

**AGENDA ITEM: 8**

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Meeting	Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	10 October 2011
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Understanding and addressing the rise in the number of repeat child protection plan cases</b>
Report of	Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Families
Summary	This report outlines our performance against the indicator Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time and benchmarks our performance against neighbouring boroughs and national averages. It discusses the possible reasons for the decline in performance during 2010/11, the actions taken to address this, and the additional research required to better understand the issue and improve performance.

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Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards affected	All
Enclosures	None
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not applicable
Key decision	No

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## **1. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 That Members note and comment on performance and the actions in place to further improve it.**

## **2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS**

- 2.1 Budget and Performance OSC, 21 June 2011 Decision 6, Corporate Performance Results for Quarter 4 and year end 2010/201.

## **3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan 2011/2013 contains the strategic objective 'Continue to safeguard vulnerable children and adults from avoidable harm at a time of reduced resources'. This is highlighted within the Children's Service Plan 2011/12, which also includes the objective to 'identify and protect those most at risk of harm'. Understanding the pattern of repeat child protection plan cases will help to support these priorities.

## **4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

- 4.1 If any potential issues regarding child protection planning are not identified and addressed there is a risk that outcomes for vulnerable children and young people could decline. Since the report on children subject to a Child Protection plan for a second or subsequent time was requested, there has been an upturn in performance. Performance will continue to be closely monitored so that any fluctuations are identified and can be investigated as appropriate.

## **5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 5.1 Children subject to a child protection plan are a vulnerable group and it is important to analyse outcomes for these children and young people, including whether they become subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time.
- 5.2 Males are more likely to be subject to a child protection plan than females and older children are also overrepresented in the cohort. As at March 2011 59% of the 201 children subject to a Child Protection Plan were male and 70% of the children were aged ten or over.

## **6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 6.1 The current Family Intervention Project, audits, and protection panel outlined in 9.12 to 9.14 can be contained within existing resources. Ongoing monitoring of performance can also be carried out using existing staff. However, though there is an increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan (see paragraph 9.10), current budget monitoring indicates that services for children in need will be delivered within existing resources of £4,200,000. The Children's Social Care budget is £27,300,000.

## **7. LEGAL ISSUES**

- 7.1 Local authorities are required to exercise all the duties and functions of the Authority under Parts IV and V of the Children Act 1989, sections 31-52 (including section 47 –

local authority's duty to investigate) and all other enabling powers with regard to the care, supervision and protection of children and young people.

## **8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS**

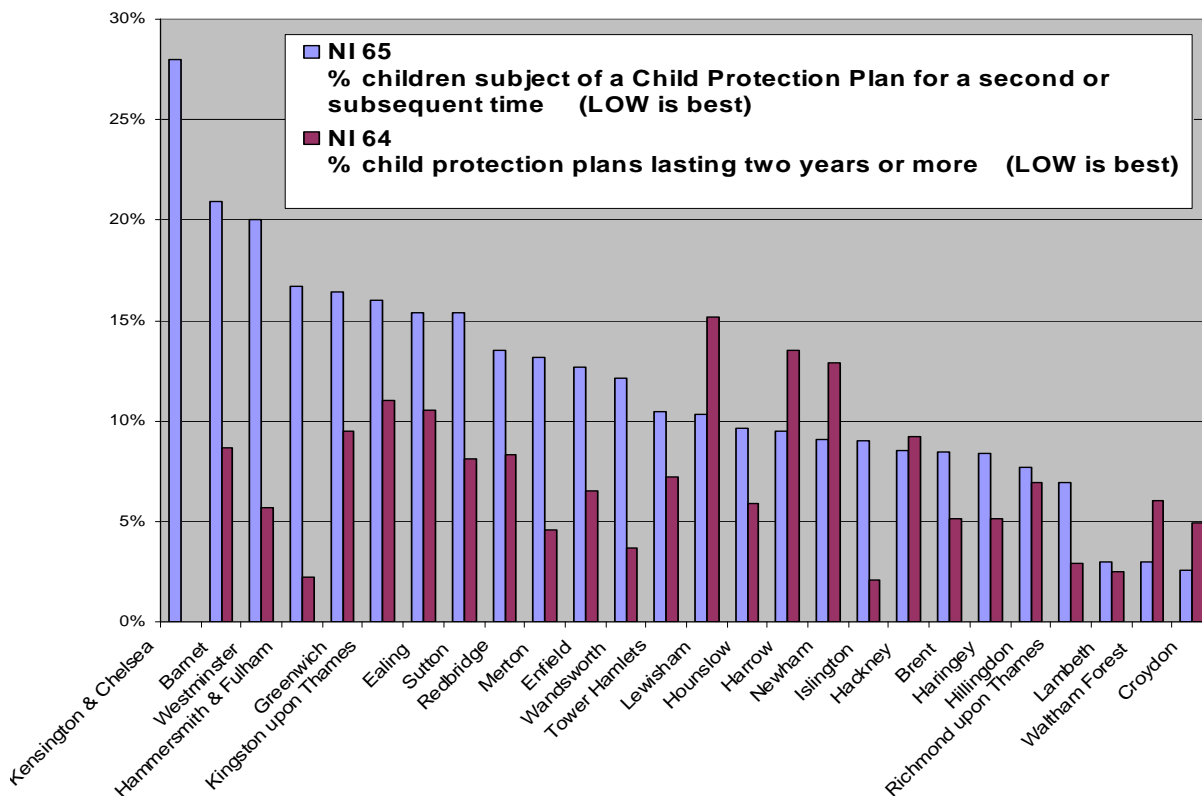
- 8.1 The scope of Scrutiny Committees is contained within Part 2, Article 6 of the constitution; the Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny Committees are in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4 of the constitution).

