

Item No. 11.	Classification: Open	Date: 21 February 2012	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Looked After Children and Offending	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. Corporate Parenting Committee notes the report which outlines service provision for Looked After Children who enter the care system as a result of offending behaviour.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. As at 31 March 2011 there were 522 children in care to the London Borough of Southwark.
3. There are several reasons in which young people can become known to both Youth Offending and Children Looked After (CLA) services including:
 - a. Magistrate courts will elect to remand a child into care prior to trial or sentencing if they feel a young person has a chaotic or inappropriate home environment which might lead to them not being sufficiently cared for in the community.
 - b. Young people who are already looked after engage in criminal activity
 - c. Young people who are taken into care on a voluntary basis under section 20 arrangements. Offending behaviour can sometimes be a catalyst and a feature for staying at home no longer being possible.
4. Each year Southwark is required to report to the Department of Education relating to youth offending patterns of looked after children who have been in care for twelve months or more. 53% (118) of young people on a statutory order in 2011 were recorded as having been in care at some point, 90 (41%) were currently in care.¹
5. In February 2011 Southwark had its OFSTED unannounced inspection of contact referral and assessment. This unannounced inspection included the initial response provided for remands into care through the criminal justice system and how safeguarding issues are integrated into all assessment activity.
6. The result of the unannounced Ofsted inspection was extremely favourable identifying Southwark's referral and assessment services as "good" with no priority action.
7. There has been several policy changes within the Youth Justice System and

¹ This figure includes the total number of young people known to the YOS who's legal status is 'looked after' and doesn't differentiate between young people looked after by Southwark or out of borough

Looked After Children regulations which impact on how we deliver services to those children who are looked after and known to the Youth Offending Service. Amendments include changes to the CLA Legal Framework around Care Planning, Placement & Case Review regulations, (CA89 Vol.2) and legislation around visits in custody for former LAC regulations and guidance. Updated National Minimum Standards have also been made.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

8. Partnership working between the CLA service and Youth Offending Service has significantly improved over the last three years. The development of the joint planning process and protocol whereby managers from either service can convene a strategy meeting if they are concerned about the planning or crime prevention arrangements for any child in care is improving the effectiveness of both services and improving outcomes for the young person. This arrangement enables early recognition and intervention plans to be set in motion to avoid subsequent escalation and involvement of the risk management board.
9. Moreover, in order to gain an enhanced understanding of CLA issues and strengthen joint working a CLA team manager has been seconded into the Youth Offending Service since September 2011. The impact of this has been promising and joint working has continually improved over the last 12 months.
10. Protocols between the YOT and Children's Services was revised and implemented in September 2010. The protocol was updated in December 2011 following amendments to national legislation and local restructure. This includes an update of the protocol for joint planning and assessment between CLA and YOS for young people known to both services.
11. Evidence shows almost all of the initial assessments had been informed by contact with, or previous assessments from, children's social care. Copies of other relevant plans, e.g. care plans, are on file in 82% of the relevant cases.
12. Further work is underway to develop policy around the new regulations for young people to be remanded into care and to understand what the impact will be on the cost of this being transferred to the LA following the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment Bill currently being presented for debate before Parliament.
13. The Youth Offending Protocol outlines the following strategies for Southwark's children:
 - a. Youth Crime prevention
 - b. Work with children aged 13-18 years
 - c. Young people aged 14-17 at risk of offending or anti social behaviour
 - d. Pre court services for young offenders age 10-17
 - e. Young people appearing in court are made subject to court ordered interventions
 - f. Joint procedures relating to young offenders sentenced to custody
 - g. Protocols for looked after children
 - h. Management of Southwark looked after children placed outside the borough.
14. In addition to the agreed protocols there are a number of targeted partnerships between CLA Services and Youth Offending Services to provide a range of

preventative and intervention services for children in Southwark's care. These being:

Screening Tool for CLA 13+

The introduction, in October 2011, of a new screening tool for CLA 13 years and over is providing a more targeted, responsive service ensuring early signs of risks are identified and addressed. This includes assessing risks and interventions for substance misuse and youth offending which have an impact on a young person's safety. The information is also used to inform plans for looked after children which has considerably improved outcomes across the board. Enhanced monitoring for those identified as potentially at risk has been introduced as part of the Risk Management Panel responsibility and overseen at a service level by the Adolescence and After Care team manager.

Risk Management Panel

Southwark's youth offending service has a risk management panel attended by all Southwark's services involved with young people including the police. This panel identifies the most prolific youth offenders in Southwark or those presenting the most concern. The CLA Service is fully represented on the panel to ensure a fully integrated care planning approach where a looked after child might meet the panel's thresholds. This enables additional resources to be targeted in a coordinated way to identify looked after children to break the cycle of offending behavior and assist their re-engagement with core services. In addition Risk Management Panel also track high risk young people to ensure services are aware of change in circumstances and able to appropriately intervene at the earliest possible stage. A review of cases that have gone to Risk Management Panel show examples of these being helpful in bringing together a range of staff to address the assessment and planning for Risk of Harm issues.

Resource Panel

Introduced in July 2010 a newly established resource panel has been developed in Children's Specialist Services to manage the threshold for children entering the care system. The resource panel is chaired by the Head of Assessment and Safeguarding Service who has additional budgets and partnerships to target considerable family support resources where a child is at risk of entering the care system.

