

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

14 AUGUST 2017

UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and the Assistant Director Safeguarding Services (Children's Social Care) have been invited to the meeting to provide an update on the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Plan.

Background

2. On 24 January 2017, Ofsted published their report entitled 'Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board'.

3. The overall judgement for Worcestershire was 'inadequate'. This was a very disappointing judgement for Worcestershire's children and young people, as well as for the committed and hardworking staff within the service.

4. Following the Ofsted judgement, a Service Improvement Plan (SIP) has been developed to cover all of the recommendations made by Ofsted.

5. On 13 March 2017, the Director of Children, Families and Communities (DCS) provided an update to the Panel on peer learning gleaned from other Local Authorities in the development of the plan, outlined the governance arrangements for the SIP and reported an early progress update.

Key updates since last report to Children and Families O&S Panel

6. Since the last update to the Panel, there have been a number of notable meetings/events which have taken place that relate directly to the SIP.

7. On Thursday 30 March 2017, a small cohort of our Looked after Children and Care Leavers did a take-over of the Council's *Leadership Exchange* event, which brings together senior managers from across the Council on a quarterly basis to collaborate on key issues. The session focused on Corporate Parenting responsibilities and was planned and delivered by our Looked after Children and Care Leavers. It was an incredibly informative session, with the children and young people sharing their own stories to provide a very powerful and moving insight into their experiences in the social care system.

8. As a result of the session, a series of 'pledges' were identified to represent part of the Council officers' commitment to Corporate Parenting. These are owned by the

Wider Leadership Team, with support provided from across all Directorates within the Council. This represents the start of our journey to develop a culture that ensures children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. Progress will be reported to our children and young people on a regular basis. Appendix 1 outlines the Corporate Parenting pledge.

9. In the March report to the Panel, the DCS stated that the Local Authority was awaiting communication from the Department for Education (DfE), about the appointment of a person to assess the Local Authority's capacity and capability to deliver the improvements required to Children's Services.

10. In March, the DfE appointed Trevor Doughty (DCS at Cornwall Council) as the Children's Commissioner for Worcestershire. The Commissioner, supported by a team from Cornwall Council, led a review of Children's Services in Worcestershire with the following brief:

- To provide the Council with the opportunity to provide evidence that it has taken decisive action since the Ofsted inspection and is no longer failing to perform to an adequate standard in the delivery of its Children's Social Care functions
- To assess the Council's capacity and capability to improve itself – within a reasonable timeframe – and to sustain improvement long-term
- To advise the Minister on whether an alternative delivery and governance arrangement for children's social care, outside the operational control of the Council is required.

11. The review took place over 2 weeks at the end of March and beginning of April. Whilst the report was submitted to the DfE in accordance with the original timeline (9 June 2017), the General Election on 8 June 2017 impacted on Ministerial appointments nationally, and the report is yet to be published into the public domain. The report is expected to be published later this year. The DfE have extended the contract of Trevor Doughty as Children's Commissioner for Worcestershire, until 29 September 2017.

12. On 6 April 2017, Cabinet approved the Service Improvement Plan and delegated authority to the DCS in consultation with CMR: Children and Families to update the plan as appropriate.

13. Cabinet also reviewed and approved the following strategy documents to support the improvement activity:

- *Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy for Looked after Children and Care Leavers* which will ensure that we better understand, plan and meet future accommodation demand for Looked after Children and Care Leavers within Worcestershire;
- *Corporate Parenting Strategy* which sets out the Council's approach to delivering effective corporate parenting responsibilities across the whole Council and partner agencies to our Looked after Children and Care Leavers population; and
- *Care Leavers Strategy* which sets out the key responsibilities for the Council and our partners to ensure that our Care Leavers receive the

support, help and guidance they may need to be able to support themselves, as they transition into adulthood to live independently.

14. During April and June, a series of Partnership Locality Events were held across all six District areas within the county, led by the Assistant Director: Safeguarding Services. A range of partner agencies attended to receive an overview of the challenges faced in helping to safeguard and promoting the welfare of children and young people and messages were tailored to address local context. These events will be held on a quarterly basis in the future to enhance children's practitioner networks between partner agencies and improve the quality of professional conversations, and to share best practice. A key theme for the events held between April and June was to raise awareness and understanding around the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) thresholds guidance document around levels of need. Ofsted reported that understanding and consistency of application was a key issue for the Local Authority and partners as a result of the inspection in October/November 2016.

