

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 6 July 2015
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2014-15
Report of: Sue Harrison Director of Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers/ Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2014/15

Advising Officer: Isabel Wilks, Team Manager Conference and Review
Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Medium Term Plan for Central Bedfordshire – the key priorities which relate to the report are:

- Promoting health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
- Improved educational attainment

The Children and Young People's Plan 2015/2017

- Priority 1: Helping children and young people achieve more
- Priority 2: Protecting children and keeping them safe

Provision of an independent reviewing service to scrutinise care planning for Looked After Children is a statutory responsibility of the Council. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are employed to review care planning arrangements for individual children in order to secure the best outcomes for those children.

Financial:

1. The Conference and Review Service is part of the wider Professional Standards Service within Children's Services Operations. The service is responsible for the coordination and chairing of reviews for Looked After Children and Child Protection Conferences. The Quality Assurance Service has an annual budget of £1M.

2. The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to keep under review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook.

Legal:

3. Regulation and statutory guidance detail the requirement to report on the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children.

Risk Management:

4. Breach of Regulatory and statutory guidance by non provision of a service by which the care plans of Looked After Children are reviewed and reputational risks by virtue of non production of an Annual Report in line with statutory guidance.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Adherence to Human Rights and Equality issues are maintained.

Community Safety:

7. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

8. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

9. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the content of the report.

Background

10. The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. This report provides an opportunity to report on the activity of Children’s Services in relation to Looked After Children, highlight areas of good practice and identify areas which require improvement. In addition the report describes the range of work the service has engaged in during the year and areas for development, which will be prioritised in the coming year.

Qualitative Information about the Service

12. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
13. There were 818 reviews held in respect of 363 children during the year from April 2014 to March 2015. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances which might require an additional review to be held.

Qualitative Information about the IRO service

14. The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews.

Conduct of the Service

15. The Service has focussed on the quality of care planning and provided challenge and scrutiny to operational practitioners and managers when gaps in relation to timely and appropriate plans for children have been identified. In addition the service has responded to new requirements as a result of the Family Justice reforms.

Conclusions and Next Steps

16. The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children's Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2014/15

Background Papers: Nil