

CABINET

19 March 2013

Title: Children's Social Care Review Report	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
Report Author: Chris Martin, Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care	Contact Details: Tel: 0208 227 2233 E-mail: Chris.Martin@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Divisional Director: Chris Martin, Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care	
Accountable Corporate Director: Helen Jenner, Corporate Director, Children's Services	
Summary: <p>This report provides Cabinet with a review of significant operational service developments and inspections over the past 18 months within the Complex Needs and Social Care teams within Children's Services. The report provides a high level summary of action taken in response to inspections, namely, the Fostering Service Inspection, the Adoption Agency Inspection and the full service Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection. The report describes the positive outcomes of these inspections, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Outstanding' for our fostering service,• 'Good' for our adoption agency,• 'Good' overall for safeguarding and• 'Adequate' on a multi agency basis with regard to services for looked after children. <p>The report illustrates that at a time of fiscal challenge and increasing demand, through a growing young children's population, these Inspection judgements are a positive reflection of local services.</p> <p>The report includes details of the work of the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board and areas of service improvement including the introduction of our Triage and Assessment service and the implementation of our local Quality Assurance Strategy.</p> <p>The report also provides more specific details regarding the Council's looked after children's population, including some key performance indicators linked to placement availability and performance targets for the future.</p> <p>Corporate Parenting arrangements were a particular area identified within the inspection report that required strengthening. Whilst this had been recognised prior to the inspection itself, improvements to our corporate parenting arrangements were not sufficiently embedded for positive change to be recognised. This report describes our current, revised corporate parenting arrangements as well as the roles of elected members with assigned portfolio leads, within our corporate parenting responsibilities.</p>	

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is asked to:

1. Note the service improvements contained within this review report and as described within the inspection reports;
2. Note the outcomes from inspections over the past 18 months and actions taken thus far in response to inspection findings; and
3. Task the Members Corporate Parenting Group to co-ordinate, produce and monitor the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, which reports annually to Cabinet and replaces the need for individual reports on inspections as indicated within the report.

Reason(s)

- Following our Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection Cabinet members made a commitment to strengthen the governance of our safeguarding and looked after children services.
- External services have contributed to service reviews. In the past 18 months our Fostering and Adoption Services have both had Ofsted inspections and in June 2012 year the regulator completed our Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection (SLAC), a 'whole service' review.
- Cabinet is well aware of the demographic trend within the Borough and the impact of this trend in such universal settings as school provision and community health settings. An increasing population both numerically and in terms of diversity brings with it a challenge for our more specialist services, particularly at a time of increasing fiscal austerity.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Complex Needs and Social Care Division comprises of three integrated service areas each with a Group Manager lead. The Assessment and Care Management Service, the Fostering, Adoption and Looked After Children Service and the Disabled Children and Special Educational Needs Service.
- 1.2 The Division has operational responsibility for all child protection and looked after children's services and more recently has included Special Educational Needs (SEN) services in response to the government's SEN Green Paper and the need for local authorities to implement more integrated assessment and support options for families who care for children with disabilities.
- 1.3 The division is committed to:
 - Earlier intervention and prevention through our own Prevention Service and via close operational relationships with colleagues provide targeted and universal support.
 - Reducing the proportion of the child population who are looked after.
 - Minimising the duration of Child Protection Plans.

- Strong means of engagement with young people and their families so that they can 'shape' future services.

2. **Safeguarding**

- 2.1 The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board completed its 6th annual report this financial year (**Appendix 1**). Significant developments included:-
- The appointment of a new independent chair.
 - The publishing of the Child T Serious Case Review, including action plan and training events.
 - Board level focus upon the safeguarding of children and families across the changing landscape within local health services.
 - Recruitment of lay members to enhance community engagement.
 - Revision of board membership to better reflect the partnership across Barking and Dagenham.
- 2.2 Future Barking & Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board (B&DLSCB) priorities include:-
- Development of roles and responsibilities of B&DLSCB members.
 - Engaging more directly with young people, families and faith communities across the Borough
 - Specific board focus upon preventing trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and young people
 - Joint work with the Safeguarding Adult Board to support improving outcomes for families
- 2.3 To improve safeguarding practice the Assessment & Care Management Service completed the implementation of the 'Triage and Assessment Service' in April of this year. The re-organisation of the social care 'front door' had been piloted from August 2011 to February 2012 and with some minor adjustments proved to be ready for full operational implementation at the start of the financial year.
- 2.4 The implementation of the Triage and Assessment Service has brought a number of improvements:-
- Improved information sharing to effectively identify risk and ensure families get the most appropriate services
 - Improved timeliness of core assessments
 - Improved responses to partners and referring agencies, in particular schools
 - An effective multi-agency process to ensure appropriate responses via the inclusion of health professionals, housing colleagues, targeted services etc. within the triage team
 - Maximising the impact of resources on preventing poor outcomes
 - Better access to support for families as Triage acts as a pathway to both targeted and specialist services
 - Closer working relationships with Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals University Trust (BHRUT) via dedicated hospital social worker within the assessments team

