

CABINET
12 JULY 2018**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES IMPROVEMENT
PLAN**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mr A C Roberts

Relevant Officer

Director of Children, Families and Communities

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families recommends that Cabinet:

- a) **notes the progress on service improvement as described throughout paragraphs 3-7; and**
- b) **endorses the updated Service Improvement Plan set out at Appendix 1.**

Service Improvement

2. As reported previously, Worcestershire Children's Services was subject to a full Safeguarding Inspection in October 2016 and since that time has been subject to regular Monitoring Visits by Ofsted the purpose of which is to monitor the improvement progress. The dates and key headlines from the Ofsted inspection and visits are listed below:

- **October 2016:** Full Safeguarding Inspection of Children's Services. Ofsted judged that there were widespread and serious failures in the services provided to children in Worcestershire who need help and protection and children looked after
- **May 2017:** Monitoring Visit to Family Front Door. Ofsted concluded that the Improvement Plan is not yet resulting in progress in a number of key areas
- **September 2017:** Monitoring Visit to Family Front Door. Ofsted acknowledged the hard work that had gone on to improve services, with many actions quite recent or too new to have yet had a significant impact, but noted achievement of some tangible improvements.
- **January 2018:** Monitoring Visit to Family Front Door and Children in Care Proceedings. Ofsted acknowledged that whilst services still require much work to be of a good standard, progress has been made
- **April 2018:** Monitoring Visit to Through Care Service. Ofsted noted that the Local Authority is making progress in improving services to children and young people and that Corporate Parenting is now a strength

Progress update

3. Ofsted has commented positively upon the following areas:

- **Strategic Commitment, Investment and Leadership:** Ofsted noted the clear buy-in and investment from Elected Members and senior leaders with significant financial investment to enable implementation of change. Corporate Parenting arrangements are seen to be a strength. Elected Members and senior managers have done much to improve how they listen to children and take positive action as a result
- **Quality Assurance and Learning to understand the experience of our service users:** The development of an effective whole-system approach to quality assurance using a number of platforms for assessing user experience, including audit and telephone survey, which enables the Service and our senior leaders to better understand the views of children and families when shaping and developing improved services
- **Our quality of practice and child-centred approach:** There has been a positive shift in the morale and culture of the workforce, resulting in improved practice. Children's case files demonstrate that an **improved level of professional curiosity, including the identification and response to risk**, is more evident in social workers' practice. Ofsted found that the quality of support offered to children in care and care leavers has improved, including improvements in Outreach, partnership working with housing, Virtual Schools and Personal Education Plans
- **Performance Management:** Relevant performance management information is now readily available to assist staff and managers to understand their day-to-day work, supporting learning and a culture of improvement
- **Arrangements for managing the quality and timeliness of cases in pre and care proceedings:** A comprehensive system for managing work that is subject to the public law outline thereby reducing drift and delay in case progression at court is now in place
- **Staffing and Culture:** Inspectors have seen a positive shift in the morale and culture of the workforce. In their discussions with inspectors, Ofsted described social workers as calm, measured and focused. They described seeing Social workers as "growing in confidence, and this is starting to result in creative, thoughtful and resourceful work with children". Staff have also reported feeling secure and supported through change.

4. However, there remain areas for further progress and development where performance is not as good as they need to be. These are :

- **The quality and consistency of management oversight** and decision-making needs to be improved upon and Team Managers need to be driving improvement
- **Plans for children** need to be of a consistently high quality with strong analysis of risk, a child focus and with clear, measurable outcomes
- **Forward planning for young people leaving care** needs to be improved upon so that the transition to adulthood and independence is a positive experience for all care leavers
- **The number of changes of social worker experienced by some children and young people** remains high and not all social workers have experienced a reduction in caseload. Our recruitment and retention work remains a priority
- **Our audit processes have been compliance driven** - We are about to introduce a new moderated audit process which will include a second auditor to provide

objectivity and challenge and feedback from children and parents/carers about their experience of the service

