

CABINET 23 FEBRUARY

The Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Service

Report by Deputy Director for Corporate Parenting & Safeguarding

Introduction

1. The impact of increasing workloads and reducing resources is affecting the current capacity in both Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting. Along with other Children, Education and Family services these areas of work need to change so as to address the high levels of demand. These services are part of a wider Children's Social Care service and include a range of specialist and quality assurance functions that are provided countywide and managed under a deputy director. These are all statutory services geared towards protecting the most vulnerable children in Oxfordshire.
2. The safeguarding service performs the statutory regulatory and quality assurance functions of the local authority in relation to children. The service is targeted at the children in the highest levels of need and is essential to ensuring the quality of social work practice. There are three arms to the service:
 - The independent oversight of child protection planning and looked after children's cases and placements;
 - The investigation of allegations against staff and carers by the Designated Officer; and,
 - The development of social work practice and standards led by the Principal Social Worker.
3. The growth in the child protection and looked after populations and the increase in regulatory functions over the last four years has led to pressures in the independent reviewing service (IROs). Oxfordshire's pattern of growth is higher than the national pattern, however it is more in line with authorities that have had a high profile child sexual exploitation issue and/or are judged as 'good' by Ofsted, with both groups showing a greater increase in child protection activity than the national figure. Thames Valley Police report increased sexual offending against children. Children's mental health services have also experienced substantial growth in demand. There is an increase in child neglect cases and more over-11s coming into both the child protection and looked after systems.

Analysis of local quantitative and qualitative data reveals a greater sensitivity to risk by professionals and the public, and more responsive services driving demand for statutory interventions.
4. In order to meet these demands and create manageable caseloads, IRO and manager posts have been created. Kingfisher has had its own 0.5 fte IRO post to quality assure all high risk child sexual exploitation cases. Permanent

recruitment has proved challenging, leading to temporary and agency appointments to relieve unavoidable pressures

5. Whilst there are no current plans to reshape either the role or existing structure of the Children's Disability service, it is important to give regard to the work of the service as this has a significant potential impact upon spend patterns and the extent of service provision. Disability provision must remain a priority for the Council and as such only limited reduction and change is possible without having a serious impact on the ability to meet current and projected obligations. This is not a service that has received a high profile in the Council and therefore its work and priorities is set out in some detail below.
6. The service provides statutory services for children with complex disabilities and their families. The services are targeted to prevent families breaking down under the strain of caring and to improve children's developmental outcomes. A proportion of children are at risk of abuse or neglect and a small number enter care and need permanent placements. Transition to adulthood is recognised to be a particularly vulnerable time when young people need smooth transfers to adult provision.
7. Parents and children have been actively involved in service-design over many years and continue to do so at the present time. Services are delivered in close co-operation with schools, special educational needs staff and health colleagues
 - Specialist social workers work with 500 children and young people
 - Daytime short breaks are a statutory requirement provided to 900+ children: commissioned from a range of organisations at a cost of £1.3m
 - 3 residential homes provide 82 children with overnight respite care and permanent care: commissioned from Barnardos at a cost of £2.845m (OCC contribution is £1.6m)
 - 20 children receive respite foster care for 2 nights per month
 - 250 children receive direct payments so that they can purchase their own respite breaks.
 - 140 severely disabled children receive care and behavioural support in their own homes
 - There is a statutory duty to fund working parents who need accessible childcare and small grants to support parents in their caring role for very high needs children.
 - A small number of children are looked after in residential schools and full-time foster placements. £1m
8. Since 2011, efficiencies have been realised by closer partnership working with parents groups and provider services. There is a limited provider market and robust contract monitoring is used to ensure commissioned services deliver value for money.

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9. The contracts with Barnardos and short break providers end in 2017. The council is proposing to find £250,000 in savings by undertaking a review across services and re-commissioning, with a view to achieving greater efficiencies.
10. The priority will be to continue being as effective as possible in supporting families to continue caring for their children at home, using family-friendly community services, respite breaks and more intensive input when necessary. This avoids the need for high cost residential care and children living at long distances from home. It lays the ground for successful transitions into adulthood, without transferring high cost care packages to be picked up by adult services post-18yrs.
11. In addition to safeguarding and disability the third major area of the service is Corporate Parenting. This service provides placements and support services for children and families on the edge of care, in care and post-care in permanent placements and for care-leavers in semi-independent settings. .At any one time, the number of children and young people supported exceeds 1000.
12. 600 children are currently in care. This is in line with statistically similar authorities, but represents a 16% rise over the last 4 years. Currently the trend of children entering care continues to rise. A similar trend is seen nationally, however, the increase in Oxfordshire is higher than elsewhere.
13. A relatively small proportion of children - under a third (199 out of 606 at the end of December) are not in in-house foster or residential homes, but are looked after in high cost residential and independent foster placements. 28% of looked after children are placed outside the Oxfordshire boundary, of whom most are more than 20 miles away and living at distance from their birth families. This is not because they have very uncommon and specialist requirements, but because the county has insufficient provision locally and at the right cost to meet the needs of the majority of this group. The service has performed well to prevent the proportion from rising in the face of an 16% increase in the LAC population since 2014. However, achieving a reduction in the proportion of children placed externally is the highest priority.

