

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Safeguarding Sub Committee	19/09/2018
<b>Subject:</b> Action for Children Annual Survey 2018	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Pat Dixon, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager, Department of Community and Children's Services	

### Summary

Between February and March 2018, Action for Children carried out the annual service user survey with children and families supported by the City of London's Children and Families Team. This survey included families open to early help, children assessed as being in need, children subject to a child protection plan, children looked after by the City of London, and care leavers. The survey sought to establish the views from children of varying age ranges, so questionnaires and methodologies were adapted to suit the needs of the children.

Overall the feedback from the survey was positive, especially about the relationships between young people and their social workers. This was particularly evident in looked-after children and care leavers. Children and young people felt safe and there was positive feedback about the Children in Care Council (CiCC). Three young people who were looked after by the City raised concerns that there were not enough laptops for educational use. This issue has been resolved and young people who need one have been allocated a laptop.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. Action for Children were asked to conduct a survey with children and families open to the City of London's Children and Families team, who were receiving support from early help, children in need, child protection, looked-after children and care leavers. The survey started in February 2018 and was completed by the end of March 2018. It used various methodologies to collate information, including phone interviews, postal questionnaires and the SurveyMonkey online tool. A total of 63 children and young people were eligible for the survey. The total number of responses received was 37, making for a 58.7% response rate (compared with 68% in 2016 and 48.6% in 2015).
2. The questionnaires were developed in conjunction with the City of London. The questions were tailored to the areas of intervention covered in the area. The main focus of the survey was to establish the experience of children and families in their journey through the Children and Families Team. The survey was separated into the different service areas covered by the City. This allowed the survey's report to look at the different experience of children and families depending on their reason for being involved with the Children and Families Team. Overall the survey presents positive feedback regarding the experience of children and families.

### **Current Position**

#### **Survey Outcome: Children in Need and Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan**

3. The report identified that children and families from this cohort have repeatedly proven to be the hardest group to engage in the survey. This year has proved exceptionally difficult. Out of the 18 children in need cases listed, five were under 5 years old, so were unable to complete questionnaires; three were older than 5 years of age and did complete the questionnaires; parents of eight children opted to answer a shortened survey. This gave a total of 11 surveys completed out of a possible 18, which was 61% of service users.
4. Although most of the families expressed the opinion that they had a good relationship with the social worker, half of the parents in the survey qualified this view with expressions of frustration about how effective the actual support was. Five parents stated that they needed urgent support with re-housing. Their main preoccupations were with problems around overcrowding, poor health, financial worries and being out of work. In terms of effecting change, this sub-group felt that social workers were powerless to provide the specific support they were looking for.
5. Overall, 75% of respondents commented that they got 'a lot' or 'some' support from their social workers. Parents appreciated their social worker's input with

things like 'getting things for the children', general advice (for example, child's school), help with completing a housing application, and someone to turn to when faced with a problem.

### **Children Looked After**

6. There were 11 responses in total (73.3% of the total compared with 72% in 2016). As in previous years, this category of young people expressed very high satisfaction levels with almost all aspects of their care. They found their social worker easy to talk to and appeared to feel well supported. They gave concrete examples of feeling listened to and generally having their needs met. For many, their social worker seems to be the 'go to' person with any concerns or problems.
7. The majority feel their educational needs are fully or mostly being met. However, not having laptops was one issue that was raised by three respondents. This has now been addressed by the Virtual School Headteacher, and young people who need laptops for their education are being provided with them. Young people know about the CiCC and value the social network and support offers. They also have a good awareness of the complaints procedure and how to access advocacy and, to a slightly lesser extent than in previous years, their Independent Reviewing Officer.
8. Compared with last year, there was an improvement in the safeguarding section – in the general sense of safety expressed, and in terms of finding support if harmed or bullied. Reassuringly, all respondents felt that they had at least one person they could turn to if such crises were to arise.

### **Care Leavers**

9. The response rate for this category was 52.9% (compared with 69% in 2016, although numerically the cohort was the same size). In terms of feedback, the responses were remarkably consistent. For example: 100% of the sample find it easy to contact their social worker and 77% find their social worker 'very easy to talk to' (identical to the 2016 survey results); 66.6% say they get 'a lot of help' from their social worker (compared with 88.8% in 2016); and in the narrative part of the survey, there was a great deal of appreciation for social workers who have given emotional and practical support (for example, as the main person to turn to if harmed or bullied, or as a source of health information). Two respondents commented on the vital – even life-saving – support they received at times of crises and in terms of not giving up (such as placement, college courses). Most respondents (88.8%) felt appropriately consulted and listened to and 100% were helped to understand their life story (compared with 33% in 2016).
10. One young person raised the issue of needing greater permanency with regards to accommodation. Another highlighted the difficulties in transitioning out of foster care, advising (with the benefit of hindsight), that all young people should be encouraged to remain in foster care for as long as possible.

11. More young people are currently in education or training than in 2016. A very high percentage rate it as 'very good' (88.8%, compared with 55.5% in 2016). All respondents (100%) said they knew how to contact the Virtual School Headteacher and singled her out for very high praise for her proactive, helpful approach. Several young people commented that they would like more opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships and most appeared focused and ambitious about their future careers.

## **Early Help**

12. This year families receiving Early Help were included in the survey for the first time. Feedback was received on behalf of six out of the 11 eligible children/young people. Parents were generally very open and positive about being interviewed. Their feedback was consistently positive. For example, all of them said that contact and communication with Support Workers was easy and they valued the support offered. Respondents gave many and varied examples of the kind of interventions they found helpful and were particularly complimentary about the interpersonal qualities of the staff they worked with. They also gave some helpful suggestions about service improvements (such as an updated resource list) and additional support needed (for example, occupation therapy and speech therapy).

## **Conclusion**

13. The survey overall has been very positive regarding the relationships between the social workers and the young people. Young people have indicated that they feel supported by their social workers and would turn to them if they were worried. This was a theme across all the services covered by the Children and Families Team. The 2016 survey showed that some young people felt unsafe. However, this year, 100% of feedback from young people said that they do feel safe.

14. The most positive feedback has come from looked-after children and care leavers. This was to be expected, as this group of young people have had time to develop close relationships with their social workers. The stability of the workforce in the Children and Families Team has also contributed to this positive feedback. Where concerns have been raised, there is evidence of significant effort being made to improve the situation for young people – such as providing laptops and working hard to support a young person who has not had leave to remain.

15. Action for Children used various methods to engage children and families in this survey. The slight fall in uptake may have been due to the proximity to another feedback request, which went out as part of the annual audits on all cases open to the Children and Families team in October 2017. The City of London aims to complete this survey on an annual basis.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Action for Children, Children and Young People supported by the City of London Annual Survey 2018

### **Pat Dixon**

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager  
Department of Community and Children's Services

T: 020 7332 1215

E: [pat.dixon@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:pat.dixon@cityoflondon.gov.uk)