- More robust casework for 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) families through dedicated social worker in the assessment team

2.5 Quality Assurance Strategy – this year we have also implemented our Quality Assurance Strategy 'Building a Better Life for All' (**Appendix 2**). The strategy itself will help demonstrate the progress made around the top priorities set by the Children's Trust Board which carries with it a clear safeguarding priority. The five Trust priorities are:-

- Ensure children and young people in our Borough are safe.
- Narrow the gap, raising attainment and realising aspiration for every child.
- Improve health and well-being, with a particular focus upon obesity and sexual health.
- Improve support, via fully integrated services, for children and young people.
- Challenge child poverty.

2.6 The strategy itself also links to our improvement plan, Project SURE, which seeks to strengthen supervision, improve our understanding of families through quality assessments, improve the quality of recording and case analysis and ensure effectiveness of interventions by measuring outcomes.

2.7 The strategy provides a schedule of case file audits which are run across a 12 month cycle. They include:-

- Quarterly case file audits – involving the directorate and corporate management team undertaking a schedule of case file audits alongside the allocated social worker
- Supervision file audit – the Quality Assurance Manager to undertake a 6-monthly sample of supervision files
- Themed audits – each year there will be three themed audits overseen by the Child Protection and Reviewing Service
- Multi Agency Audits – case file audits which include the contribution of all partners engaged with particular families

2.8 Findings from the audit scheduled are shared with directorate and divisional management teams as well as the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board. Individual action plans identifying improvements are also provided and these findings also contribute to the overall improvement plan, Project SURE.

3. **Looked After Children**

Scrutiny of performance with regards to children looked after by the Borough has come in the form of several inspections over the past 12 to 18 months. In this time period both Fostering and Adoption services have been subjected to individual OFSTED inspections. In this period we have also participated in a 'thematic' OFSTED inspection exploring the effectiveness of our virtual head teacher and support for looked after children with regards to their academic attainment. These individual inspections also contributed to the work of the Safeguarding and Looked after Children Inspection in June 2012.

Progress against improvement actions identified from these inspections has been reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children's Select Committee.

3.1 Children in Care Placement Availability Review – our annual review of children in care was drafted in July 2012 and provides evidence of an improving service area for looked after children in the Borough (**Appendix 3**).

Headline findings are:-

- Looked after population increased from 411 in March 2011 to 427 in March 2012. Whilst an overall increase this represents a stabilisation of the 'in care' population. This position has been sustained throughout the year and children in care numbers at October 2012 show a slight reduction to 423.
- An increasing number of young people are cared for via foster carers (approx 80% of the children in care population)
- Over 50% of all children in care are placed within the Borough foster carers, which is an improving position (209 in March 2011 compared to 242 in March 2012)
- Improved performance regarding the approval and availability of adopters, 39 in 2011/12 compared to 26 in 2010/11
- Numbers of young people in residential continued to reduce, 22 in total in October 2012 (compared to 38 in March 2011 and 29 in March 2012) and only 8 in high cost residential long stay units. This indicates a range of successful performance in relation to placement identification and support but also includes the contribution of our specialist fostering service Pitstop and our Prevention service, both of whom prevent young people entering high cost care options

3.2 Future actions regarding looked after children capacity during 2012/13 include:-

- Fostering team to ensure a net gain of 20+ foster carers.
- Adoption service to approve 20+ adoptive parents.
- Seek the support of housing colleagues to identify creative options whereby young people in out-of-borough high cost placements can be brought back to the Borough via the provision of suitable accommodation and support.

3.3 Barking and Dagenham Adoption Agency was inspected by Ofsted over four days in 2012. The service received an overall quality rating of good and more specifically an outstanding judgement for safeguarding children.

3.4 In particular the inspection found that, "This is a good adoption agency with some outstanding features. It is ambitious in considering adoption as a placement choice for all children, where this is appropriate, and it is successful in placing children promptly in stable, secure family situations, where their safety, health and well-being are fully promoted." To quote an adopter: 'They want the best for the children.'

