

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	28 January 2011
Title of Report:	Parent and Baby Placements
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To inform the panel of activity and outcomes for parent and baby placements since April 2008

Recommendation: The Panel is recommended to note and endorse the contents of the report.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The allocated budget for these placements is £660,000 in the current financial year and at the end of Quarter 3 (31 December) there was a projected pressure of £63,000.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 In common with other local authorities in the region, East Sussex has seen a significant rise in the number of parent and baby placements, most of which are mandated within legal proceedings. This rise has not been replicated nationally so it would appear that local judiciary and magistrates 'favour' this approach. It is often the case that the local authority does not support the placement but is still directed to meet the full costs. However, as indicated below in 2.7 there are early signs that is becoming more common for the court to accept the robust arguments of the Local Authority when the evidence indicates that separation of parent and baby is in the best interests of the child.

2.2 Work has been undertaken to analyse the activity in parent and baby placements since 1 April 2008. The average cost of a placement is £16,588, ranging from £733 to £71,158. The most frequent presenting concern is substance/alcohol misuse (and domestic violence). 35% of the cases relate to substance/ alcohol misuse, 27 % of these included domestic violence, 16% learning disability, 14% mental health, and 6% domestic violence alone. The care planning outcomes for children where parent and baby placement has been provided are summarised below. If we discount the placements that fail immediately, the duration of placements can range from as little as 4 weeks to as long as 18 months.

2.3 The children's care arrangements were followed up in June 2010 and outcomes for children can be summarised as follows:

2.4 **2008-2009** – 17 placements - 7 placed in adoptive placements, 3 remained in mother's care, 3 placed in father's care, 1 remained in parents' care, 3 placed on RO/SGO to extended family. 17.6% mother and baby placements concluded with the child successfully remaining in mother's care and in total 41% of babies remained in parental care, 17.6% were cared for by extended family members and 41% were placed for adoption.

2.5 **2009-2010** – 31 placements - 17 placed in adoptive placements or care plan for adoption, 7 remained in mother's care, 7 placed on RO/SGO to extended family or care plan for RO/SGO. 22% remained in mother's care, 22% are cared for by extended family members and 55% have a care plan for adoption.

2.6 **2010-2011** – 28 new placements have been made between 1 April 2010 and 31 December 2010 and 19 placements have ceased. A further piece of work will be undertaken to follow up the outcomes and care arrangements for these children during the coming year.

2.7 The increase in activity in 2009 reflects the increase in care proceedings in the context of the Public Law Outline which became embedded during this period, coupled with a national rise in care

proceedings in the aftermath of the 'baby Peter' case. During 2009-2010 53 children aged under 2 years were admitted to care and the pressure of care proceedings has continued in 2010-2011 with 60 children under 2 years being admitted in the first 3 quarters of the year. The service has, however, gradually become more successful in presenting cases to the courts to argue for separation at an earlier stage in proceedings rather than accepting the view that the parent has a right to be offered a parent and baby assessment placement.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 Further work is underway between Children's Services senior managers and the judiciary and magistrates to help them understand our approach to permanence planning for children and also to understand the financial context in which decisions are made. There are some signs that this approach is beginning to have an effect.

3.2 The Panel is recommended to note and endorse the contents of the report.

MATT DUNKLEY
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children & Families, Tel: 01273 481274
Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None