

CABINET
2 FEBRUARY 2017**OUTCOME FROM THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES
FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION,
CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS****Relevant Cabinet Member**

Mr M L Bayliss

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 outcome of the Ofsted inspection report;**
 - (b) notes and approves the improvement plan set out as an Appendix to tackle the areas of concern identified by Ofsted; and**
 - (c) notes the key policy development as set out in paragraph 22 of this report and authorises the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families to take decisions upon them.**

Background

2. Ofsted carry out inspections of Local Authority services with regard to the help, care and protection of children and young people. The inspections are carried out under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which replaced previous children services inspection arrangements. The SIF covers inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, care leavers and a review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
3. The current regime has been in operation since the end of November 2013 and to date 116 inspection reports have been published, with a further five awaiting formal publication. The inspections are announced at short notice, take place over a four week period and involve a detailed and forensic analysis of the quality of work with children and the impact made on the outcomes they achieve.
4. The inspection outcome has four possible judgements: inadequate, requires improvement to be good, good and outstanding. The judgements of the 116 Authorities where the results have been published to date show that 73% of authorities are inadequate or require improvement.

5. Worcestershire's inspection took place from 24 October to 17 November 2016. This involved 11 inspectors and 155 meetings with over 200 people as well as the rigorous examination of case files of children.

6. The overall judgement for Worcestershire was 'inadequate' and was published on 24 January 2017. This is a very disappointing judgement for Worcestershire's children and young people, as well as for the committed and hardworking staff within the service. Plans were already in place to deliver service improvement prior to the inspection and this work has continued and been further strengthened to form an improvement plan to cover all recommendations from Ofsted. The Local Children Safeguarding Board judgement was "requires improvement", as was the judgement for adoption. The full judgement is available on the Ofsted website.

Inspection Report

7. Ofsted published the report on their website on 24 January 2017. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, Chief Executive, Director of Children, Families and Communities and Assistant Director Safeguarding (Children Social Care) carried out a number of interviews, media, member and staff briefings on the day of publication.

8. The report contained fourteen recommendations for the Authority, with its partners, to implement. These are:

- (a)** Ensure that elected members and senior leaders meet their statutory responsibilities and duties to the children of Worcestershire by improving all children's services
- (b)** Implement the workforce strategy as swiftly as possible to improve workforce stability and capacity
- (c)** Ensure that children's services staff and the wider partnership understand and consistently apply the 'level of needs' at every stage of the child's journey, including in the early help pathway
- (d)** Strengthen children's voices by ensuring that children are seen, and seen alone, that their views are fully considered and taken into account, that they are supported to contribute to their plans and that their wishes are acted upon, when appropriate
- (e)** Ensure that the management oversight and performance information relating to children who are at risk or vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and missing are accurate, and lead to improved safeguarding practice
- (f)** Complete a thorough review of all children subject to Section 20 accommodation to ensure that their arrangements are appropriate in all cases
- (g)** The local authority should assure itself that decisions made to close the cases of the cohort of children in need that were recently reviewed are both appropriate and in the children's best interests

- (h) Improve the quality of assessments and plans for all children. Ensure that children progress, including permanence plans, through robust reviews and effective oversight
- (i) Ensure that strategy discussions include all relevant agencies and robust contingency arrangements so that children are safeguarded while child protection enquiries are undertaken
- (j) Improve the timeliness of health assessments for children looked after to ensure that their needs are fully understood and met
- (k) Ensure that social workers and managers fully understand and exercise their responsibilities to unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- (l) Review the response to privately fostered children to ensure that assessments of carers are completed and agreed, and that children are visited within required timescales.

The detailed report is available on the County Council's website.

Worcestershire's Improvement Plan

9. The Council had been aware of shortcomings in services, which had led the Chief Executive to invite the Local Government Association to carry out a peer review of children's services in April 2015. Following the peer review report, which confirmed the challenges within the service, an improvement board and 'back to basics' plan for children's social work were implemented.

10. Ofsted's view was that there was progress since the peer review, although they felt the progress had lacked pace and stability of leadership to have had a clear impact on children's outcomes.

11. However, Ofsted did recognise that some progress had been made in relation to:

- Recruitment of a permanent senior leadership team: the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, Director of Children, Families and Communities, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board have all taken up their roles in the last four to nine months.
- Implementation of the Safeguarding Board's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy
- Establishing an integrated Family Front Door (incorporating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ethos) with the publication of revised Threshold of Need Guidance
- Children's Social Care 'Back to Basics' Improvement Programme showing improvements in compliance with key performance standards (for example return interviews for children missing, timeliness for assessment activity and adoption performance amongst others)

12. The improvement plan has been refreshed in the light of the final Ofsted judgement. The plan focuses on 8 major work programmes. These are:

- (a) Workforce strategy
- (b) Ensuring conditions for good practice
- (c) Performance and quality assurance
- (d) Service user feedback
- (e) Thresholds and assessments
- (f) Good outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- (g) Improving the quality of practice for children subject to public law outline and care proceedings
- (h) Targeted early help.