5. Other areas of improvement are demonstrating a positive impact on key performance indicators

- The development of the Community Social Worker role to support schools and partners in identifying and managing risk has contributed towards a reduction in Referrals to the Family Front Door from approximately 1,000 per quarter to 770 per quarter which means children and families get a timely early help response where it is appropriate
- Fewer children have been received in to care, for quarter four in 2017/18. A total of 269 children were received into care which equates to 53 less entrants for the same time in 16/17. There will be continued focus on "Edge of Care" interventions to prevent family breakdown and permanency planning for those who cannot return home before it can be confidently said that all children in care need to be there. However the Council's Looked After Children rate remains higher than Statistical Neighbours and National data and there is a continued focus on ensuring permanency and long term care plans for those children and young people who have been in care for a number of years
- An increasing number of children are achieving permanency in a more timely way with 48% leaving care within 12 months of entering care in 17/18 compared to only 35% in 16/17
- 85% of social work assessments were completed on time (within 45 days) in Q4 2017/18, a significant improvement compared to 66% in Q1 of the same year
- Fewer children are subject to Child Protection Plans as positive action is being taken to place children in care where positive outcomes are not being achieved and cases have drifted. The rate now stands at 36 per 10,000 which is lower than Statistical Neighbours and National data.

Worcestershire's Improvement Partner - Essex

6. Work has continued with Essex County Council. An interim report February 2018 concluded:-

"Colleagues in Worcestershire are clear that they are on an improvement journey and have worked to enhance and promote the pace of change that is required.

Their new operating model is forward looking and innovative and structural changes are already taking place. The new model also addresses many of the issues identified by both Essex and by Ofsted in their monitoring visits

In our working relationship with Worcestershire we have found them to be very proactive and positive and diagnostic visits and deep dives have been well received by both senior managers and teams. Coupled with this it is good news that a marked improvements in pace and change have been noted in the last two monitoring visits from Ofsted in October 2017 and January 2018.

Having worked in collaboration with ECC managers during the diagnostic and deep dive visits, Worcestershire managers are now in a good position to adopt the team diagnostic model as part of their routine quality assurance and improvement processes in the future".

Service Improvement Plan for 2018/19

7. The Service Improvement Plan has been reviewed and updated using feedback from Ofsted, performance against key performance indicators and the work completed with Improvement Partner, Essex County Council. The focus for the next 12 months will be:

- Supporting and developing our workforce
- Promoting social care best practice
- Building our quality assurance processes
- Listening to the voice of the child
- Enhancing our multi-agency partnerships
- Delivering effective Through Care.

8. The Council believes that there are now strong foundations in place for improvement following the work completed since October 2016. The focus remains on sustaining this progress including a focus on the quality of practice, as well as management oversight and decision making which is key to ensuring that children receive the right service at the right time.

9. The next Ofsted Monitoring Visits are scheduled for July and October 2018.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

10. There have been positive HR outcomes of the service improvement work, including additional investment in frontline social workers which has meant a reduction in average caseload.

11. The service faced significant cost pressures in 2017/18, including a pressure of £7.6million relating to placements and provision costs and £0.6million relating to safeguarding services. A further £10.5million has been allocated in the 2018/19 budget to support the growing number of looked after children and the increased complexity of need within the care system. Although work continues to ensure improvements in the service enable both better outcomes for children and where possible for outcomes to be provided through the best value for money solution, there remains a risk associated with such a demand related service.

Privacy and Public Health Impact Assessments

12. None at this stage.

Equality and Diversity Implications

13. None at this stage. The Council is very aware of its Public Sector Equality Duty and it is recommended that further assessment is done on assessing the service delivery contract for the Company.

Supporting Information (available electronically and at County Hall Reception)

- Appendix 1 - Service Improvement Plan 2018/19

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Background Papers

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

Interim report from Essex County Council February 2018