Initial evaluation of Resource Panel shows that the panel has the capacity to develop into an effective meeting to establish expertise about service delivery to prevent the need for young people to become looked after. Most cases were appropriately referred and most of these cases were referred in a timely fashion. However, there were some exceptions to this. The panel was able to assist in the deployment of resources including FGCs, ACT, Keyworking, YOS and TYS support.

Research

In September 2010 Southwark was one of four authorities in England which undertook research, in partnership with University of East Anglia, relating to offending patterns and looked after children. The report findings, published in September 2011, showed:

- that multiple risk factors at the individual, family, peer and community level interact and contribute to the risk of offending by young people in general and offending by looked after children in particular

- there are turning points which are developmentally and socially significant and affect the likelihood of children being taken into care, thriving in care and taking non-offending pathways.
- Interventions at all of these turning points and by a range of agencies can make a difference. Although early developmental harm is associated with poor outcomes, most areas of development can be subject to positive change if elements of the environment – which includes parents, families, schools, peer groups – change for the better.
- reliable and trusting relationships for young people in care is essential – not only in strong and supportive foster families but also in residential care and with a range of professionals, especially YOT workers and social workers / key workers involved in supporting young people through moves to semi-independence.

Discharge from Youth Offending Institutions

Since the introduction of the new protocol the CLA service has not had a single occasion where a YOI Governor has had to express any concern relating to a discharge plan. The CLA service provided briefings for its Adolescent and Aftercare Service to ensure a greater understanding of statutory requirements and the need to deliver a discharge plan (including accommodation, support, education, finance and supervision) in a timely way.

Offending Rates for Looked After Children in long term care

Offending by children who had been looked after continuously for 12 months as at end March 2011 and were aged over 10 years. Southwark ranks 7th out of 26 London boroughs. However, it is important to note that cohorts are very small, boroughs with very low numbers are not included in the analysis.

Drop In Service

In January 2010 the Adolescent and Aftercare Service introduced a “drop in service” at the Youth Offending Service headquarters. The drop in service has been previously reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee as a key initiative to maintain contact with the most difficult to engage children from the age of 16-18 and care leavers aged 18-21. Whilst the drop in addresses issues relating to young people not in employment education and training, it also fulfils a key safeguarding issue. There is a link between looked after children (aged 16-18) who are not in employment, education and training and raised vulnerability to becoming involved in offending behaviour and gang related activity. Whilst attending young people can access advice from specialist nurses, employment advice, substance misuse teams, connexions and other support services (i.e. dental sessions). The drop in service is well supported by youth work services (TYS) who provide 15 hours senior youth work support a week.

15. Southwark’s strategy for substance misuse has commissioned “Insight” to target interventions for the most vulnerable groups. Children in care and young people known to the Youth Offending Service have been identified as a key group. This contract arrangement began in September 2010 with both Services being able to make direct referrals to Insight. In response, Insight places one of their team each week at the drop in to improve early referral and intervention arrangements (linkage between youth crime and substance misuse).

16. There are a number of young people being remanded into the care system due to gang related activity who cannot return home for a range of reasons. The looked after care service is not designed as a public protection system and we are therefore reviewing the system to better manage young people coming into care with significant gang related behavioural issues who either do not wish to be in care or are literally in fear for their lives. The impact of gang related activity is a council wide challenge and a significant amount of work is taking place locally under the leadership of the Safer Southwark Partnership.

Specialist Fostering Arrangements

In partnership with Southwark's commissioning service the CLA Service have commissioned specialist foster placements from the private and voluntary sector who are able to support and manage children in care with significant offending behaviours. In partnership with the Youth Offending Service a targeted carer specification was identified as part of the tender documentation. In January 2011, six independent fostering providers were approved to provide this service and the arrangements came into effect in March 2011. This has enabled the CLA service to consider placing children in care with offending behaviours in a family setting rather than in residential care.

Through the commissioning cycle, overseen by the CLA Strategic Commissioning Board, work is underway to review the impact of the current specification and further strengthen this for remand fostering facilities.

Policy implications

17. There are no policy implications as this report is a briefing relating to current legal framework and service delivery.

Community impact statement

18. The Children Looked After services works to promote all five of The Every Child Matters outcomes for children in care. It is recognised that placement stability, engagement in education, access to leisure activities and healthy lifestyles all help to build resilience in young people to avoid offending behaviour.
19. The Youth Offending Service and Looked After Children Service recognise that offending is a significant concern for the community and is subject to intense scrutiny, especially since the riots in August. The leadership for addressing youth crime issues in Southwark is lead by the Safer Southwark Partnership who deliver a range of specialist services and staff to provide targeted interventions for named children (team around the child approach).

Resource implications

19. The Children Looked After and Youth Offending Services are statutory agencies which are supported through core and central government grants. It is recognised that during the 2011/12 financial year the grant provision for the Youth Offending Service has been significantly reduced.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Previous corporate parenting committee agenda papers and key statistics for CLA	160 Tooley Street SE1 2TN	Jodie Harris, Strategy, Planning and Performance 020 7525 3967

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services	
Report Author	Jodie Harris, Principal Strategy Officer	
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Finance Director	No	No
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