

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES & EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	5 NOVEMBER 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	SAFEGUARDING ACTIVITY REPORT - APRIL- AUGUST 2015		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES	WARDS:	ALL
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Reading Borough Council children's services work with over 2000 of our most vulnerable children including those who receive early help via our Children Action Teams, Children in Need, children assessed as being at risk of significant harm and the subject of a child protection plan and children in Reading's care.
- 1.2 This report provides an update of the key activity areas from April 2015 to August 2015 as reported through our internal performance reporting which is updated on a month by month basis. This is then submitted via the National Returns which all local authorities are required to submit to the Department for Education (DfE) in July and August each year.
- 1.3 As a result all comparative and trend data is provisional pending validation locally and nationally and it cannot be analysed against comparative data until later in the year.
- 1.4 The report also summarises the developments made since June 2015 to improve practice in the service and as a result better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION:

2.1 That the report is scrutinised and noted.

3. OVERVIEW

3.1 This report is a summary of Reading's performance since the last report for (Quarter 4 January 2015 to March 2015) and highlights areas for priority and scrutiny. Based on the current provisional data it also considers key performance for Children in Need and Looked after Children against previous year's performance. Benchmarking against other authorities including Statistical Neighbours for 2014/15 year end performance will be possible once this data is published later in the year.

3.2 The analysis of the data is taken from the Quality and Management of Information for Children Services report for 31 August 2015 (purple book), Annex A from the Ofsted Inspection Framework and schedule of audits has provided evidence of strengths and weakness in several areas of practice.

4.0 CHILDREN IN NEED/ CHILD PROTECTION

4.1 Early Help continues to be a service with a positive trajectory, receiving referrals from a range of services and a low level of closed cases being referred back for a Children's Social Care (CSC) assessment in the 9 months following the service ending.

4.2 There were 251 Early Help Referrals in quarter 1 compared to 294 in the previous quarter. April and May experienced a slight referral drop from Schools, which picked up again in June and July towards the end of the academic year. Schools, Children's Centres, Early Help and Children's Social Care continue to be the main sources of requests for help.

4.3 The number of Common Assessments (CAF) completed has held steady with 94 completed in quarter 1 against 108 in the last quarter. All CAFs continue to be quality assured at point of submission to ensure that the importance of the Voice of Child, multi-agency contributions and clear analysis leading to a plan of support is in place.

4.4 There continues to be evidence of children and young people being 'stepped up' to children's social work services where required, being escalated by Early Help managers who hold a good grip on cases. All 'step up' referrals continue to go through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure a greater consistency of thresholds. In addition to this the work of the MASH Early Help coordinator is beginning to have an impact as children are now

being successfully redirected from MASH into the Early Help hub for preventative support.

- 4.5 The project to simplify the process for accessing Early Help support is progressing well. Events are being run in October and November 2015 to communicate the important link to LSCB thresholds, and how a Single Early Help Pathway will work with Health and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners. A single pathway will be operational from January 2016.
- 4.6 Regular Early Help Audits are on-going and in quarter one 29 files were audited. Results saw improvements in timeliness of assessments, offer and quality of supervision and quality of analysis in case recording notes. The 9 month review process continues to tackle any concerns over case drift and in ensuring that the children's outcomes are the focus in any assessment and planning.
- 4.7 Work on the quality and use of chronologies, as well as asking workers to re assess cases regularly continues to be a priority from quarter 1.
- 4.8 The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) has been in place throughout the reporting period with Thames Valley Police co-locating in June 2015. The service received 2073 contacts from professionals, families and members of the public between April 2015 and August 2015. Of these an increased number met the threshold for social work assessment and intervention. 721 children and young people were referred for social work assessment and intervention in quarter 1 compared with 423 in quarter 4 of the previous year. This was an average of 240 referrals month. The numbers dropped in July 2015 to 118 and in August to 146. This may in part relate to a seasonal dip during school holidays.
- 4.9 The majority of referrals originated from the Police (343 received April-August 2015) with schools being the second highest referrer at 196 for the same period. In 2014-2015 schools referred 204 in the whole year which highlights a significant increase in referrals from schools year to date and positively reflects the work undertaken by schools to identify children in need or those who may be at risk of significant harm.
- 4.10 Overall, domestic abuse has remained the highest reason for referral. This constitutes 17.8% of referrals. The MASH has significantly enhanced the screening of domestic abuse contacts to the MASH with the presence of members of Thames Valley Police co located with social work staff. Referrals concerning physical abuse (10.7%) and sexual abuse (10.9%) were similarly highly represented.

