

Agenda Item 49.

TITLE	Measures Taken To Reduce The Need For Children To Return To A Child Protection Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

That the Overview and Scrutiny board is informed in response to a question that was raised.

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee notes the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report is in response to a question that was raised at the Overview and Scrutiny board on the 8th September 2020 in relation to children who are subject to a child protection plan and the measures taken to reduce the need for children to return to a child protection plan.

The report details the number of children who became subject to a child protection plan in Wokingham Borough Council over the last twelve months, along with those that become subject to a child protection plan subsequently. The report will also explain the reason and purpose of a child protection plan.

Background

Children become subject to a Child Protection plan where the multi-agency assessment indicates they have suffered or are at risk of suffering significant harm.

The number of children becoming subject to a Protection plan fluctuates from year to year and can be influenced by a variety of different factors linked to changes in legislation and/or guidance, socio- economic factors and issues such as child sexual exploitation.

Previous 12 months

	Q4 2019-20	Q1 2020-21	Q2 2020-21	Q3 2020-21
No. CPP started	44	26	35	55
Previous CPP within 2 years	4	1	0	14
% of children starting a CPP who had previous one in the last 2 years	9.1%	3.8%	0.0%	25.5%
Previous CPP ever	10	5	3	15
% of children starting a CPP who had previous one ever (national indicator)	22.7%	19.2%	8.6%	27.3%

Comparison with previous 2 years below:

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 (Q1+Q2+Q3)
No. CPP started	197	178	116
Previous CPP within 2 years	17	21	14
% of children starting a CPP who had previous one in the last 2 years	8.6%	11.8%	12.9%
Previous CPP ever	29	36	23
% of children starting a CPP who had previous one ever	14.7%	20.2%	19.8%

Benchmarking Repeat Child Protection Plans 2019-20

	England	SE
% of children starting a CPP who had previous one ever (national indicator)	21.9%	23.4%

Background and context to this indicator

The Child Protection plan sets out the work with the network with the aim of building safety around the child that will sustain over time. In Wokingham we work within the Signs of Safety Practice Framework identifying and working with the child's network to build safety plans.

However, family life can change dramatically over time whether that is through ill health, changes to employment status, separation/divorce/bereavement, new relationships and/ or the birth of additional children. This means that safety plans need to adapt and change over time and such changes can undermine the support network and safety plan. In some situations, families can be progressing well, but a new concern arises which may place the children at risk again.

In families where Domestic Abuse is a feature, we know that for some victims it can take numerous attempts before they are able to achieve a permanent separation and that both victims and perpetrators are vulnerable to having abusive relationships in the future. As children get older, safety plans may need to adapt in line with their age and stage of development and the impact /manifestation of signs of neglect is different for different age groups. Coupled with this the impact of neglect is cumulative and signs may not be apparent until children reach a particular age or stage of development.

Eight of the children who had a protection plan between April and September 2020 had previously been subject to a Protection plan. All eight were subject to a Protection plan under the category of neglect and all involved complex issues, such as domestic abuse, parents reconciling, partners returning to household leading to an increase of risk or changes of circumstances and new concerns emerging such as mental health issues, new relationships and pregnancy in cases where there are existing risks identified.

The changing picture for children as they grow can lead to children needing state intervention at different stages of their childhood and can result in them becoming subject to a Protection plan for a second or subsequent time. State intervention might lead to a short term piece of work to adapt and adjust the safety plan to meet the current level of risk/need but in some circumstances may lead to a more significant intervention and the need for the Local Authority to impose a plan to meet the child's need.

What do we do to prevent children coming back into the child protection system:

It is expected that if children become subject to Protection plans, they would normally remain within the Child Protection process for at least 6 months and when the Protection plan ceases the children will continue to have an allocated Social Worker and step down to a Child in Need plan for an agreed period of time in order to continue to provide support and monitor the plan being sustained over time. When the child in need plan ends there would also be some consideration about which agencies and family networks can support them when social care exit close the case.

The Quality Assurance and operational teams work closely together to identify children who may be coming back into the child protection system. The Safeguarding Service Manager is notified of children referred for a child protection conference who have been subject to a protection plan previously. This is done on a monthly basis in order to avoid drift or delay in achieving safety and permanency for those children. The children are reviewed and monitored as part of the legal and permanency tracking processes so that consideration can be given as to whether legal intervention should take place alongside the Protection plan.

This is where the LA set out what needs to change in order to avoid making an application to the court (known as issuing care proceedings). This process is called the pre-proceedings process and means that the parents get independent legal advice. It is important that any legal intervention is timely preventing delay for children in achieving stability, safety and permanency.

In summary, Childrens Services monitor the number of children becoming subject to a protection plan on a monthly basis and there is a specific indicator for the numbers becoming subject to a Protection plan for a second or subsequent time. This number fluctuates and can be influenced by a number of factors. Benchmarking against other Local Authorities and our statistical neighbours is an important component in assessing where we are. Despite “in year” peaks, Wokingham Borough Council remains below the average of statistical neighbours (communities that are similar). We collect information about children becoming subject to Child Protection plans either in the previous 2 years and ever in their lifetime in order to test the impact of recent interventions and decision making, to give an idea of how practice is improving or otherwise.

Staff receive support and training from the Signs of Safety team in order to develop their skills and knowledge in working with networks to build robust safety plans. The quality of safety plans is tested through the independent reviewing service and the Quality Assurance Safeguarding Team as part of the audit programme. This informs the staff training programme.

While it is not always possible or indeed in a child’s best interests to prevent them from becoming subject to a Protection plan for a second or subsequent time there are robust processes in place for monitoring and reviewing those plans in order to check that the right services and level of intervention are provided at the right time for the right children.

Our step down processes ensure that while the Protection plan might cease agencies that continue to support the family under Child in Need, Early Help or as part of the universal offer are fully aware of the child’s journey and their needs in this regard.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

List of Background Papers
N/A

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