development of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) initiatives locally, and regionally, through the East London consortium
- Increase approvals of adopters to meet the needs of LBBBD children.
- Review and redesign the Adoption Team to meet the changing needs with adoption and special guardianship
- Work with partners in the region to improve performance and meet gaps in services e.g. continuation of monthly family finding meetings, sharing of information regarding ASF resources, access to Consortium's preparation groups so there is no delay for prospective adopters
- Continue to develop and embed the adoption reforms in response to the Government's Action Plan for Adoption and those announced in the new Education and Adoption Bill
- Further develop LBBBD's permanence procedures to support staff in ensuring that all permanence options are explored and progressed in a timely manner.
- Continue to increase the use of SGOs as an alternative appropriate option for permanency where adoption is not achievable

11. Independent Reviewing Service

- 11.1 The statutory context for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) is outlined under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002).
- 11.2 The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) was followed by a revision of care planning regulations and guidance. This came into effect in April 2011 and was accompanied by four sets of guidance. The IRO handbook strengthened the role of the IRO. The IRO responsibility included not only chairing statutory Looked After Children Reviews but also to monitor cases on a continual basis. The IRO also has a duty to monitor the local authority in their role of corporate parent and to highlight and address areas of poor practice. This includes bringing concerns to the attention of senior managers and exercising their independent role through CAFCASS (Child and Family Court Assessment Service).
- 11.3 The findings of the OFSTED report on the effectiveness of the IRO in their responsibilities towards Looked After Children indicated that there remain some key areas as a service that we need to develop and improve further in order to improve our performance and achieve better outcomes for the children in our care. This was reported on in the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2013/14 and progress against these has been reviewed as part of this year's report (which will be presented to the LSCB).
- 11.4 Areas of achievement:
- The role of the IROs in making effective challenges where concerns are identified has been clarified through our Corporate Parenting Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan, which sets out the boroughs responsibilities and actions it is undertaking to build on the attainment of our Looked After Children.
 - IROs now work more closely with the Virtual School and more consideration is now given to where each child would like their Personal Education Plan to be completed and who should be involved. This is assisting in improving the attainment of Looked After Children.
 - Work has been undertaken to address attendance and exclusion, which has impacted on outcomes and our performance is above average in both these areas.
 - We now keep and analyse data on when social work reports are shared with parents and when managers have attended conferences. This information is shared with social care and as a result, we are seeing a real improvement in these areas.
 - There are now policies and protocols for all areas of practice, linked together through a platform called Tri-X. This is helping ensure consistent processes across the social care workforce.
- 11.5 The Independent Reviewing Service has set challenging priorities and targets for 2015/16. These include:
- Improved follow up on concerns raised in conferences
 - Improving consistency and analysis of evidence to assure thresholds are met

- Support for strengthened permanency planning and analysis of alternative options
- Stronger consideration of value for money when reviewing options for families and children (but not at the expense of safety)
- Further enhancing the voice of the child in case planning, including greater explanation to children if their wishes are not met.

12. Members' Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG)

- 12.1 In 2014/15, 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.
- 12.2 The membership and terms of reference were reviewed in 2014/15 and the work of the MCPG has been governed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy (April 2011-2014) and an annual corporate parenting report. The Children's Select Committee received a report on the work of the Members Corporate Parenting Group in November 2014.
- 12.3 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 been well received at the Corporate Parenting Board enabling detailed discussion in strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- 12.4 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
- 12.5 Post 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 and expectations in September 2014. 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.
- 12.6 In 2014/15, 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. In particular, the MCPG has focussed upon young people NEET and the performance of our Leaving Care Service and their ability to support young care leavers accessing suitable education, employment or training options.

- 12.7 We were pleased that Ofsted in May 2014 reported that structures for the delivery of corporate parenting are in place and established with evidence of positive impact.
"Structures for the delivery of corporate parenting are in place and established with evidence of positive impact." (OFSTED, 2014)
Our Children in Council (Skittlz) was judged as active and regularly presenting their views to the corporate parenting board and that some service changes have been achieved. However, inspectors also concluded that there are too few children and young people involved in our Children in Care council with many children's views not represented, including those out of borough. In addition, Ofsted identified an area for improvement – **"Ensure that corporate parenting responsibilities are fully understood by elected members to achieve greater awareness and accountability across the local authority"**. Actions to drive forward improvements in 2014/15 are detailed in the Local Authority improvement plan (Appendix 1).
- 12.8 As recommended by Ofsted, a new pledge to looked after children in care - 'Our Promises' has been produced with our children in care council, published and disseminated. In 2014/15, an outcomes framework has been established to review the impact of the Pledge and ensure that the Pledge is known by all our looked after children across the country and not just locally. Looked after children outcomes were measured in November 2014 against November 2013 baseline demonstrating positive or neutral direction of travel against 26 performance indicators compared to negative direction of travel against 5 indicators. The outcomes framework has been presented to Members' Corporate Parenting Group and well received. A Leaving Care Charter has also been produced and published in October 2014 and disseminated to all care leavers.
- 12.9 The Children in Care Council has increased its membership to 13 compared to 7 since the Ofsted inspection, exceeding our local target set at 12 members by April 2015, with addition of care leavers as a priority. The Children in Care Council and looked after children groups have been restructured in the last 12 months to ensure that the Skittlz has access to wider consultation groups.
- 12.10 The following were key areas of achievement in 2014/15:
- New Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2015 – 18, based on Promises to Children in Care;
 - Revision of the Promises for Children in care and Charter for Care Leavers
 - Reduction in the number care leavers NEET. At 54.7% of our Care Leavers engaged in education, employment or training, we are higher than London averages (53%) and national averages (45%);