3.5 Significant strengths include working with siblings who are being placed for adoption, to ensure they understand what is happening and can express their views in a safe therapeutic environment.

3.6 Areas for improvement included:-

- Documenting and evaluating adoption support
- Using the views of children to develop the adoption service
- Insufficient staff to provide a timely post adoption service to adults

- The quality assurance functions of the panel and its decision-making process

- 3.7 All areas of improvement have been listed in the adoption agency action plan 2012/13, which also includes revised adoption regulations that became mandatory in September 2012 and are aimed at 'speeding up' the adoption process and removing some of the responsibilities of adoption panels. In particular the fact that adoption panels no longer consider whether a child should be placed for adoption. Such requests are now submitted to the Agency Decision Maker (Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care) for decision.
- 3.8 It is worth highlighting that the field of adoption is currently undergoing unprecedented changes that will affect the way we work for many years to come. It is very evident that the Government attaches a great deal of importance on improving the adoption system and the impact that delay has on children. There is a strong political lead from the government to increase the number of adoptions as a positive option for some children in care in a number of ways, many of which come into effect in 2012/13. This includes the introduction of adoption scorecards and direct scrutiny from the Department for Education. In particular, the amount of time taken between a child starting to be looked after and their placement for adoption will prove to be a significant indicator. The adoption action plan includes a number of measures aimed at improving this performance some of which have already contributed to a measurable improvement (**Appendices 4 and 5**).
- 3.9 The Borough's Fostering Service was subject to a full Ofsted inspection in June 2011. The service was judged overall to be outstanding. All individual judgements, including safeguarding, were also outstanding.
- 3.10 The inspection used the five Every Child Matters outcomes framework and headline findings included:-

Be Healthy:

- Child and Adolescent mental Health Services integration – very positive support provided to young people
- Strong relationships with local community based health services provided by the NHS North East London Foundation Trust

Stay Safe:

- A strong and well regarded multi-agency training programme
- A strong Local Safeguarding Children's Board training programme
- Pitstop project – effective strategy to manage high risk young people and reduce costs associated with residential care
- Low numbers of children missing from care

Enjoy and Achieve:

- 27 young people at university who are care leavers
- Placement stability very good
- Reduced numbers of school exclusions for looked after children
- Increased leisure opportunities for looked after children

Make a Positive Contribution:

- Excellent examples of engagement with young people
- In-house foster carers provide a high value for money service

- Placement preparation is a real strength within the team

Achieve Economic Wellbeing:

- Leaving care service provides good support for young people who are well prepared for adult life
- Suitable accommodation for care leavers has also improved

3.11 Being an outstanding inspection there were very few areas requiring immediate attention and in need of improvement, but those areas of significance noted in the inspection included:-

- Revision and update of the 'Foster Carers Handbook' (**Appendix 6**)
- Development of the Short Breaks fostering scheme for children with disabilities
- Benchmarking exercise to compare fostering allowances with other local authorities

3.12 The fostering team subsequently developed an action plan which encompassed these areas of improvement as well themes identified within the service area itself.

The action plan includes priorities such as:-

- Implementation of Connected Persons Policy
- Recruitment of five additional Short Breaks fostering scheme carers for children with disabilities
- Train and support an identified cohort of foster carers to supervise contact arrangements with parents and thus save potential costs associated with contact provision
- Recruit net gain of 20 foster carers across the financial year
- Reduce levels of independent fostering agency usage and increase the numbers of transfers of carers from Independent Fostering Agencies to 'in house' foster carers(target of 5 for financial year)

4. **Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection**

4.1 Barking and Dagenham Children's Services Directorate were subject to a full service Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection between 11 and 22 June 2012. The outcomes of the inspection were reviewed by Cabinet members and the Children's Select Committee. This inspection, being part of a 3-year cycle across all local authorities, explored all provision to safeguard children and to support children already looked after, scrutinising practice across all agencies.

4.2 The outcomes for the inspection were positive; services to safeguard children being judged as good and services for looked after children judged as adequate. There were also a number of recommendations made by the inspection team and these recommendations have required actions from all partners, including NHS and Metropolitan Police Service colleagues. (The inspection report itself is included as **Appendix 7**).

4.3 The draft action plan has subsequently been improved with further contributions from partner agencies. The action plan itself has been agreed by the multi agency local Inspection Preparation Board and progress is monitored regularly through this

forum (**Appendix 7a**) and reported to the Children's Trust and Children's Select Committee.