NUMBER OF REFERRALS TO CSC	
YEAR	No of Referrals
2012-13	1681
2013-14	1732
2014-15	1598
2015-16 (Q1)	721
July - Aug 2015	226

- 4.11 The percentage of referrals converting to assessment has risen over the reporting period to 64 % during quarter 1, rising slightly to 67% by end of August 2015. Sixty four percent continues to be a low level of conversion from referral to assessment and more work is being undertaken with the MASH and assessment teams to ensure consistency of threshold for social work services. This has included the review and re - launch of the threshold guidance by the LSCB in November 2015

% OF REFERRALS GOING ON ASSESSMENT	
YEAR	ASSESSMENT %
2012-13	96.0%
2013-14	83.0%
2014-15	59.26%
2015-16(Q1)	64%
July- August 2015	75%

- 4.12 At Quarter 1, 67.9% of single assessments were completed within timescales against a S.E Benchmark of 78.2%. This performance dipped during July and August with staff working on a backlog of out of date cases. The quality of assessment has been the subject of ongoing scrutiny as part of the monthly audit process and there is evidence of more robust management oversight. The Principal Social worker has identified a comprehensive training course for the Access and Assessment teams around the quality of assessment and analysis as part of her ongoing work to improve practice and which is being delivered over the autumn.

- 4.13 Children’s Services has a duty under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to conduct enquiries where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This informs any further intervention including whether the Local Authority should take any action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The decision to initiate S47 enquiries is made in conjunction with the Police and partners via a strategy meeting or discussions. There has been increased activity in this area with 177 S47 enquiries in quarter 1, a rise of 28% on quarter 4. This increase has been sustained over July and August 2015 with a total of 261 enquiries in the period April 2015 to August 2015.

SECTION 47	
YEAR	Number of S47 initiated
2012-13	618
2013-14	557
2014-15	577
2015-16 (Q1)	177
July - August 2015	84

- 4.14 The quality and consistency of strategy discussions is an ongoing piece of work with Thames Valley Police and the other Berkshire local authorities. The need to routinely involve health and schools in strategy discussions needs to be strengthened.
- 4.15 The increase in S47 Enquiries is reflected in a similar increase in the number of Initial Child Protection Case Conferences (ICPC) held with the plan for 100 children and young people being considered at ICPC in Q1 and a further 46 held in July and August 2015.
- 4.16 The number of S47 enquires recommending an Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) increased from the last Quarter to 100 from 84 in quarter 4. The percentage of S47 enquires leading to ICPC stood at 57.3% in June 2015 and 66.7% in August 2015. This is still lower than the South East Benchmark figure of 72.7 % (available as at January 2015). This suggests that the threshold for initiating S47 investigations remains slightly low but is an improving picture.
- 4.17 In the year to date, 79.9% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within the 15 day national target compared to 61.1% of Statistical Neighbours in Quarter 1 2014-15.

S47 recommending Initial Conference	
YEAR	Number of ICPC
2012-13	161
2013-14	226
2014-15	301
2015-16 (Q1)	100
July - August 2015	46

4.18 The number of children with a Child Protection Plan has been steadily increasing from 203 at the end of Q4 to 237 at the end of Q1 and 265 at the end of August 2015. The breakdown of plans is set out below.

Plan type	Number Q4	Number Q1	Number Aug 2015
Neglect		49.8%	44.9%
Physical Abuse		7.2%	7.5%
Sexual abuse		14.8%	10.6%
Emotional abuse		28.3%	37.0%

4.19 The data demonstrates that Neglect is the major reason for Children having a child protection plan. A multi- agency audit was completed on behalf of the LSCB and a Neglect Protocol has been developed to ensure that all partners are working together to tackle this serious issue. This protocol is underpinned by a Neglect Action Plan. The action plan aims to increase the identification of neglect by all RBC employees, facilitate early intervention with families where neglect is identified and increase the skills of children's services staff.