- Development of a video made by the Skittlz group for young people coming into care;
- Improvements in timeliness of visits and reviews of Personal Education Plans; and
- The attainment of Looked after Children at Key Stage 2 was above national levels for Looked after Children, but this remains well below levels for their peers (59% for LBBD LAC children, 48% for National LAC, compared with 79% nationally and locally for all children).

12.11 Key Priorities for next year:

- Ensure all Looked After Children are able to access high quality work experience;
- Attainment for Looked After Children in Key Stage 4;
- To improve suitable accommodation rates;
- To improve take up and timeliness of health services and checks; and
- Improve the annual survey of looked after children to specifically seek the views of Care Leavers.

13. Social Care Programme

- 13.1 The Children's Complex Needs and Social Care Division face continual challenges to service provision and an increase in demand in social care. This is leading to financial pressure which has a significant impact on wider council budgets.

These challenges present in a range of forms; a series of external inspections conducted over the past 18 months; legislative and policy change at a national and local level; a challenging financial landscape; a child population growing rapidly in both number and increasing referrals to social care with higher complexity of need; an expectation that social care addresses a range of societal issues, for example the impact of gangs, homelessness, migration and sexual exploitation. The increasing complexity of demand is placing a significant financial pressure on the Council, as the Children's Social Care Division is currently not able to deliver its services within the budget level set by the Council and this has an ongoing effect on wider council budgets.

- 13.2 It is evident that more in-depth work needs to be conducted to provide a full analysis to aid medium term financial planning and to manage demand down. Additional capacity is needed so that we can evaluate which elements can be tackled and reduced by developing social work; or other agencies', practice; which could be ameliorated by better targeted early intervention work and which would require changes through lobbying for legal or political change. This work started in the Social Care Transformation Programme, set up in 2013.
- 13.3 In Autumn 2013, iMPower and Isos were asked to review social care and early intervention provision in the Borough. A number of recommendations were made. Further analysis was undertaken with a view to establishing new Social Care Efficiency Programme, to be launched in July 2015.
- 13.4 This invest to save approach is aimed at ensuring costs are driven down and budgets re-aligned if appropriate. It will put the Council in a stronger position to address and reduce demand management so that we are able to address future

financial challenges. A support team has been agreed by Cabinet and a business case to address this work is due to report in September 2015.

14. Financial Implications

Compiled by Carl Tomlinson, Group Finance Manager

- 14.1 Children's Social Care budgets were under significant pressure in 2014/15 with the Complex Needs and Social Care division overspending by £6.097m.
- 14.2 For Children's Services overall, the 2014/15 outturn overspent by £4.892m taking into account the use of the Children's Services reserve of £1.500m and cross Directorate work to reduce spend, including the spend freeze and giving up all potential carry forwards. Wider council actions to manage spend has enabled the organisation as a whole to outturn only marginally overspent.
- 14.3 The main reasons for the overspend were an increase in the number of placements, higher No Recourse to Public Fund and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker costs, and the continued need to employ a higher than anticipated number of agency personnel. It should be noted that a priority initiative to increase the number of permanently employed staff continues.
- 14.4 An additional £3m has been included within the MTFS for Complex Needs from 2015/16 in recognition of the demographic pressures and an additional £1.3m towards the Children's and Families Act.
- 14.5 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.

15. Legal Implications

Compiled by: Lindsey Marks, Principal Solicitor

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 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.

16. Other Implications

- 16.1 **Staffing Issues** - There are no specific staffing issues contained within this report. However, increased demand pressures in the past 12 months again have required the agreement of additional staffing to manage this demand. Whilst this additional support has greatly assisted, demand has not abated. Recruitment in social care

and reducing the level of agency staff is a key project of the Social Care Programme as discussed above.

- 16.2 **Customer Impact** - The report highlights the areas of service improvement, as well as the areas where performance continues to be addressed.
- 16.3 **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.
- 16.4 **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.

The new LASPO legal arrangements for young people on remand will have an impact on Children's Social Care capacity, and whilst this is funded from central government, this is a new development and therefore may need a review within the next year or so in order to measure the capacity impact.

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/jsnashome.aspx>

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Ofsted Improvement Plan
Appendix 2 – Adoption Report 2014/15