

12 December 2017		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
A Sustainable Children's Social Care System for the Future: Annual Public Health Report 2017		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Tim Elwell-Sutton, Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health		
Accountable Assistant Director: Tim Elwell-Sutton, Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake, Director of Public Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

It is the statutory duty of the Director of Public Health to prepare an independent report on the health and wellbeing of the local population each year. Last year's Annual Public Report focussed on the sustainability of the adult health and social care system in Thurrock. This year, the report considers how to create a sustainable children's social care system for the future.

The report analyses the reasons for growing pressure on the system, produces new forecasts for future demand, and makes a series of specific recommendations for making the system more sustainable. In particular it sets out the need for a radical shift of focus towards services which reduce demand and prevent children from becoming looked after. This work is already underway but will need to be continued over the long term.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the contents and recommendations of the report be noted by the Committee.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 One of the main goals of Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to make Thurrock a place offering "Opportunity for All". Central to this goal is making Thurrock a place where children can flourish and achieve their full potential in life.

- 2.2 It is increasingly understood that poor experiences in childhood can create intergenerational cycles of deprivation and poor health. People who have multiple adverse childhood experiences are also more likely to make poor educational progress, have unplanned pregnancies and be unemployed. This in turn can have a negative impact on their parenting ability, perpetuating the cycle across generations.
- 2.3 Pressures on social workers and the whole social care system are growing each year. There is evidence that a growing number of families and children are coming into contact with the social care system. The reasons for this have not been well understood but the pressures on the social care system are clear: social workers are increasingly over-burdened and the cost to the council is growing.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 These are set out in detail in the report itself.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 This report fulfils a statutory duty of the Director of Public Health (Health and Social Care Act 2012). The specific recommendations contained in the report arise from a detailed analysis of local and national data, as well as a thorough review of evidence about what works in children's social care.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 A wide range of stakeholders were consulted and contributed to this report. These are set out in the acknowledgements section of the report. No other consultation has taken place.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The report makes the case for a significant shift in investment within Children's Services towards services which reduce the number of children who require social care intervention. This is an important strategic shift which has already begun. The analysis presented in the report suggests that unless this is continued, spending in the high-cost part of the system (Looked After Children) is likely to grow rapidly and become increasingly unsustainable.
- 6.2 The result of following the recommendations would be a gradual easing of pressure on the children's social care system, with fewer children becoming looked after.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Management Accountant

The report looks at potential future demand for children's social care. Future forecasting suggests that there is a risk of the costs of Looked After Children increasing by up to £6m per year by 2027 unless action is taken to manage effectively. The report also outlines a number of opportunities to manage demand and recommends a strategic shift in investment towards preventative services. The report makes a number of specific recommendations about invest-to-save opportunities in this area. For example, a new edge of care service which prevents 22 children from entering care each year could save the council £1.2m per year though this is an estimate only and would need to be quantified in more detail before an investment decision is made. Specific investment decisions arising from the recommendations in this report would be subject to the approval of detailed business cases for individual services and these would be approved through the normal governance processes.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor for Children's Safeguarding

There are no legal implications. This report has been prepared in accordance with the statutory duties of the Director of Public Health.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities

The report outlines evidence that ethnic minority families are over-represented in the children's social care system. The recommendations made in this report would reduce or prevent the escalation of social care cases and help to address this imbalance.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Detailed references are given in the main report.

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Annual Public Health Report 2017: Executive Summary
- Appendix 2 – Annual Public Health Report 2017: Full Report

Report Author:

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Public Health