4.20 Child Protection Plans lasting two years or more continue to decrease and at the end of Quarter 1, 5 children had been the subject of a child protection plan over 2 years, a decrease of 2 from Q 4, mirrored by a further decrease in August 2015 to 4 children. There is an audit cycle embedded which includes auditing of Child Protection Plans that are of 18 months plus duration. The average time children and young people had Child Protection Plans in Q1 had increased from an average of 8.9 months at the end of 2014-15 to an average of 12 months, however, this has dipped again with the end of August 2015 showing an average of 7.7 months. This demonstrates the robust use of plans to improve the parenting provided to our most vulnerable children and a reduction in drift.

CHILD PROTECTION PLAN LASTING 2 YEARS OR MORE		
YEAR	Number	%
2011-12	16	8.20%
2012-13	18	8.90%
2013-14	17	8.50%
2014-15	7	3.38%
2015-16 (Q1)	5	2.07%
August 2015	4	1.5%

- 4.21 Over the year 2014-15 55 (21.7%) children were subject to a plan for a second or subsequent time. This compares with 17.3% for statistical neighbours. Although this reduced to 32 (20.9%) at the end of August 2015 this number remains high. An audit of reasons behind this increase is being undertaken in October 2015, the results of which will inform future practice.
- 4.22 Child Protection plans require all children to be seen every 10 working days to ensure their safety and protection. Children should be seen alone and their views sought. In March 2015, 95% of Child Protection visits were completed within timescale, in June 2015 this was 68%, and in August 2015 this had increased to 90%. This is a local indicator and the nationally reported indicator counts the number of children who have had 100% of visits according to their plan. Whilst this data is improving there continues to be a lack of consistency month on month and improvements need to be sustained. Managers are using weekly data to ensure compliance and this is reviewed by senior managers including the Head of Children's Services weekly and at the monthly Challenge sessions.
- 4.23 Children who require ongoing social work intervention but who are not assessed as at risk of significant harm are designated as children in need. This has been an area of concern, with our performance being poor. Clear standards have now been set which include the visiting pattern and ensuring that every child has a Child in Need Plan. Standards are in place to ensure consistency; social workers are now required to see every child every 4 weeks as a minimum standard. Social workers are also required to update their plan of work for children in need at a minimum of every 6 months. This has resulted in a significant improvement in CIN cases having a plan in long term teams, with 84% of children with a plan in contrast to 39.9% in April. In addition to visits and plans there has been a huge drive to close or transfer relevant cases with regular meetings with the Children's Action Teams have

been set up to ensure cohesive step down. The aim of this work is to ensure that the right level of intervention is provided for every child in need and in a timely manner.

5. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 4.24 At Quarter 1, 2015-16 there were 223 children and young people Looked After which is an increase on the last quarter of 16. This further increased in July and August to 230. This number represents 66.28 children per 10000 population (August 2015). This is higher than the statistical neighbour average rate of 60 per 10,000 and the South East Bench mark Q2 2014-15 was of 48.2 per 1000 and represents the remedial work undertaken since January 2015 to safeguard children and young people.

Looked After Children - numbers in care	
Year	Total number of children
2012	237
2013	227
2014	208
2015 (Q1)	207
August 2015	223

- 5.1 Of our Looked after Children, as at August 2015, 117 are male and 113 being female. 102 of these children are noted to have special educational needs. 166 are white and 64 are from ethnic groups. (72.2% white / 27.8% ethnic groups). This varies from school census data which shows a 50/50 split and raises questions about whether the BME population is under represented.

- 5.2 At Quarter 4, the profile of our Looked After Children demonstrated that 53 were aged 4 and under; with 126 aged between 5 and 15 and 45 aged 16 and over plus 6 unaccompanied asylum seeking children. There has been an increase of 7 under 1's from Q4 last year.

Looked After Children - numbers in age	
Year	Total number of children
Under 4 years	53
5-9 years	51
11-15 years	75
16+	45
UASC	6
Total	230

- 5.3 The Looked after Children's Sufficiency Statement Strategy 2015-2017 was considered by ACE on 29th June 2015. The document demonstrates how we plan to "take steps that secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children

that the local authority is looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty'). The Strategy provides the analytical basis by which deficits in suitable accommodation for all children in care can be addressed. This includes Adoption and Fostering targets and associated marketing activity. This document is critical to inform commissioning intentions for future local accommodation provision to meet the needs of Looked after Children.