15. On 6 April 2017, Worcestershire formally submitted our Service Improvement Plan to Ofsted. Chris Sands, Senior Ofsted Inspector provided the following feedback on Worcestershire's Service Improvement Plan submission on 28 April 2017:

- Generally positive feedback – the plan sets out priorities clearly, and is congruent with *Putting Children First*
- Clearly states the importance of partners – strong governance
- All areas of the Ofsted report are covered through the eight-point plan
- Suggested areas to address include:
 - Need to be more specific about measures for improvement – the 'by when' factor
 - Hugely ambitious plan – which is much needed, but can it be achieved?

16. A revised plan was submitted to Ofsted on 5 May 2017 to address the feedback, and this was subsequently endorsed by Ofsted as acceptable.

17. Following the submission and subsequent acceptance of our Service Improvement Plan, Ofsted monitoring visits could be agreed. These will take place at a frequency of approximately every 3 months. Each visit will have a key theme, agreed in advance between Ofsted and the Local Authority.

18. Ofsted conducted their first monitoring visit on 23 and 24 May 2017, with the focus being the Family Front Door service. Jenny Turnross, HMI from Ofsted, who led the inspection in October/November 2016 led the first monitoring visit too. This has helped to ensure continuity from Ofsted, and should make it easier to assess and track our improvement, whilst also building on the relationships developed during the inspection last year.

19. Each visit is followed by a letter which outlines the outcome of the visit (there are no judgements made but instead a statement summarising direction of travel). The first letter is not published, however a brief summary is provided in the next section of this report.

Feedback from Ofsted Monitoring Visit – No.1

20. Unfortunately, the feedback reported from Ofsted in May was not as we would have liked. Despite Ofsted recognising some positives such as the political, corporate and leadership commitment to the improvement, most of the positives were qualified with a caveat. For example, Ofsted reported that social worker caseloads had reduced, but were still too high. Ofsted recognised that Community Social Workers were now better configured to support management of the demand at the Family Front Door, but there was still more that could be done.

21. Ofsted also recognised our acceptable and detailed improvement plan, which is targeted on outcomes but challenged whether the focus was too broad based at our current point in the improvement journey.

22. Ultimately, Ofsted deemed that the Local Authority is not yet making the expected progress to improve services for children and young people and cited that an absence of clear priorities was impeding our ability to make tangible and sustained change. Ofsted also reported that learning from audits was not being utilised to improve services and LSCB thresholds were still not understood and/or being applied consistently.

23. The next Ofsted monitoring visit (No. 2) is scheduled for 12/13 September 2017 and will again focus on the Family Front Door.

Service Improvement Board response

24. The Panel is asked to note that the Service Improvement Board (SIB) now includes representation from Health, Police and Education, with Business and VCS representation expected from August 2017.

25. This is in addition to the cross-political party representation, with Elected Members Pattie Hill (Labour), Fran Oborski (2017 Group and Chairman of Children and Families O&S Panel) and Jane Potter (Conservative and Vice Chairman of Children and Families O&S Panel) forming membership of the Board following local elections in May, along with Senior HMI Ofsted Inspector, Chris Sands.

26. Jenny Turnross, Ofsted, attended the Children's Social Care Service Improvement Board meeting on 28 June 2017 to outline key findings and discuss next steps.

27. As a result of this meeting, the Board directed that a revised set of priorities should be developed to address the Ofsted monitoring feedback. The SIB recognised that despite the eight point plan being comprehensive and detailed, there is a need to refine focus in order to enable tangible and sustained improvement to take place.

28. Appendix 2 provides the revised Improvement Plan which has been produced to focus on activity/improvements required between July and September 2017. It is important to note that this does not supersede the eight point plan, but instead places an intensive focus on the following priorities/activities already included:

- Family Front Door – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments
- Remodel the Early Help Offer

- Culture – Create a Child-focused and Accountable Culture
- Quality Assurance – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like

29. This revised plan incorporates feedback provided by Jenny Turnross, following her review of the plan, and at the SIB meeting on 26 July 2017, the Board endorsed the revised focus on these four key priorities ahead of September's Ofsted monitoring visit.