4.4 The inspection highlighted areas in need of immediate attention within both safeguarding and looked after children judgements. In particular for safeguarding children these included:-

- Improve the quality and timeliness of record keeping so that the key issues in cases are clear and progress can be monitored.
- Ensure that cases referred to the Multi Agency Locality Teams contain clear assessment of risk and that information sharing is compliant with national and local protocols

4.5 Progress thus far for these actions:-

- The quality and timeliness of record keeping has been improved so that the key issues in cases are clear and progress can be monitored
- Implementation of our QA strategy as discussed above. The QA strategy is crucial in monitoring progress around improvements to recording but also to inform future training needs and service area requiring targeted improvements
- Two audits have been undertaken in August 2012 as part of the QA schedule. These audits have ostensibly been Children's Social Care Management Audits with particular focus upon Looked After Children (LAC) and how well they are achieving the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes
- An Independent Reviewing Officer Child Protection Audit undertaken, looking at and child protection investigation compliance, including recording, case progression and outcomes.
- Both these audits have contained specific reference to quality of recording which has been fed back to the divisional management team and Children's Service Senior Management Team
- Equalities dimensions are also a feature of both these audits and will be included in the future overview report
- Cases referred to the Multi Agency Locality Teams now contain clear assessment of risk and information sharing is compliant with national and local protocols
- B&D Triage staff have been briefed as to the importance of being more analytical in their assessment of risk on all cases which are referred to children's services passing through the Metropolitan Police Service Public Protection Desk (PPD) and Children's Services Triage Team. This is to ensure that there is clear case recording as to why the case does not meet the threshold for a safeguarding assessment and should be passed to the relevant Multi Agency Locality Team (MALT) for consideration
- A risk assessment tool has been developed in relation to domestic violence cases. This is to ensure that cases passing through Triage and the PPD which involve domestic violence are assessed for potential child protection concerns which may warrant a statutory safeguarding assessment
- New MALT protocol adopted
- Monthly audit of chairing, of MALT meetings has been implemented

4.6 For looked after children immediate recommendations included:-

- Review procedures for children and young people entering the care system through the powers of police protection so this response is only used when no other alternative is possible
- Ensure practice is improved so young people do not miss school to move placements or attend appointments linked with their looked after status
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and North East London Foundation Trust to review the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to children in care to ensure that they receive a prompt response to their needs

4.7 Action taken to progress these recommendations thus far:-

4.7.1 Review procedures for children and young people entering the care system through the powers of police protection so this response is only used when no other alternative is possible

- A 'Police Protection action plan' has been drafted and agreed with the Metropolitan Police Service Child Abuse Investigation Team (MPS CAIT) colleagues
- The level of Police Protection Orders (PPO) use is now monitored and analysed regularly. Numbers are weekly reviewed and reported to DCS and Divisional Director. Data is also shared monthly with lead member as part of placement scrutiny
- PPO use reviewed on a bi-monthly basis with MPS CAIT via bi-monthly meetings between CAIT Detective Inspector and B&D Divisional Director
- We have developed a joint protocol with MPS around the use of PPO. The protocol is aimed at reducing the numbers of PPO and encouraging dialogue between Police Officers and social care staff before powers of protection are taken
- Provide an in-depth analysis of factors around families experiencing PPO but previously supported through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Monitor progress and outcomes via quarterly reports to Children's Trust

4.7.2 Ensure practice is improved so young people do not miss school to move placements or attend appointments linked with their looked after status

- We have developed a placements 'checklist' to ensure that any placement move does not disrupt school attendance
- Looked After Children reviews are always to be scheduled outside of school hours to ensure that education is not disrupted

4.7.3 London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and North East London Foundation Trust to review the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to children in care to ensure that they receive a prompt response to their needs

- North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) have recently reviewed the referral criteria and processes across Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) services for looked after children
- Monitoring of the referral to appointment time has been undertaken for the B&D CAMHS service in June-August 2012 (inc) and found that on average this took:
 - June - 4 weeks
 - July - 3 weeks
 - August - 2 weeks
- NELFT are in the process of establishing a new Triage Service within B&D CAMHS which is planned to be operational as a pilot by January 2013
- NELFT now has a system in place to 'flag' Looked After Children and monitor progress through the service for B&D CAMHS
- Specific CAMHS resource to support the LAC Team has been identified and the practitioner commenced duties in post during September 2012