- 5.4 The lack of local placements in the Reading Borough Council area is demonstrated by the fact that 32% of our Looked after Children are placed more than 20 miles away from their home address. While this may be for a positive reason (such as children in adoptive placements or in specialist residential settings) this overall percentage figure must be reduced. It is important for children and young people to be local so that they can retain stability in education provision receive local health services and remain in contact with their family and community when safe to do so.
- 5.5 Work has been undertaken to recruit local foster carers including work with local faith groups and a target set to recruit 24 new carers by the end of March 2016.

Placement 3 -The percentage of looked after children at 31 March placed outside LA boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live			
Year	%	No. of children	Total children
2012	20.25%	48	237
2013	21.59%	49	227
2014	25.96%	54	208
2015	33%	61	207
2015 (YTD)	32%	67	230

- 5.6 73.6% of our children and young people are in stable placements, as at August 2015 (placements for 2 years plus or are placed for adoption). This compares favourably with the most recent South East Benchmark of 65%. However, we also have a cohort of 22 children who have had 3 or more placements (9.6%) and there has been an increase of 3 children since the end of March 2015. Whilst this compares favourably with the England average of 11% (as at 2013) there is still a need to be mindful of children's requirements

for stability and so we will continue to closely monitor this cohort via our commissioning service and through the work of our Reviewing Team.

Placement 1 -The percentage of children looked after with three or more placements during the year ending 31 March			
Year	%	No of children	Total children
2012	5.91%	14	237
2013	4.85%	11	227
2014	8.65%	19	211
2015	9.2%	19	207
August 2015	9.6%	22	230

6.0 CHILDREN LEAVING CARE

6.1 At the end of August 2015 there were 71 young people entitled to services under the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 aged 19-21. This has increased by 7 young people since end of March 15. As a Local Authority we are committed to ensuring that children leaving our care have a good start as they move towards adulthood. At the end of August 2015 89% of young people had a Pathway Plan in contrast to 27% in April 2015 and against a target of 95%. This continues to improve and audit has demonstrated some good practice in this area. Despite this, there are 36.6% who are not in suitable employment, education or training which is slightly lower than the latest Statistical Neighbour benchmark of 39.0% but remains unsatisfactory. New targets have been set for Advizor who work with our young people to facilitate their ongoing learning and development.

6.2 Of the 71, 7 young people are in Higher Education and are supported via a bursary from the Local Authority. Fifty five out of 71 children (77.5%) were in suitable accommodation, this compares to the Statistical Neighbour average of 80.74%. Work continues with independent providers, which forms part of the sufficiency strategy, to remedy this.

7.0 ADOPTION

7.1 Adoption Performance as evidenced by indicator A1 (the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family) on the

Adoption Scorecard, which is for children who have been adopted, indicates that after a reduction last year the average time has increased in the first quarter of 2015-2016. The national target is 420 days. For A2 (the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family) is 377 average days at the end of quarter 1 (August data not yet available). This is higher than the national target of 120 days. The breakdown of indicator A3 (children who waited less than 14 months-426 days between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family) contains some children with considerably longer timescales in excess of 500 days. There were 3 children who waited less than the 14 months as at June 2015, the average number of days between entering care and moving to adoptive placement was 736 at June 2015. Further diagnostic work was commissioned with independent providers Coram. This profiled the children placed for adoption compared with the children looked after, those currently needing adoptive families and those who the service has not been able to place. An action plan has been developed by the Adoption service and work started to improve performance in this area.