Update on Revised Priorities

30. Operational and business support resource has been reconfigured to support delivery of the revised SIP priorities. The following activity has been completed in July against the four revised priorities:

- **Family Front Door – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments**
 - Revised LSCB Levels of Need guidance document issued to all staff and partners via the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)
 - Family Front Door (FFD) pathway revised to better manage contacts and referrals – including role of the Community Social Work (CSW) team
 - Backlog of assessments being reduced through temporary additional capacity (Quality Assured Project (QAP) commissioned)
 - Online booking system now live for professionals to speak directly with CSWs and publicised via the LSCB
 - Meeting held with partners (Education, Health, Police, Social Care) at FFD to scope the development of MASH
 - FFD Diagnostic focussed on contact and referral, timeliness and quality of decision-making undertaken by Leeds City Council
- **Remodel the Early Help Offer**
 - Draft Early Help strategy, including Early Help Pathway, has been produced and circulated to LSCB for feedback and discussion at September board meeting
 - Revised Early Help Assessment, Action Plan and Closure Forms developed and uploaded to website in Microsoft Word format for ease of use by all partners
 - District events taking place with commissioned and partner agencies on Levels of Need Guidance and the Early Help Pathway
- **Culture - Create a Child-focused and Accountable Culture**
 - New social worker induction programme developed and approved
 - Developed a shared vision, mission and core values statement
 - Delivery of Social Work Conference session on 17 July (mandatory attendance for Social Work staff) - communicated key messages around vision, mission and core values
 - Weekly newsletter created as vehicle to deliver key messages
 - Cultural diagnostic programme scoping session held on 24 July with Directorate Leadership Team
- **Quality Assurance – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like**
 - Development of a new KPI report on key performance areas reported to DCS and Leadership Team on a weekly basis now live

- Audit programme refocused on Family Front Door, undertaking a number of thematic audits including:
 - repeat referrals in the last 12 months;
 - tracking level 3 cases from contact to provider;
 - assessments at the Family Front Door; and
 - s47s that end in closure

Next Steps

31. The following activity is planned during August against each of the four revised priority areas:

- **Family Front Door – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments**
 - LSCB Levels of Need guidance document refresher sessions continue to be run for all FFD staff
 - Complete the work to re-establish MASH arrangements at FFD with agreed multi-agency protocol
 - Impact of revised Levels of Need Guidance on volume and type of referral received at FFD to be assessed and reported to a future Service Improvement Board meeting
 - Continuous cycle of learning regarding threshold decision making via weekly communication, team meetings, audit and supervision
- **Remodel the Early Help Offer**
 - Revise Early Help practice standards and procedures – in progress
 - ‘Step Up – Step Down’ process between Social Care and Early Help revised and to be communicated and embedded. Audit cycle to monitor improvements.
- **Culture - Create a Child-focused and Accountable Culture**
 - Ofsted readiness sessions to be planned for staff ahead of Monitoring Visit
 - Social Work Conference session on 10 August (mandatory attendance for Social Work staff) – communicate key messages around vision, mission and core values
 - Cultural diagnostic programme commences with the aim of creating a high support / high challenge environment
- **Quality Assurance – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like**
 - Principal Social Worker to ensure Social Work Practice Standards are repackaged into a single set of procedures and re-launched
 - Continue audit programme focusing on FFD
 - Establish Early Help Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboard to enable effective monitoring of performance at LSCB level
 - Practice observations on visits to children undertaken by managers to create a baseline for individuals and the service, in terms of quality of practice
 - Messages from audits to be shared across whole workforce via a Principal Social Worker newsletter, which has a practice focus
 - Team Manager looped learning audit programme (designed by Essex County Council), to be delivered by WCC

Specific Information Requests from Elected Members

32. The following requests for information were made by Elected Members to be incorporated into this report:

- Social worker workloads (Councillor Dent)
- Numbers on a comparative basis for performance of agency staff, recruitment and retention, and caseloads (Councillor Banks)

33. Appendix 3 and Appendix 4 provide the requested information.

Purpose of the Meeting

34. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information in the report
- determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny, and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting pledge
- Appendix 2 – Service Improvement Plan revised priorities (July – Sept 2017)
- Appendix 3 – Social Work Caseload information
- Appendix 4 – Social Work Recruitment Summary

Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) the following background papers relate to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and background papers for the meetings of the Cabinet held on 2 February 2017 and 6 April 2017
- Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 13 March 2017