



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 JANUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR FIRST RESPONSE CENTRAL DUTY AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to brief the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the performance of First Response Central Duty and the Children's Social Care Teams over the first two quarters of this business year (1st April to 30th September 2013).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

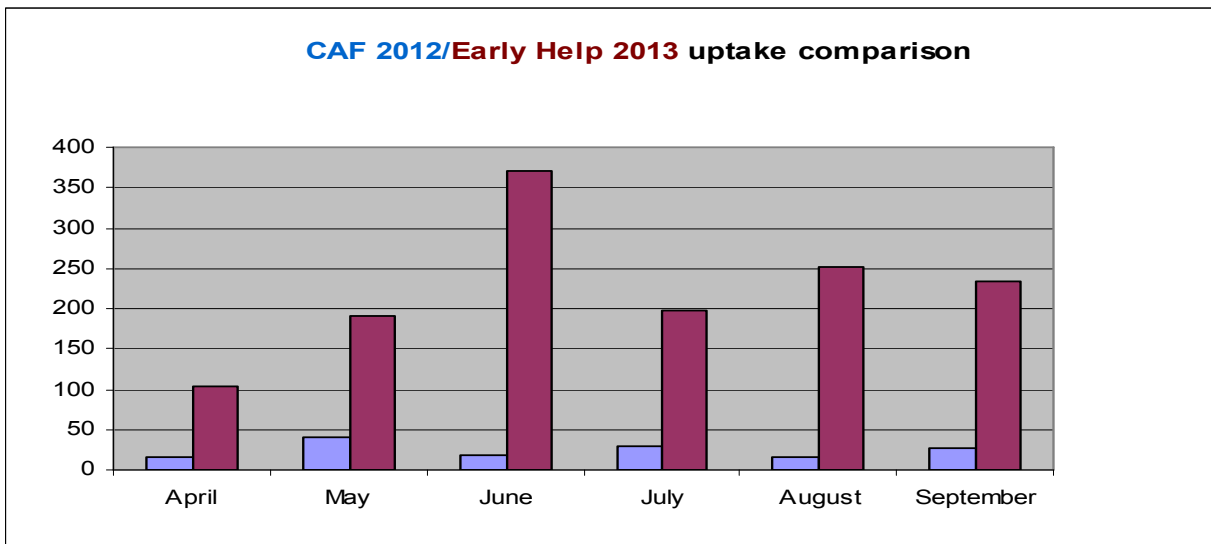
2. This report refers to services provided by the Children and Young People's Service as set out in the Children Act 1989 and 2004.

Background

3. In April 2013 the County Council expanded the service provided by the Central Duty Team. This development saw the Central Duty Team expand its role with incoming enquiries about children's social care cases to include being the first point of contact for new enquiries to the County Council about all vulnerable children and families, including those contacts relevant to the Supporting Leicestershire Families Service. This arrangement is colloquially referred to as the 'single front door'. Central Duty was renamed First Response Central Duty to take account of this increased role. This report sets out the performance of First Response Central Duty in the first half of the business year.
4. This report also sets out a summary of the performance of the Children's Social Care Teams for the first half of the business year.
5. Detailed performance information is regularly reported to the Lead Member for Children and Family Services. The performance report for the first half of the business year as reported to the Lead Member is attached at Appendix A.

Performance of First Response Central Duty

6. With the expansion of First Response Central Duty to manage the County Council's single front door for children and families it was deemed essential to establish that the most vulnerable people were receiving an effective and quick response. From the start of this new arrangement high levels of management oversight were undertaken, including regular performance audits. Service standards for the timeliness and quality of response were audited in the first quarter of this period. The audit found that:
- a) Seven out of eight cases audited of in-coming children's cases were dealt with within 24 hours and one within 3 days;
 - b) Seven out of eight cases were correctly assessed and prioritised. However, in one case, although the case was correctly sent for an assessment, auditors felt the case should have been dealt with immediately and remedial action was taken straight away to address this matter;
 - c) In all the referrals First Response Central Duty used the Signs of Safety model (see below for a description of Signs of Safety) and as such risk and protective factors were identified and managed;
 - d) In all cases audited there was evidence of other agencies relevant to the case being contacted and involved in decision making;
 - e) In all cases the analysis of the social worker was felt to be clear and all cases had team manager recommendations that were analytical and clear.
7. Accompanying the audit work, a continuing analysis of data regarding the in-flow of children's cases and how these cases are dealt with by First Response Central Duty is being undertaken. During quarter two the First Response Central Duty received 5278 phone calls and 7516 electronic/fax/paper referrals, making a total of 12,794 contacts with the team. Despite this high workflow volume the team sustained and improved on telephone performance with the average call waiting time reducing from 56 seconds to 8 seconds during the period. Similarly 81% of all contacts were dealt with within 3 working days.
8. An important target that First Response Central Duty has addressed in this period has been to re-balance incoming enquiries about vulnerable children and families to ensure the County Council is making a proportionate response to their needs. In this respect, although there has been an increase in the number of referrals for children's social care, there has been a decrease of 11% on those cases following through to require a social care assessment. Instead these cases have received appropriate responses in Early Help services including Supporting Leicestershire Families.
9. Associated with the desire to ensure that the County Council is making a proportionate response to children and family's vulnerability is the increased number of children and family cases being dealt with by Early Help services and include Supporting Leicestershire's Families. The graph below sets out the increase in Early Help uptake since the integration of Early Help into First Response Central Duty compared to the previous system of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) uptake for 2012:



Performance of the Children's Social Care Teams

10. The Children's Social Care Service is broad ranging in its service offer. There is a single consistent approach to quality improvement through use of the 'QAIF' (Quality Assurance Improvement Framework) system. This records and monitors four sets of performance information:
- a) Numerical data;
 - b) Performance analysis;
 - c) Staff voice and practice wisdom;
 - d) Children and young people's voice.