Adoption 1 -The percentage of children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted			
Year	%	No. adopted	Total ceased
2012	19.59%	19	97
2013	18.95%	18	95
2014	27.37%	26	95
2015	22%	19	85
2015-16 (Aug15)	26%	11	42

Adoption 2 - The percentage of children who ceased to be looked after because of a special guardianship order			
Year	%	No. ceased to SGO	Total ceased
2012	13.40%	13	97
2013	16.84%	16	95
2014	17.89%	17	95
2015	19%	16	85
2015-16 (Aug)	17%	7	42

A1 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)			
Year	Avg. days	No of days	No of children
2012	544.44	9880	18
2013	591.72	10651	18
2014	681.27	17713	26
2015	611	11,610	19
2015-16 (Q1)*	736	7,362	10

A2 - Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)			
Year	Avg. days	No of days	No of children
2012	222.06	3553	16
2013	242.31	3877	16
2014	325.96	8475	26
2015	285	5429	19
2015-16 (Q1)	377	3769	10

- 7.2 Performance is generally positive in terms of the numbers of children adopted from April-August 2015 which means that the number of children affected by an historical legacy of delayed matching is reduced. However the last cohort of these children are now being adopted which will prevent further impact on this indicator of the Adoption Scorecard. Children adopted in the first quarter of 2015-16 included older children and/or sibling groups who had also been subject to individual circumstances producing delay e.g the failure of a prospective adoptive placement during introductions and the requirement to re-commence family finding. Work has now also significantly reduced the number of children awaiting revocation of Placement Orders (for children who have been professionally assessed as needing long term care but are unlikely to achieve adoption as a permanent outcome). Looking at the cohort of children matched and placed with adopters (not yet adopted) at the end of

the last financial year and the first quarter of 2015-2016, the children were predominantly younger and have been placed much quicker. This will begin to reflect in the nationally collated data as these children are adopted.

7.3 The number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) remains in line with the numbers from the same point last year. The cumulative total at the end of August 2015 is 7 which equates to 17%

8. AUDIT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITY

8.1 A refreshed Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and provides a much more robust scope and methodology to obtaining performance information. Data on trends, performance trajectories and an ability to cross relate to other performance measures are now more easily accessible. The focus within audit activity is a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure process and procedures are being followed and that areas for practice improvement are identified and actioned. The audit process incorporates the whole of children's Services and is supported by a range of revised audit tools.

8.2 A Moderation process is built into the audit process and quality assures the process of monitoring the quality of the auditing carried out. Random cases are, therefore, routinely re-audited by a manager or peer.

8.3 The audit process and moderation which is in place for Children's Social Care has been extended to the Children's Action Teams so Children's Services has one overarching methodology for auditing. Case mapping across teams is planned to further improve practice for the whole of the 'child's journey' across services.

8.4 A quarterly performance and quality meeting is chaired by the Head of Children's Services. The meeting will look at the various strands of quality assurance activity and will agree action plans to be developed as a result of activity. This meeting will act as a challenge meeting where the HOCS can scrutinise activity, receive exception and corrective action reports and call managers to account.

8.5 Quarterly reports continue to be produced that will pull together themes from audits that have been undertaken. The Service Improvement board will then consider the messages and learning from these processes in connection to learning and action planning that emerges from the framework.

8.6 Results from audits will be disseminated across Children's Services. The views/comments of staff are gathered in a range of fora, for instance, focus groups, staff briefings, whole service conferences and induction of new staff.

Feedback in respect of the findings of audits and the relevant themes will be disseminated at such events.

- 8.7 A range of audits have been undertaken over the past 3 months via routine monthly auditing by service areas and deep dive group audits. These audits found some evidence of improving work but also reported historical drift and delay is significant to all cases, lack of consistency on the timeliness of supervision, insufficient challenge of poor practice, a failure to seek the views of absent fathers as part of the assessment process and lack of consistency in representing the view of children and young people. Files frequently did not have chronology of significant events to inform practice.
- 8.8 Although assessments by the Access and Assessment service were generally viewed to be of a good standard it was recognized that assessments would have benefitted from ensuring that all key agencies and absent fathers were involved in the assessment process and that timescales were adhered to.
- 8.9 Over recent weeks the early shoots of change are beginning to be visible, with plans now being developed and statutory visits undertaken within timescales and in line with practice standards and regulations.
- 8.10 In addition, The LSCB also has a full audit programme in situ that considers the impact of issues such as domestic abuse/domestic abuse re-referrals, multi-agency evaluation of CP Conferences and Core Groups, partnership engagement with CAF and TAC meetings, LAC Health Assessment, Effectiveness of Early Help Pathway and CSE with a focus on information sharing.
- 8.11 A recent multi-agency audit completed in April 2015 by the LSCB identified themes and areas of learning and how well agencies are working together in order to address neglect. The need for chronologies to be used to support development work was highlighted, as was the need for all agencies to assist in support to reduce drift and target support at an earlier stage. The child's journey and the voice of the child need to be better evidenced and a clear system for schools to record child protection concerns. In addition, the threshold document, review of the neglect protocol and the Family Group Conference Service was identified as requiring a review and these actions have now been completed.
- 8.12 A Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) audit was completed and identified lessons to be learnt in respect of formally recording on MODUS if a child is discussed at the forum so that all agencies can access this information, MODUS action plans to be completed by the agreed date and

that all agencies need to record this. All agencies are required to challenge any inappropriate risk assessment.