The table below shows the numbers of children in different placement types and the average cost per week

	Number in placement 31/12/15	Average cost per week
IFA Placements	112	£835
In house foster care	202	£481
External residential placements	87	£3,402
In-house residential	12	£2,924
Other (placed with parents; placed with family & friends etc.)	193	variable
Total	606	

14. The consequence of this insufficiency is a serious disadvantage for the Council and for children: they are at risk of losing their connections with their families, schools, communities and professionals who know them well. An additional £7.4m had to be added to the placement budget last year to contribute to the rising costs from increasing numbers of looked after children.

In 2013, the Council approved the 2013-16 Placement Strategy which set out how Oxfordshire would strengthen edge of care interventions to keep children with their families wherever possible, support friends and family care arrangements, increase in-house fostering for harder to place children and build on success in achieving permanency for many of our looked after children. The Council also committed capital investment to building four new children's homes in the county, which together with our two existing homes, will provide a residential care pathway aimed at keeping vulnerable adolescents within the county and returned to their families as soon as possible.

15. In 2015, the Residential and Edge of Care staff team has begun its recruitment and started to provide a 7-day a week daytime and evening service working with children on the edge of care and at risk of placement breakdown. Together with children's social workers and dedicated input from health partners, schools, education, youth justice and police, improved risk management and care planning is being implemented.
16. The 4 new children's homes are in the course of being built and will open in the spring and summer of 2016. The Council's fostering recruitment campaign has increased the rate of new approvals and the proportion of children in in-house foster placements and placed with 'family and friends' approved carers has increased. The service is reviewing its support programmes for carers to ensure that best value is being secured, carers are developed and retained and children's placements are stable.
17. The indications are that by providing services differently and by ensuring the safeguarding, planning and interventions are of the highest quality, the Council can achieve both good outcomes and improved efficiencies. The twin priorities of the service are to ensure the corporate parenting service delivers the best possible outcomes for children and to convert the anticipated efficiencies into savings in the placement budget.

Issues

18. Limited structural changes are needed within this arm of the service. Most of the work undertaken is increasingly efficient and effective in delivering to the priorities of the Council. There are however significant capacity issues that need to be addressed as part of the Directorate's organisational change programme. These include:
- Frontline capacity in the IRO service to meet the increase in statutory cases, currently unfunded

- Staffing of the new children's homes and edge of care service, planned as part of the Placement Strategy to be funded by savings made on external placements

Proposals

19. The Safeguarding service proposes a new structure according to the following priorities:
 - Sufficient IRO posts based on statutory ratios for LAC, review intervals for child protection, regulatory requirements and activity trends.
 - On the basis of current workloads this is likely to be 7 posts (including 5 current unfunded posts) with a unit cost of £50,000
 - An efficient use of management resources that prioritises supervision of IROs through the creation of 1.5 p/t senior IRO posts and reduces the current number of service manager posts down to 1fte
 - The combining of the Safeguarding Manager post and the Principal Social Worker post to create a single Safeguarding & Standards Manager overseeing the whole safeguarding service and achieving savings at tier 3 management level.
20. The Residential & Edge of Care Service will recruit new staff over the course of 2016 in order to deliver the new children's homes and strengthen edge of care interventions. This will include sufficient staff working shifts with children in care, children in short term respite arrangements and providing child and family-based interventions to prevent entry to care and placement breakdown.
21. The aim is that the Placement strategy described above will deliver savings in costs of external placements which will cover the costs of running the new Children's Homes, and the costs of the Residential and Edge of Care Service so that the overall impact is cost neutral to the CEF Directorate. The service is reviewing the impact of the strategy on costs and is developing reports to be provided to the Placement Strategy Board and to Cabinet to monitor delivery and demonstrate that cost neutrality. This will need to take account of increasing numbers of children becoming looked after.
22. The Corporate Parenting service will also need to review the impact of the strategy when considering if there are any further opportunities for efficiency in the context of further savings required as a result of the local government settlement.

RECOMMENDATION

- 23 **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
- (a) Agree the proposals outlined in paragraph 19-22
 - (b) Agree that a further report outlining in detail the proposed staffing arrangements and costs be made to the March 2016 Cabinet meeting.

HANNAH FARNCOMBE

Deputy Director for Corporate Parenting & Safeguarding

Contact Officer: Hannah Farncombe, 01865 815273

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