

Committee: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **11 June 2012**
Title of Report: **THRIVE Update**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Purpose of Report: **To update the Committee on the progress made so far as part of the THRIVE Programme.**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the progress made so far as part of the THRIVE Programme

1. Project Management

1.1. The first months of the THRIVE Programme have been used to establish working groups and plan the project. Project Initiation Documents for most strands are now agreed and work to collect and analyse evidence is underway.

1.2. Regular monitoring of progress against activity milestones, outcome indicators, budgets and risks has been set up and is being overseen by the THRIVE Programme Team and by this Board.

1.3. A number of awareness raising events have been held for ESCC staff and partners and a communications and engagement strategy is now in place. This includes a consultation process, that will actively engage families and seek their views, built into the three service reviews being undertaken in the Children's Services Department - covering Children's Centres; Social Care; and the Targeted Youth Service, Youth Offending Team and Education Support, Behaviour and Attendance Services (ESBAS). There will also be a consultation process for the wider service developments, in particular the development of an early help strategy.

2. Reduction in demand

2.1 A key aim of the programme is to reduce pressures on frontline statutory Social Care services by reducing East Sussex's comparatively high number of contacts and referrals by 50% and 64% respectively as compared to October 2011. So far we have achieved the following:

- The number of contacts received in March 2012 was 49% (597) lower than the number received in October 2011.
- The number of referrals received in March 2012 was 32% (544) lower than the number received in October 2011.

2.2 We attribute these significant falls to early work with the Police who have agreed to do more screening prior to referral. Two joint agency audits of information that has not been passed on to Social Care teams by Police colleagues has not indicated any concerns at this stage.

2.3 To reduce inappropriate referrals still further and ensure that good interagency information is available, a Multi-Agency Screening Hub (MASH) pilot was launched on Monday 30 April in the west of the county. The MASH is staffed by the Duty and Assessment Team and by partners such as the police and health. Referrals are being considered by this multi-agency team so that the right help from the appropriate agency or agencies can be put in place if necessary. This should improve the efficiency of the referral process, reduce duplication of services and target help more effectively, thereby producing better outcomes for families and young people and saving money. The MASH will be evaluated and fine-tuned over the next few months and if successful will be rolled out across the county.

3. Changes in Activity for Support Services

3.1 Although unit costs for Looked After Children (LAC) in East Sussex are not high in comparison to other authorities, the large numbers of children subject to care proceedings and who are LAC means that there are insufficient in-house resources and it is necessary to resort to more expensive agency placements and more external court-ordered assessments than the budget can sustain. Our aim, therefore, is to bring as

many foster care placements and specialist assessments in-house as possible and, where appropriate, to reduce the length of time spent in foster placements by speeding up adoptions. Progress on these key activities is being closely monitored by the Assistant Director for Children and Families and to date:

- The new Specialist Assessment Service was launched on 30th April. This service aims to reduce the need for court-ordered external assessments in care proceedings cases, so speeding up cases, and reducing costs.
- 15 new Foster Carer assessments are currently underway and recruitment events are being held monthly. 25 prospective households attended the event in March.
- 34 assessments of prospective adopter families are currently underway, 12 of which are already booked into Adoption Panels in April, May and June. Seven recruitment events are also planned over the rest of the year.
- A high-profile recruitment campaign for carers across several services, is planned for the autumn.

4. Strengthening and Developing Early Help Services

4.1 A multi-agency Early Help Strategy is in development. For many families this will mean dealing with need without escalation to statutory social care services. For others it may mean a pathway of support post-statutory social care interventions and for still others it may mean recognising severe family dysfunction and ongoing risk to children very early and ensuring decisions to remove children from families are taken as speedily as possible.

4.2 The strategy will include plans for strengthening the current early help offer through a combination of additional capacity and workforce development and staff and partners are working to identify the best approaches in relation to different issues and different geographical areas. This work includes running some pilots to test out different ways of working:

- The Good Start Health Visiting pilot in the Bexhill Children's Centre area has not been as successful as hoped and is now being extended to Hastings. The intention is to pilot new ways of integrated working for Health Visitors and Family Outreach Teams. Ensuring a consistent and well reported shift to more targeted models of health visiting remains a challenge and continues to be pursued via Section 75 discussions.
- An embedded key worker approach to dealing with families with multiple problems has been agreed for East Sussex and will be piloted with a few teams over the rest of the year.
- Three Corporate Service Reviews are underway. The Children's Centres Service Review will present options in June 2012 and recommendations will be made to the THRIVE Programme Team and SMT. The Review of Targeted Youth Support, Education Support, Behaviour and Attendance Services and the Youth Offending Team and the Review of Social Care will both report by the end of September 2012.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The THRIVE Programme already appears to be delivering some early results in terms of turning down demand for statutory social care services. Additional work is now needed to take this emerging picture a step further in terms of profiling the interrelated nature of service activity, budgets, threshold discussions on risk and outcomes for children and families. This is a complex and dynamic picture that will evolve over the coming months.

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[Background Documents](#)

None