8.13 The evaluation of the Annual Report for Complaints and Compliments 2014-15 showed that there was 86 complaints received the following and of these 23 were resolved through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) by the Social Care Teams. Of the 63 remaining complaints:

- 48 were investigated to an outcome;
- 13 were withdrawn part-way through the investigation; and
- 2 were still on-going at the end of the reporting period

8.14 The main themes identified are as follows. This includes all complaints resolved informally and investigated at Stage 1, but does not include complaints investigated at Stages 2 & 3, as themes are duplicates of Stage 1)

Theme of Complaint	Number	% of Total
Breach of Confidentiality	1	1.16
Communication	9	10.47
Contact	6	6.98
Data Protection Breach	1	1.16
Financial Issue	1	1.16
Lack of Action	1	1.16
Lack of Support	1	1.16
Looked After Child Payments	1	1.16
Service Provision	44	51.16
Staff Conduct	21	24.43
Total	86	100

8.15 Complaints were received from a variety of sources including parents, adopters, foster carers and 7 were received from children and young people themselves. The findings from the Report highlight the need for there to be a clearer focus on customer relations, better communication and improved service delivery. A reduction in complaints and an increase in compliments received will indicate an increase in customer satisfaction.

- 8.16 Twenty nine compliments were recorded within Children's Services between 1st of April 2014 and the 31st of March 2015 from across all Services.
- 8.17 The Independent Reviewing Service are now more robust in their challenges and hold staff at all levels to account in respect of the cases that they review.
- 8.18 The quality Assurance Framework will be kept under review to ensure that continual learning and improvement is embraced and embedded into all aspects of Children's Services

9. WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT

- 9.1 The recruitment of social workers and managers at a number of levels remains a priority for Reading Borough Council. The new recruitment strategy has been implemented which is already having a positive impact and in August 2015 there were 42 applications for social work roles with 6 preferred candidates identified. A new permanent recruitment process has been introduced in parallel, including a new media programme for advertising and a revised Reading Offer, to ensure that the Local Authority is promoted as a flexible and innovative employer. We are also actively recruiting an AYSE cohort to start in January 2016.
- 9.2 A similarly positive recruitment strategy has been put in place for Middle and senior management posts with permanent staff recruited to these posts.

10. THE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

- 10.1 The Improvement Journey is over seen by the Improvement Board, chaired independently and attended by the Managing Director, Lead Member for Children, the DCEEHS and partner agencies including the Borough Commander and senior representatives from health.
- 10.2 The Board meets monthly and, in addition to scrutinising progress against the plan, has looked in depth at specific actions\ including changes in governance and audit.
- 10.3 Work lead by the Head of Children's services has underpinned the improvement journey with a robust change management process. This includes:
- Changes in the governance structure aimed at increasing management oversight and scrutiny
 - Changes in the quantity of work undertaken aimed at improvement against key performance indicators and compliance with care standards and regulations.

- Changes in the quality of work undertaken including changes to the culture of social work practice
- Changes in the support and supervision given to social work staff and managers.

Changes in governance

- An access to resources panel has been set up chaired by the Head of CSC. This panel is multi-disciplinary and reviews all children coming into LA care and the care plans of those children already in care where the placement is high cost or at a distance. The Panel scrutinises the decision making, quality of work undertaken and makes recommendations for further action. By the 21st September 2015 the panel had reviewed the work undertaken and made recommendation for practice on 100 children and young people.
- A performance challenge panel has been introduced. This meets monthly to review the data set and key performance indicators. The purpose of this panel is to consider the reasons/blockages that prevent targets from being achieved and to identify solutions, based on best practice, to improve the data set and inevitably the outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- The improvement plan has been developed and shared with managers. A managers group meets to progress the plan with practice leads identified for each of the key areas.
- A children's services improvement board has been developed with partners to review the progress of the plan, offer support and challenge outcomes.