5. Governance and Corporate Parenting Group

- 5.1 In addition, governance arrangements have been revised leading to the establishment of a single portfolio lead for Children's Services. All cabinet portfolio leads have agreed to take a corporate parenting responsibility for their areas. A summary of work last year is available as **Appendix 8**.
- 5.2 The report also recommended that corporate parenting arrangements and strategic planning are strengthened to ensure that they properly reflect the Council's responsibilities to children looked after.
- 5.3 Corporate Parenting Group has been refreshed in April 2012 and the inspection has lead to the following actions:-
- Lead member to attend the Corporate Parenting Group
 - Attendance from senior managers from within and beyond the Council to be secured
 - Corporate Parenting Group to 'sign off' revised 'Children in Care Pledge' and monitor outcomes Corporate Management Team to ensure that Corporate Parenting roles are embedded throughout services
 - In particular elected members who are assigned portfolio leads within Cabinet are specifically requested to illustrate how they will support looked after children and how they will carry out their role and function as corporate parents within the council directorates that they oversee.

6. Consultation

This report has been widely circulated and comments where received have been included.

6.1. **Financial Implications.**

Completed by Dawn Calvert (Group Manager – Finance)

- 6.1.1 The Children's Social Care budget is funded from within the general fund. In 2012/13 there is budget provision of £29.352m and a forecast cost pressure of £1.5m. This cost pressure is largely related to assessment and care management, Section 17, SEN transport and supporting those families with no recourse to public funds. The forecast pressure is currently being mitigated by under spends within other areas of the Children's Service budget.
- 6.1.2 The impact of future service pressures is currently being modelled.

6.2. **Legal Implications**

Compiled by: Lindsey Marks - Legal Services

- 6.2.1 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.
- 6.2.2 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 high standards of corporate parenting.
- 6.2.3 Since the 1 September 2012 the Adoption Panel no longer makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker as to whether or not a child should be placed for adoption save in the case of a relinquished baby.

6.3. **Other Implications**

- 6.3.1 **Risk Management** - All of the necessary and relevant actions related to this report are contained within the action plans for the CR01 & 2 as relevant.
- 6.3.2 **Staffing Issues** - There are no specific staffing issues contained within this report. However, the ability of the service to sustain continued performance improvement at a time of fiscal austerity and increasing demand without further resource consideration is a very serious challenge.
- 6.3.3 **Customer Impact** -The report highlights the areas of service improvement, as well as the areas where performance continues to be addressed. Children and their families will continue to experience a positive response to their social care needs. In particular the strengthened role of the Members Corporate Parenting Board will provide more rigorous oversight and scrutiny with regards to the outcomes for the Borough's looked after children population.
- 6.3.4 **Safeguarding Children** - The report includes the findings of the recent OFSTED inspection of June 2012 which judged the safeguarding services for children within the Borough to be 'good'. The report also highlights the strength of the local safeguarding children board and the contribution of the partnership to the safeguarding of local 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.

6.3.5 Crime and Disorder Issues - Research shows that young people who have stable support mechanisms and sound parenting are less likely to become involved in anti-social behaviour and crime. The work highlighted in the inspection reports and undertaken through children's social care and the LSCB, as detailed in this report, contributes to the wellbeing of young people, as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan and helps them to make positive choices as they grow older.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices: The appendices are available via the following links:

List of appendices: The appendices are available via the following links:

Appendix 1 - Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board's 6th Annual Report

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/professionals/Documents/BDSCB%20Annual%20Report%202011-2012.pdf>

Appendix 2 - Quality Assurance Strategy, 'Building a Better Life for All'

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Report%20-%20App.%202%20QA%20Strategy%202011v9.pdf>

Appendix 3 - Annual Children in Care Placement Availability Review

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Childrens%20Social%20care%20Report%20-%20App.%203%20Placement%20Availability%20Review%202011-12.pdf>

Appendix 4 - Adoption Inspection Report

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Adoption%20Inspection%20Report.pdf>

Appendix 5 - Adoption Inspection Report, Action Plan

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Adoption%20Action%20Plan%202012-13.pdf>

Appendix 6 - Revised Foster Carers Handbook

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Handbook%202013%20pdf%20document.pdf>

Appendix 7 - B&D Safeguarding & Looked After Children Inspection report via

[http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/050_Safeguarding%20and%20looked%20after%20children%20inspection%20as%20pdf\[1\].pdf](http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/050_Safeguarding%20and%20looked%20after%20children%20inspection%20as%20pdf[1].pdf)

Appendix 7a - SLAC action plan

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Report%20-%20App.%207a%20OFSTED%20Multi%20Agency%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

Appendix 8 - Corporate Parenting Actions by Portfolio Holders

<http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Report%20-%20App.%208.pdf>