

31 January 2018		ITEM: 12
Council		
A Sustainable Children's Social Care System for the Future: Annual Public Health Report 2017		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Ian Wake, Director of 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. As part of creating a sustainable children's social care system, Public Health has been working with the wider Children Services to influence a range of its activities which is evident by this report as well as its service transformation work within Brighter Futures.

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.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the contents and recommendations of the report be noted by Cabinet.**
- 1.2 That Cabinet approve to hold a Mental Health summit to address emotional and mental health issues which contribute to the wider health and wellbeing issues amongst young people.**

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.
- 2.4 Furthermore, it is clearly evidence those children who have access to the social care system face increasing mental health and wellbeing need. The 2016/17 Brighter Futures Survey highlighted issues such as bullying, stress and online safety as major areas of concern for Children and Young People. These issues also contribute to the wider health and wellbeing issues currently faced by young people more so by children in care.
- 2.5 It is proposed that a high-profile Mental Health summit is held, led by the Portfolio Holder for Health, bringing together representatives of key stakeholders including: children and young people's representatives; schools and the wider educational settings; service providers; the CCG; voluntary sector, council officials and elected members. This summit will be an opportunity to showcase to partners a new joined-up approach to addressing Children and Young People's mental health and wellbeing and its contributory factors in Thurrock.

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 strategic shift in investment within Children's Services towards services which reduce the number of children who require social care intervention. The analysis presented in the report suggests that unless this is made, there is a risk that spending in the high-cost part of the system (Looked After Children) will 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 Children's and Adults'
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**
Strategic Lead: 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:

Tim Elwell-Sutton
Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health
Public Health