## **9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

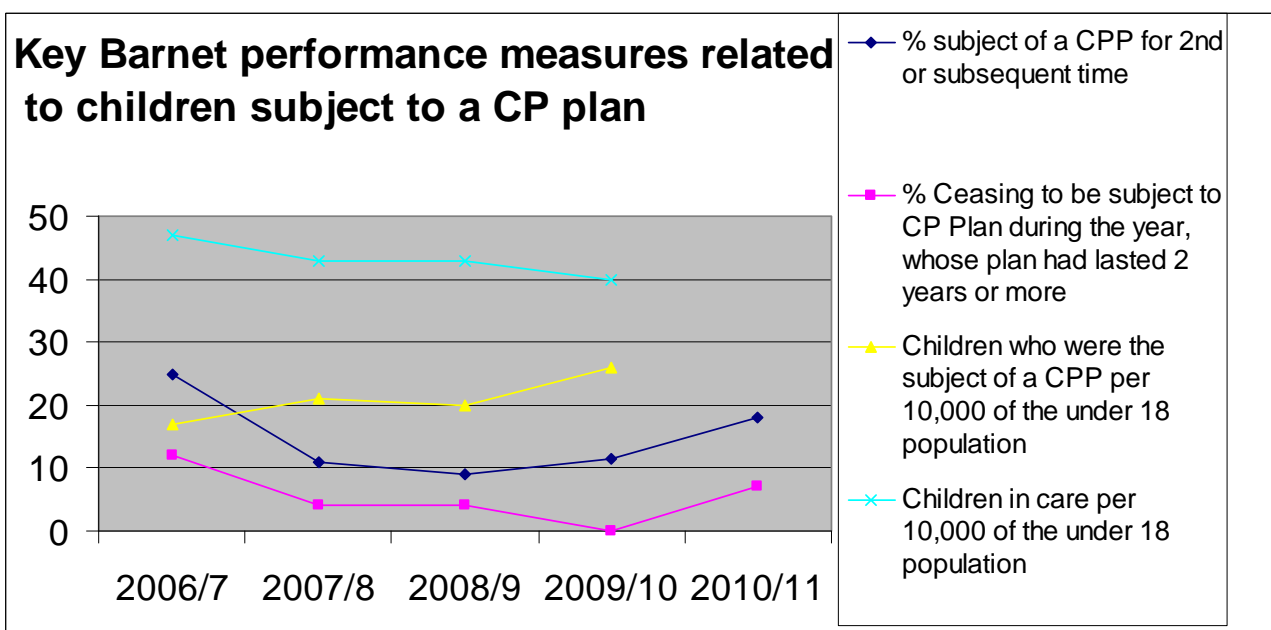
- 9.1 When social workers and workers from agencies such as health, police, and education establishments are concerned that a child is likely to or is suffering significant harm, then a children protection conference is usually called. The child protection conference discusses and analyses information about the child's safety and developmental needs and the parent's or carers capacity to ensure the child is safe and protected from harm both in the present and in the future.
- 9.2 The child protection conference can decide to make the child subject to a child protection plan where actions to safeguard and promote the child's well being are set out. Parents, carers and where appropriate children and young people attend the child protection conference.
- 9.3 The decision as to whether a child should continue to be subject to a child protection plan is reviewed three months after the initial child protection conference, and then at six monthly-intervals. The decision to discontinue the child protection plan is based on a judgement that the child is no longer at risk of significant harm and no longer needs safeguarding by means of a child protection plan.
- 9.4 Performance in the management of children protection is directly measured by the following indicators:
- the percentage of children subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time, where low is good
  - the percentage of children ceasing to be subject to a child protection plan during the year, whose plan had lasted 2 years or more, where low is good
  - the percentage of child protection cases which were reviewed within required timescales, where high is good
- 9.5 The first two indicators are in obvious tension with each other. It should also be noted that children are counted as being subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time regardless of how long ago they became subject to a first child protection plan. High levels of subsequent plans may suggest that the professionals responsible for the child's welfare are not intervening effectively either to bring about lasting change or to make alternative plans for the child's long term care.