Numerical data

11. On 30th September 2013 there were 373 children subject to a child protection plan. This represents a decrease of 20% over the preceding twelve months. Whilst this report concentrates on the first two quarters of the business year it is timely to report some change in quarter three which has seen an increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan to 410 by the end of November.
12. On the same date, 30th September 2013, there were 435 children in the care of the County Council, an increase of 72 children since 31st March 2012. However, of importance is that the overall number of children in care between 31st March 2013 and 30th September 2013 remained the same at 435. As set out in the paragraph above, whilst this report is about the period 1st April 2013 to 30th September 2013, it is timely to note the increase in the number of children in care at the end of November to 450.

Performance analysis

13. Although it is still too early to draw long term conclusions regarding the decrease in numbers of children subject to a child protection plan during the first two quarters of the business year, the initial analysis suggests that this is the result of the investment made by the County Council in Safeguarding services and in particular the creation and growth of 'Strengthening Families' teams which has changed the approach in some children's cases. These teams provide long term assistance in the child's community that is aimed directly at preventing the need for children to become subject to a child protection plan or become looked after. The view emerging here is that the upward trajectory is being tempered and the longer term impact of the Strengthening Families teams should begin to be seen in the coming period.
14. Nevertheless, as explained above, there is an increase in numbers in the third quarter to date and this can be connected to the impact of national attention on safeguarding children following the publication of a serious case review in Coventry and a court case in Bradford, both of which received considerable publicity in September, heightening public awareness and resulting in increased contact with the First Response Central Duty service and referrals into Children's Social Care.
15. In the first half of the year Ofsted have undertaken two regulatory inspections. These were at Welland House Children's Home which was graded good and the County Adoption Service which was graded as adequate. An improvement plan is in place for the County Adoption Service.

Staff Voice and Practice Wisdom

16. Over the past eighteen months a major development area has been the introduction of a key practice methodology into children's social care called Signs of Safety. This is an academically validated approach which originated in Australia and New Zealand. The key features of the approach provide working tools for practitioners in their direct work with children and families and also create a clear approach to risk analysis and risk management. In the first half of this year internal audit activity has confirmed that the Signs of Safety methodology is being increasingly used in children's cases. Staff report that they find the tools both helpful and easy to use. This was especially evident on 31st October 2013 at the staff conference which focussed entirely on Signs of Safety and its impact on children and families cases.

Children's Voice and Choice

17. In the first half of this year there has been considerable emphasis on developing the self-esteem of our children in care. There have been two notable examples; the participation of our Children in Care Council in the Unheard Voices project, and the launch of the Beacon website for our children in care. The Children in Care Council's contribution to the Unheard Voices project resulted in the visit of some of its members to Auschwitz – Birkenau. Their video record of this has recently been released as a short film. The Beacon website created by the children in care themselves and supported by County Council staff provides a well used platform for learning, on line conversations and advice.

The key impact of these important work strands has been the considerable improvement in the self-confidence and self-esteem of those children and young people and a commensurate improvement in other aspects of their lives.

Resource Implications

18. Children's Social Care received growth in its budget in 2011/12 in order to address a recurring budget shortfall in placement budgets. Part of this growth has been used to create the Strengthening Families teams that work with families to prevent children coming into care or becoming subject to a child protection plan.

Timetable for Decisions

19. There are no decisions directly relevant to this performance monitoring report.

Conclusions

20. The report summarises in brief key aspects of the performance of First Response Central Duty and the Children's Social Care Service. The new arrangement for First Response Central Duty is working well. In the first two quarters of the business year the numbers of children subject to child protection plans has decreased and this could be seen to be as a result of the impact of early help services which include Strengthening Families and Supporting Leicestershire Families. In the first two quarters of the business year the number of children in care is stable. The majority of staff report that they feel confident and competent in their role. There is innovative and creative engagement with the children and young people in our care. The ongoing regular performance monitoring of First Response Central Duty and Children's Social Care teams will enable the department to take swift action in response to any changes in trends across years and in-year.

Equal Opportunities Implications

21. These services are offered to the most vulnerable children and families in Leicestershire.

Relevant Impact Assessments

22. The children's social care workforce is kept under regular review to ensure that risk is minimised.

Background Papers

23. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None.

Officer to Contact

Lesley Hagger, Director of Children and Family Services

Telephone: 0116 305 6340

Email: Lesley.hagger@leics.gov.uk

Walter McCulloch, Assistant Director

Telephone: 0116 305 7441

Email: Walter.mcculloch@leics.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A - Quarterly Data - referral assessments April to September 2013