The overarching plan is attached at Appendix 1.

13. The political and managerial commitment to delivering good services to Worcestershire's children and young people has ensured that progress has continued to be made since the inspection. The stability and commitment of current leadership has continued to focus on making improvements since the inspection.

14. A key part of the inspectors' feedback at the end of the inspection was that they had seen evidence of positive change but that it was too early to judge that it had made a real difference to the experience of children. Continuing to deliver and embed the plan is the best way to make this positive difference. It is important that, despite the disappointment about the judgement, all focus and energy is targeted towards delivering the changes that will continue the improvement work and ultimately deliver good outcomes for children and young people.

Worcestershire's Financial Strategy

15. The Council has made significant financial investment in Children's social care placements in recent years (£3m for the 2017/18 financial year) which has allowed services to be available to meet the needs of children requiring intensive support to meet their needs.

16. Cabinet agreed in December 2016 to recommend a further £700,000 per annum to increase safeguarding capacity following the 2015/16 Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board which advised that it could not be fully assured that child protection services were effective.

17. In light of the Ofsted judgement, Cabinet are recommending an allocation of additional resource, recognising that the pace of change can be accelerated through the availability of additional funding. Council will be asked to recommend a budget for 2017/18 that adds a further £800,000 per annum on an ongoing basis. In addition, there is a recommendation for a short-term allocation of £1m for 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years (£2m in total).

18. This would provide an additional £1.5m revenue for children's safeguarding and for services for care leavers on an ongoing basis. It also provides an additional revenue funding of £1m for each of the next two financial years and an addition to the capital programme of £1m to support improvements in social care IT systems to accelerate the pace of change required to ensure that children in Worcestershire in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers achieve the positive outcomes that they deserve.

Policy Framework

19. There are a number of policies and strategies that are currently in need of refreshing and approving in order to ensure that the framework for the delivery of services is clear, effective and follows current best practice guidelines. Work is already underway to prepare these documents for formal approval by Cabinet later in 2017.

20. The County Council had a Key Issues Debate at its meeting on 12 January 2017 about the role of all Councillors as corporate parents. This was a positive debate that demonstrated strong cross-party commitment to the vital role that Councillors play as corporate parent to children in care and to care leavers.

21. The Corporate Parenting Board, on behalf of the Council, will discuss and approve a revised Corporate Parenting Strategy and a pledge to children in care and care leavers at their meetings in February and April 2017.

22. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families will be asked to approve the following strategies during April 2017:

- (a) Looked After Children Strategy, including the sufficiency plan, permanency plan, placement action plan, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Adoption Policy
- (b) Care Leavers' Strategy, including the handbook and action plan, and
- (c) Proposals to review and co-produce with children and parents a transformation plan for services for Children with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs.

23. These strategies will be developed jointly with children and young people to ensure that the outcomes that are important to them drive the strategic direction for the Council. It will also be helpful for Scrutiny to be involved in the oversight of the policies.

Wider partners

24. Cabinet is asked to note that there are key roles for partner organisations across Worcestershire to play in order to ensure that services are playing their full part in improving outcomes for children and families. This includes the full range of public sector organisations, as well as schools, the voluntary and community sector, families and the wider community and of course children and young people themselves.

25. The judgement has been shared widely and the improvement work will continue to be discussed and debated through the range of key strategic forums to ensure that all partners play their full part in keeping children safe, healthy and achieving great outcomes for a positive future. The voice of the child will be at the heart of the improvement work being delivered.

26. There will be a refresh of the Children and Young People Plan and a strengthening of partnership oversight of improving outcomes.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

27. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 15 to 18.

28. HR implications are a key part of the workforce strategy. This will include ensuring that the Council becomes an employer of choice for children's social workers and has a structure where staff are enabled and supported to deliver good work for children.

Privacy and Public Health Impact Assessments

29. The improvement plan will be screened for public health impact.

Equality and Diversity Implications

30. The improvement plan will be screened for equality relevance and all areas identified as having such relevance will be subject to more detailed assessment against the 3 aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Where any potential inequality is identified for children or young people who belong to one or more Protected Groups (Race or disability, for example) potential mitigating action will be considered and implemented, where appropriate.

Supporting Information

- Improvement Plan attached as an Appendix and available on the Council's website <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/ofstedinspection> and County Hall Reception

Website information

- Ofsted - [Ofsted SIF inspection report](#)

Worcestershire County Council – <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/ofstedinspection>

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Specific Contact Points for this report

Catherine Driscoll, Director of Children, Families and Communities

(01905) 846303

Email: cdriscoll@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

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

Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 December 2016