

REPORT	IMPROVEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE MONITORING
MEETING	CHILDREN SUB COMMITTEE
DATE	8 th FEBRUARY 2017
REPORT OF	KERRY CRICHLOW HEAD OF QUALITY, PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report highlights the core indicator areas that are currently being reviewed in greater depth in order to develop insight and thereby establish the most appropriate actions that will be taken.
- 1.2 More detailed analyses will be completed to better understand the local drivers that underpin the increase in the number of children looked and those subject to child protection plans, drawing on and extending the intelligence set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.11 below.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- 2.1 Detailed analysis is continuing in the key areas of child protection plans and Looked after children services, for both of which the current rates are high:

Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

- 2.2 Wirral's rate of children subject to a CPP has varied considerably over the last decade. At 31 March 2015 Wirral had the lowest rate among its group of statistical neighbours and a rate well below that of England and the North West; twelve months later the rate was the fourth highest in the group and was above the group average and the rates for England and the North West. This represented a 73% rate increase in the year.
- 2.3 Following a slight fall in CPP numbers between April and July 2016 the month-end count had risen to 435 by 31 December 2016, an increase of 8% in nine months. Whereas the rate of growth is significantly slower than in the previous year, the total number of open cases is high.
- 2.4 Rate growth has been attributed to changes in child protection practice between 2014/15 and the present. The LSCB reviewed these changes and concluded that the increase in the number of CPPs was as a result of

- the threshold policy and criteria having been re-launched among partner agencies
- further training having been provided to social workers around the Section 47 process, and
- the review of CIN cases open for six months or more.

2.5 Other (though not all) North West local authorities recorded an increase in CPP rates between March 2015 and March 2016, but among geographically close and statistical neighbours none other than Lancashire came close to matching the Wirral rate of increase. It has been previously but incorrectly reported that rates in Merseyside also rose over the corresponding period; whereas there was a marginal year-on-year increase in Sefton and Knowsley, the sub-regional average was a fall of nearly five per cent.

2.6 Whatever contribution policy and training revisions may have had to an increase in CPP numbers, the recent and current CPP rates have been consistently inflated by about four rate points, because of delays in the closure of CP plans on children who have become Looked After.

Children Looked After (CLA)

2.7 Work has continued to analyse and characterise the CLA population and better understand the origins of Wirral's historically high CLA rate and the drivers of continued growth in CLA numbers. There is a distinction to be made between the high but relatively stable base rate, which varied little over the three years to March 2016, and the growth since April 2016.

2.8 Analysis of Wirral's CLA population in November 2016 has revealed two characteristics that have a bearing on overall population size, the first being children's age, the second being the duration of care episodes:

- Since 2012, for England as a whole, the age profile of children looked after has been characterised by a steady increase in the proportion of older children, but not so in Wirral
- Wirral's CLA population has had fewer very young children and fewer older children, but a significantly larger proportion than England of children in the age range 1-9 years.
- Care episodes have got shorter in England between 2012 and 2016 and the average duration of episodes ending in the year to 31 March 2016 was 765 days, down from 785 in 2015 and 886 in 2012

- But if one looks at the 180 episodes that ended between 1 April and 30 November 2016, the average duration was 1327 days: children who left care in Wirral between April and November were, on average, looked after for eighteen months longer than the average for England in the previous year
- 2.9 Care episodes in Wirral have been and remain significantly longer than the England average; children entering care after the age of one year can remain Looked after for several years, contributing to the long-term high CLA rate.
- 2.10 The CLA population rose 12% between 1 April to 31 December 2016. The simple arithmetic of CLA population growth is that more children have become Looked after than have ceased to be Looked after. The rate of children becoming Looked after has been consistently high since March 2016 and the rates for commencements and cessations have increasingly diverged. Of recent months only in June 2016 has the number of children leaving care been greater than the number entering care.
- 2.11 Step-up from a child protection plan appears to have been a significant driver in the recent growth of the CLA population. 252 care episodes on 247 children started between 1 April and 30 November 2016. 170 (69%) of these children had also been the subject of a child protection plan at some time since 1 April 2016, either immediately prior to the commencement of a Looked after episode or until a very short time beforehand. Sixty-nine per cent is a minimum estimate and does not allow for the possibility of children who became looked after in April having been on a plan that ended in March or early April.

Care Leavers

- 2.12 Considerable work has been undertaken on improving practice in 'staying in touch' with care leavers; this was a key area of concern in the Ofsted judgement in July 2016. The initial focus has been on ensuring contact has been initiated with all care leavers, as well as direct contact this included indirect contact such as making a call to the young person or writing to them. When measuring this activity as an outcome for 'being in touch with care leavers' we have regularly achieved 93%.
- 2.13 Having ensured that we are initiating contact with all our care leavers, there has been focussed work on that contact being meaningful. The measure in December reflects the requirement to demonstrate meaningful 'in touch' contact with our care leavers. With the changed measurement against this indicator, we have returned at 70.3% for December.

- 2.14 There is intense management focus on improving this performance which includes; weekly performance meetings between team managers and their teams, fortnightly management review of performance led by the senior manager for children looked after.
- 2.15 Additional resources have been agreed to ensure we are providing a quality service to our care leavers and we evidence improved performance in the coming months. This includes increasing the Personal Advisers who support and work directly with care leavers, from 4 to 12, with the additional workers due to join the service in the next two weeks. Increased management capacity has been agreed for the Children in Care teams to ensure management oversight and grip; this capacity will be in the service by the end of January.