



Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report from the Director of Children & Families

Social Care Progress January 2010/11

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report shows the level of progress made by the Brent Social Care between December 2009 and December 2010 in delivering the strategic priorities of the Children's Trust Board and National Performance Indicators.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are requested to note progress in performance and consider areas for further improvement

3.0 Background

- 3.1 This report is produced by the Head of Safeguarding and outlines the way in which Brent's children and families are safeguarded and the progress to date.
- 3.2 Children's Social Care Services re-organised in January 2009, creating a locality service to provide services to children who are in need (or in need of protection) but who remain at home and a care planning/children in care service to work with looked after children..
- 3.3 The **Brent Locality Service** delivers services to children and families from five teams across Brent and responds to families which have needs within Level 3 of the Brent Levels of Need indicators (agreed April 2008).
- 3.4 Each Locality social care team provides a prompt response to referrals which meet this level of need with the social worker responding to the referral The work constitutes child in need, child protection, children who are looked after with parental agreement and the initiation of care proceedings when required..
- 3.5 Many front line service across London struggle to recruit and retain permanent staff. The Locality Service is 100% fully staffed with permanent Brent employees. The success of the recruitment and retention strategy was named as strength by Ofsted in the recent unannounced inspection. When the Locality service was established in Spring 2009 only 45% of Social Workers and Managers were permanent.

- 3.6 Those children whose needs are at levels one and 2 are met within universal services and the Early Intervention Locality Service. This service co-located with the Locality Service in April 2010. This has enabled the 2 services to build a stronger relationship which in turn enhances relationships with partner agencies. The effect on practice is that there is a smoother transition between the levels of need: children who require more targeted and child protection interventions are more readily stepped up to Locality teams and those that do not are stepped down to Early Intervention teams. These 2 services ensure that children in Brent receive the level of service they require. As partner agencies become more aware of the 'step up step down' process they are better able to make appropriate referrals and do not feel pressured to pitch all concerns as child protection in order to raise a response.
- 3.7 Ofsted carried out an annual unannounced inspection of Brent Locality service in November 2010. There were no areas for priority action we identified. Several areas of excellence were identified: audit and management oversight of work, recruitment and retention, support to newly qualified social workers and the advanced practitioner role.
- 3.8 **Care Planning and Children in Care Service (CPCIC)** provides a dedicated service to children and young people in care who are unable to return to the care of their parents. This can be at the point the Locality Service initiates care proceedings or when voluntary agreements to look after children become permanent arrangements. In the case of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, they enter CPCIC direct. Thus CPCIC offers an expert service to all children and families in court proceedings including Supervision Orders and some child protection plans. CPCIC supports children through to adulthood; 2 dedicated teams work with children under 12 and another 2 with young people up until the age of 21 or 24 if they are in Education (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000).
- 3.9 CPCIC is shaped by *Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care* provides a strong framework for service improvement to looked after children. It outlines how we can best deliver better outcomes for children in care, and help local partners achieve the ambitious goal of ensuring every child in care grows up safe, happy, secure and loved and how this is supported by performance management and legislation.
- 3.10 Staffing within CPCIC has improved as with the Locality Service; 90% of posts within CPCIC are held by permanent Brent staff. This represents a significant improvement from the same period last year and is a result of the recruitment and retention strategy.
- 3.11 The IDeA now Local Government Improvement and Development were invited to carry out a peer review of safeguarding arrangements across partner agencies by Brent LSCB. They review, concluded in May 2010. The findings were largely positive, with a strong message that Brent needs to be more vocal about its successes. An improvement plan has been developed and BCS and the LSCB have agreed to monitor and review the recommendations.

4.0 Performance Alerts

Referral, Assessment and Child Protection

- 4.1 The increase in activity across Brent Social Care started with the media coverage of Peter Connolly's death in Haringey in 2008. This rate of increase has decreased but numbers of child protection plans and care proceedings remain at a high level. It is of note that Brent Social Care restructured at this time. Performance against National Indicators has significantly improved because of strong performance management

but also because of better relationships with partner agencies and more robust assessments that correctly identify those children who are at risk of significant harm. Whilst the demands on the service have increased the establishment has not. Therefore the achievements in the service are the result of robust performance management and dedicated staff.

- 4.2 Performance management within Brent Social Care is shaped by the National Indicator set (currently under revision by the coalition government) and internal drivers to improve and monitor performance. Performance is measured against national averages and statistical neighbours. The statistical neighbours share similar demographics and generally provide a better reference for benchmarking local performance.
- 4.3 Referrals to Brent Social Care have increased by 25% since 08/09. Referrals are managed through either initial, core or s.47 (child protection) investigation. The Department is measured on the timeliness of these assessments.
 - 88% of initial assessments were completed within the required timescale. The target for 10/11 was 75%.
 - 87% of core assessments were completed on time. The target was 80%. Statistical neighbours were 81% and the national average was 70%.
 - 87% of s.47 investigations progressed to child protection conference within the required timescale; the national average is 66%
- 4.4 The numbers of re-referrals to the department is 17%. Our local target was 20% whilst the national average is 24%. The re-referral figure is used to indicate how robust the initial service was. The real picture can be that the original presenting problem was resolved but different events in families' lives can have a tremendous impact on parenting: new adults in the household, transition to adolescent present new challenges, and onset of parental mental illness. Thus whilst re-referral data is captured it does not give a true picture of the quality of intervention.
- 4.5 At the end of December 2010 there were 252 subjects of child protection plans in Brent compared to 222 in Dec 09 and 174 April 09. The number of child protection plans peaked in August 2010 at 271.
- 4.6 Thus the numbers of child protection investigations has decreased whilst the number of child protection plans has increased. This represents sharper decision making when referrals are assessed and better targeting of resources.
- 4.7 Prior to 2009 the number of child protection plans had never been greater 195. The rise in child protection plans places pressure on all agencies involved because of increased requirements to see the child, complete administrative processes and attend multi-agency meetings.
- 4.8 Since the beginning of the financial year 2010, there has been a marked decrease in the number of child protection plans under the categories of physical abuse, sexual abuse and multiple categories.
- 4.9 Physical abuse plans have decreased by 54%, sexual abuse by 57%, and multiple categories by 49%. This represents 14, 3, and 20 children respectively.
- 4.10 The number of plans under the categories of emotional abuse and neglect has significantly increased. Emotional abuse has increased by 33% and neglect by 84%. This represents 33 and 37 children respectively.

- 4.11 The category of emotional abuse is often a proxy indicator for domestic violence and this is supported by local audit evidence. A recent audit demonstrated that 75% of child protection plans had domestic abuse as the primary or secondary risk.
- 4.12 The significant increase in child protection plans for neglect is the next subject of multi-agency audit by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- 4.13 The decrease in multiple categories represents better compliance with government advice to register the primary category of abuse only.
- 4.14 There are fewer children who are subjects of repeat child protection plans than in April 2010. This figure stands at 14% compared with 19% in April 2010. As with repeat referrals, a repeat child protection plan can indicate the initial response was not robust or that the family has met with new challenging circumstances. The process for making and reviewing child protection plans in Brent changed in August 2010. It may be useful to track the future effect on repeat child protection plans.

Looked After Children

- 4.15 In Dec 10 there were 376 looked after children (LAC) compared with 350 in Dec 09. There are 43 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in this number compared with 42 in Dec 09. 171 Care Leavers (18 – 24 years old) are supported by the service.
- 4.16 The number of proceedings has suffered a tremendous increase: there were 27 cases in proceedings in 2007/08, this increased to 32 for the following year and rose to 59 for 09/10. The current figure represents an increase of 7 applications compared to the same period last year. Legal proceedings increase the administrative activity of social workers exponentially.
- 4.17 Children's Services are measured on the number of placement moves experienced by LAC. Stability of placement is recognised as contributing to good outcomes for children in care. The national average of 3+ placement moves is 10.9% and for statistical neighbours is 11.9%. The true figure for Brent is 9.2%.
- 4.18 Forty six children have experienced more than 3 placement moves compared with 39 children in Dec 09. This figure is expected to rise as children are moved to lower cost and in-house placements to realise efficiencies in the placements budget.
- 4.19 100% LAC reviews were held on time and children and young people participated in the vast majority of statutory reviews
- 4.20 Over the last two years (08/09 and 09/10) the department has placed a high percentage of children for adoption that its statistical neighbours. 12% and 9% were placed in the two years respectively against an average of 8%.
- 4.21 The split of LAC placed in or out of borough remains consistent. 44% in borough 55% out of borough. One quarter of those placed outside Brent are placed in neighbouring boroughs.
- 4.22 There were 95 children placed with in-house foster carers in Dec 10 compared to 80 in Dec 09 – an increase of 19%
- 4.23 There were 51 children placed with family and friends in Dec10 compared with 42 children in Dec 09 – an increase of 21%

- 4.24 The Department supports 23 young people who are at University and 85% of young people aged 19 are in education, employment and training compared to 61% in December 2009. This achievement rates at is nearly 20% higher than our statistical neighbours. These young people are supported by Social Work Assistants, 1 Part-time Connexions worker, 1 part-time education worker and a part-time worker from Prospects.
- 4.25 The service also has a Sexual Health Advisor who is based with Social Care. The aim of this post is to reduce teenage pregnancy, ensuring young people's sexual health and contraceptive needs is being addressed.

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