### **Performance analysis**

- 9.6 At March 2011 the percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time was 18%. The percentages between April and August 2011 have ranged between 9% and 13.6%. This is much improved performance than that at December 2010 when performance was at 20.9%
- 9.7 The chart below shows performance against two of the performance indicators across all London boroughs for whom data is available at the end of December 2010. It



9.8 Closer examination of social care in Croydon, Lambeth and Waltham Forest shows that although they are performing well on both measures in the chart above, they have a larger number of children in care per 10,000 of the population than Barnet – 126 (Croydon), 105 (Lambeth), and 63 (Waltham Forest) compared with 40 in Barnet. Though there is no direct link between numbers of children subject to plans and looked after, one possible interpretation is that Barnet may be choosing to work with children and families in the community rather than placing them in care. This hypothesis is discounted because numbers of children in care to Barnet have not increased following the reduction in numbers of children subject to a second or subsequent plan.



9.9 In the past three years, the percentage of children subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time has been lower than the England average and generally in line with statistical neighbours. 2010/11's outturn of 18%, an increase on last year's outturn of 11.6%, gave rise to concerns. Current performance is at 13.6% and is similar to past trends. It must be noted that both indicators are subject to fluctuations, due to the small cohort of children involved, and changes in performance may not be statistically significant.

#### **Possible reasons for previous performance**

9.10 The reasons for the decline in performance during 2010/11 are not immediately evident, in part because, the decision to make a child subject to a child protection plan is complicated and unique to the individual child. A second or subsequent child protection plan is not necessarily wrong because it may reflect a new risk of significant harm to a child that had not existed previously. What is important is that high and low performance is monitored to ensure that all issues that could be impacting the safeguarding and protection of children are explored and addressed appropriately.

9.11 Outside of a detailed audit of each case over the past two years, two likely reasons for the change in performance are explored below. They are the increase in social care activity and neglect in families.

#### 9.12 Increase in social care activity

The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan in Barnet have risen from 145 in 2006/07 to 241 in 2009/10. For August 2011 the number was 289. The increase in volume does not give an obvious answer as to Barnet's performance on children subject to a second or subsequent plan because this performance indicator is worked out as a percentage of the number of children subject to a child protection plan. Reasons for fluctuations in numbers of children subject to children protection plans are complicated and difficult to clearly evidence, for example, there was an increase following the aftermath of the death of Baby Peter Connolly. The hypothesis being that nationally there was an impact on professional judgement and practice with professionals being more risk adverse.

#### 9.13 Neglect and changes in the level of harm posed to individual children

Analysis of the children subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time has found that, during 2010/11, 34 children became subject to a plan for a second time and only 3 were subject to a third plan. It must be noted that second and subsequent plans are included in the indicator regardless of how long ago the first plan was. Of the 34 children, 26 were subject to a child protection plan as a result of neglect as opposed to other types of abuse.

In some complex families, patterns of neglect tend to oscillate and thereby fall above and below the threshold of significant harm. Hence there may be periods of neglect followed by periods of evidenced improvement in outcomes for the child. During these periods, professionals would be correct to conclude that significant harm is no longer present and with the right level of ongoing support, predict continued stability for the child.

An audit of neglect cases in 2007 showed that none of the professional judgements made to cease the child protection plan put the children at significant risk of harm.

#### **Actions to improve performance**

The following actions are in place to monitor and improve performance.

- 9.14 Strengthening support when children cease to be subject of a child protection plan  
Expanding the Family Intervention Project will increase multi-agency support for children who may become subject to a child protection plan or have previously been. This will provide support for families and children living together in the community and should work to reduce the likelihood of a second or subsequent plan.
- 9.15 Munro-style audits of children subject of a child protection for a second or subsequent time  
Professor Eileen Munro has undertaken a national review of child protection and has recommended changes to the method of audits and case reviews. Barnet has already started to carry out Munro-style audits in order to draw out organisational issues, local issues and other key themes to improve practice. Peer-reviewed audits will be carried out on a number of cases in which children have been subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time where the levels of harm have been highest. Findings from the audit will be discussed with social workers, managers and other relevant professionals to improve practice.
- 9.16 Protection panel  
A newly developed Protection Panel meets on a monthly basis to examine in detail the findings around the case audits and make recommendations both in terms of the individual child and thematic organisational issues that may be emerging. Organisational issues will be reported to the Children's Service Senior Leadership Team.
- 9.17 Findings from the audits that help clarify the reasons behind the recent decline in performance on children subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time, and the actions that are being taken in response to this, will be reported to the Corporate Directors Group in six month's time.

## **10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 The Statement of Purpose of the Protection Panel can be viewed by request by contacting Ann Graham on 020 8359 7534.

LS: MM  
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