Changes in the quantity of work undertaken

- The challenge meeting reviews all key indicators and challenges staff where outcomes are poor and identifies and monitors actions for improvement. Clear timescales are put in place to improve performance.
- The staff newsletter is used to message key areas for improvement and celebrate successes
- Two whole service meetings, with other regular meetings planned throughout the year, have been set up to ensure key messages are delivered across the service.
- Standards have been set for specific areas of practice including children in need plans and Pathway plans for children leaving care to ensure that all staff are aware of visiting patterns and engaged in the improvement journey.

Changes in the quality of work undertaken

- An audit programme is in place led by the service manager for quality assurance. This programme looks at both the quantity and the quality of practice. The programme includes group audits involving staff at all levels and peer auditing in order to engage all levels of staff in the process and embed change.
- Audits take place across the service all managers from the DCS to ATM complete at least 2 audits a month.
- The access to resources panel provides scrutiny, challenge and senior management guidance to social workers and managers on individual cases to ensure that appropriate and best value services are delivered and drift and delay is avoided.
- The principal social worker has identified training and coaching for teams on thematic issues including planning and assessment, chronology compilation, analysis and case recording.
- Standards have been set in key practice areas.

Changes in the support and supervision given to staff

- The Principal social worker has developed a programme of work for social work staff and managers providing training on key areas of practice to underpin change.
- The training programme is being reviewed regularly to reflect the outcomes of audit.
- Supervision standards have been set which stipulate a requirement that each case be supervised at least every 4 weeks to ensure plans are progressed and appropriate outcomes are achieved for children, young people and their families and in a timely manner.
- Changes in the recruitment strategy have resulted in increasing interest in work in RBC as an employer with recruitment to 6 social work posts, employment offered for two vacant service manager positions and final interviews due to the Head of Children's services post.

11. PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD

The best place for children to thrive is within their families and within their local environment, where this is not possible, RBC will provide the best care for young children by ensuring that we carry through our statutory responsibility with passion and enthusiasm. This will require good partnership working with our partnership agencies, including those from within RBC. We will need to ensure that we all work towards the same objective, which is to bring the best outcomes for our children.

As part of continuing on our improvement journey, the following will be necessary for us to achieve our objectives for young people:

- We need to ensure that the new directions set are embedded over the next few months and provide the quality of care to young people in our care, those on a child protection and children in need plans.
- We continue to develop our auditing culture in the department and cascade the learning through training events and regular workshops.
- That the voice of the child emerges strongly throughout our practice.
- That the core standards are fully understood and the key priorities are adhered to; these include the voice of the child, regular and reflective supervision, performance management, timeliness of our assessments, good analysis of our work and intervention with children and families that is outcome focussed.
- That we achieve stability in staffing, by recruiting good quality staff and retaining them and developing those currently in the Department to their full potential.
- It is essential that all staff have an understanding about our budgetary pressures and learn to live within the budgets allocated but continue to provide high quality services.
- Ensure that residential care is only considered when all their options have been exhausted.

12. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

12.1 The work of Children's Social Care is aligned with the strategic priorities of Reading Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2015 - 2018 and the Reading Health and Wellbeing Strategy and in particular:

'Safeguarding and protecting those that are the most vulnerable'.

13. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

13.1 A wide range of partners and parents, carers, young people and families accessing Social Services were actively involved in the planning around their own case but are also engaged in the development of the work as a whole, and it is our ambition to further improve this through the work of the service user evaluation programme.

14. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

15. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no legal implications to this report, although the Children's Social Care work enables the Council to meet the statutory duties set out in the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the Childcare Act 2006.

16. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no new financial implications outlined in this report.

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None.

GLOSSARY:

CSC - Children's Social Care

MASH - Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub

DfE - Department of Education

LSCB - Local Safeguarding Children's Board

VCS - Voluntary and Community Sector

TVP - Thames Valley Police

ICPC - Initial Child Protection Conference

UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

SN - Statistical Neighbour

FGC - Family Group Conference

MARAC - Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference