

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **27 January 2012**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Safeguarding Unit Report**

Purpose of report: **To inform the Panel of the work and function of the Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Advisors and provide statistical information on National Performance Indicators for the year ending 31/3/11**

---

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Panel is asked to note the contents of this report**

---

### **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no financial implications. The report describes services that are already provided from within Children's Services' budgets

### **2. Supporting Information**

2.1 The Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have a statutory role in chairing all the Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Children (LAC) Reviews (Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Adoption and Children's Act 2002). New statutory guidance came into force in April 2011 and included an IRO handbook and increased responsibilities in Care Planning and Reviewing arrangements for looked after children (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations). A new "Working Together to Safeguard Children" is due to be published by the DfE in 2012 and will set out how individuals and organisations should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

### **3. The Service in East Sussex**

#### **3.1 Location and establishment of the service**

3.1.1 One full time Safeguarding Manager and 10 full time CPAs/IRO's (who are all experienced managers) have an administrative base at St. Mark's House, Eastbourne. In addition there is one Operations Manager, Safeguarding who as part of his responsibilities, acts as Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for child protection, this is the role that manages child protection allegations against professionals.

#### **3.2 Management of reviews**

3.2.1 The statutory requirement is that for each child coming into care, a review is carried out within 28 days and subsequent reviews at least at 3 months and then 6 monthly intervals. However if there is any significant change of circumstances such as a change of placement then the process re-commences.

3.2.2 The statutory requirement for each child subject to a child protection plan is a review conference be held within 3 months of the Initial conference and then within 6 months.

3.2.3 The IRO or CPA chairs the meeting and makes decisions. If there are difficulties in achieving the protection or care plan or in producing good outcomes for children then the IRO/CPA will follow up with the relevant manager and any further concerns will be addressed within a formal dispute resolution process.

## **4. Overview of the work 2010-2011**

### **4.1 Looked After Children**

4.1.1 The total number of LAC as of 31/03/11 was 589 a 14% increase compared to 2010. As of 31/12/11 the number of LAC was 621. Whilst this is a further 5% increase since 31/03/11 the last 6 month period has seen the number stabilise around the 620 level.

4.1.2 The number of LAC Reviews held within timescales was 91.9%, below the target of 95% but a slight increase compared with the 2009/10 rate of 90.3%. This performance was due to a combination of reviews disrupted by the snow; long term staff absence but most fundamentally because of the large increase in the number of LAC

4.1.3 Participation of children in their LAC reviews was 93%, a slight increase on 2009/10 but maintaining a significant increase from 80.2% in 2008/09.

4.1.4 The stability of placement (3 or more placement moves) was 9.7% as compared to 9.4% in 2009/10. Although this is still very good performance in terms of national performance of 10.7%, it may indicate a downward trend that needs to be kept under review.

4.1.5 The number of LAC children who were adopted or became subject to a Special Guardianship Order was 53. This is a continued increase against 42 in 2009/10 and 22 in 2008/09 and indicates an improvement in this type of permanency planning for children.

4.1.6 Current IRO caseloads are approximately double the suggested maximum (120 children as opposed to 50-70) and a recommendation has been made to SMT for a secondment and backfill costs of two staff as FTE IROs in 2011-12 to drive on quality assurance for LAC. A reduction is then modelled in line with service transformation objectives and the anticipated decrease in numbers of LAC.

### **4.2 Child Protection**

4.2.1 The total number of children subject to a child protection plan as at 31/03/11 was 625, a 15% increase compared to 2010. As of 31/12/11 the number of plans was 696.

4.2.2 The number of Child Protection Reviews held within timescales was 99.4% ,exceeding the target of 97%. This is of note in light of the continued significant increase in the volume of children becoming looked after or subject to child protection plans.

4.2.3 The percentage of children becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time was 12.5% as compared to 17.4% in 2009/10. This is within the target range of 10-15% but can be subject to significant fluctuation due to issues such as large sibling groups. There is a need for continued focus and review on the support plans needed after a child protection plan has ceased.

4.2.4 The number of children subject to a child protection plan for 2 or more years was 6.8% as compared to 9.4% in 2009/10, against a target of less than 10%). This performance improved throughout the year and appears to be on a continued downward trend indicating improved permanency planning. This indicator has been changed to a snapshot of all CP plans for 18 months or more in the council plan to give an earlier point of monitoring.

## **5. Key Challenges for the Service**

5.1 The continued increase in both child protection and LAC numbers has generated significant increased pressures for the workloads of CPAs and IROs which has also impacted on the ability to undertake the quality assurance and development parts of the role.

5.2 There are still greater increased responsibilities and expectations within the IRO handbook as follows.

Greater emphasis is placed on the local authority to appoint an IRO at the point when a child becomes looked after for the first time.

Extension of the IRO's monitoring role to greater independent oversight of the child's interest.

Requirement of the IRO to speak to each child prior to a review to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings.

Reinforces the duty of the IRO to challenge poor practice by referral to CAF/CASS.

5.3 Following the Munro review of child protection published in 2011 a new version of "Working Together to Safeguard Children" is expected to be published in 2012 and is likely to address issues of timescale for assessment and for cases progressing to Initial Child Protection Conference. The DfE is also working on a new Performance Indicator framework which is due to go out for consultation in January 2012. It is anticipated that there will be less of a reliance on strict timescales and a move towards the quality of assessments that happen in a timely fashion for the child and family.

5.4 The implementation in 2011 of the new LAC recording documents on the careFirst system has gone well. A Social Care Information System Programme Board has recently been convened to consider the possibility of a move to another product and soft market testing will assess if another system will bring significant practice improvement benefits.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 The Safeguarding Unit continues to represent value for money and helps ensure good outcomes for LAC and those children subject to a child protection plan.

6.2 Performance against key indicators remains good despite rising numbers of children who are LAC or subject to a child protection plan.

MATT DUNKLEY  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Douglas Sinclair, Head of Safeguarding Unit, 01273 481289  
Local members: All