

CABINET
26 SEPTEMBER 2019**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE – OFSTED INSPECTION
UPDATE AND PRIORITIES FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT**

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 the Cabinet:

- (a) notes the Ofsted report published on 29 July 2019;**
- (b) notes the progress on service improvement; and**
- (c) endorses the recommended priorities for further improvement as set out in this report.**

Background

- 2. As reported previously, Worcestershire Children's Services was subject to a full Safeguarding Inspection in October 2016 where we were judged to be inadequate in all areas of practice. Since that time we have been subject to regular Monitoring Visits by Ofsted, the purpose of which is to monitor the improvement progress.
- 3. A total of seven monitoring visits have been conducted and a full re-inspection was completed in June 2019. This report outlines the key findings from that inspection as well as the Ofsted recommendations for further improvement.
- 4. The full inspection report, as published on 29 July 2019, is linked as Appendix 1 (available in digital form).

Key findings in the report published 29 July 2019

5. The overall finding of the inspection was that Worcestershire County Council's Children's Social Care Services are rated as *'requires improvement to be good'*. **The report notes our strong trajectory of improvement since the last inspection.** It was noted that *"effective work by senior management and staff, together with commitment and investment by political leaders, has led to improved responses to the needs of children and families. As a result, outcomes for many children and their families are better, and there is evidence of a sustained trajectory of improvement."*

6. Ofsted commented positively upon a number of areas of practice, demonstrating the progress we have made since the 2016 inspection. An overview of the positive feedback in the report is outlined below:

Children In Need of Support and Protection

- The Targeted Early Help undertaken with families is making a positive difference to their lives
- Thresholds are applied appropriately and most children receive a proportionate response to need
- Consent is understood, sought and dispensed with appropriately
- Social work assessments are comprehensive in gathering information and views of the child, parents and partners. They are up to date, completed in a timely way and they analysis risk effectively
- Decision-making at the Family Front Door is usually prompt and timely – informed decisions, with appropriate contribution of partners, are made where serious safeguarding concerns are identified and safe plans are made for children
- Effective partnership working between police and social workers for children vulnerable to exploitation means the response to these concerns is strong and the multi-agency approach to Domestic Abuse triage is effective in safeguarding children
- Social workers know their children well, they understand what life is like for them and the views of children inform assessment outcomes and plans
- Child Protection Conferences and Child In Need meetings are timely and children, families and partners are well engaged in them
- Monitoring of outcomes in child protection cases is good. When concerns reduce, cases are appropriately “stepped down” enabling the families to maintain progress with support. When concerns escalate, swift action is taken to safeguard children
- Work in the disabled children teams demonstrates an understanding of risk and the specific needs of children they work with
- Smooth transitions between Children’s and Adult Services are facilitated by work between Young Adults and Children with Disability teams
- Across the service, the new strengths-based practice model, Signs of Safety, is well embedded and used effectively with professionals and families to identify risk and measure progress
- Emergency Duty services provide effective out of hours support for children and families
- Concerns and allegations about professionals are managed well by the designated officer service
- Arrangements for Privately Fostered children are effective
- Partnership work with police, and multi-agency information sharing in response to children experiencing exploitation have improved
- The creation of Missing Children Officers has made a positive impact reducing the number of children going missing from home and care
- Social workers understand specialist areas of safeguarding and exploitation. Young People at risk of Radicalisation, Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage are well supported
- Active responses to the rise in both children missing in education and those Educated at Home is taking place

- The Council effectively monitors and provides appropriate support and challenge to Alternative Provisions and is effectively working with schools to reintegrate pupils where this is appropriate.

Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Decisions made for children to come into care are appropriate and, where necessary, immediate action is taken to safeguard children
- Assessments for children in our care are timely and comprehensive
- Care plans for children are appropriate, comprehensive, up to date and reflect the needs of children well
- Effective parallel planning is in place for young children to ensure they achieve timely permanency
- The majority of children in care are settled, are in placements that meet their needs and are making progress
- Care planning for siblings groups is done in the best interests of children. Siblings are placed together when it is in their interests
- Children in care “benefit” from supervised family time with parents, siblings and family
- Long-term stability for most children has improved as a result of proactive management and service development to introduce “consolidation meetings”
- Looked After Child reviews are well chaired by Independent Review Officers (IRO). Records are written in a supportive meaningful way and in most cases IROs are active in ensuring quality and timeliness is identified and addressed
- Children and Young People in care are making good educational progress and this is effectively monitored by social workers and schools through Personal Education Plans
- Assessments of Foster Carers are timely, thorough and analytical
- Supervising social workers understand the needs of the children and help Foster Carers to develop the skills necessary to meet those needs
- Planning for children with a plan of Adoption is a strength. Adoption Central England (ACE) and the local authority work effectively to identify early where adoption is an appropriate permanence plan, and then find a family without delay
- Personal Advisors who support Care Leavers build positive relationships with young people and they know them well. They are aspirational for their young people and consistently encourage them to achieve in education and employment
- All Care Leavers have a Personal Advisor until they are 21 years old and the Local Authority ensure they offer services, and are in contact, with most up to the age of 25 years
- Pathway Plans for young people leaving care are detailed, up to date and have clear actions and timescales. Effective participation from young people in completing their own plans and our “plan on a page” provide a good straightforward overview
- Access to support for Care Leavers across the districts is positive and helps maintain contact and reduce isolation for these young people
- Most Care Leavers live in suitable accommodation and our outreach services engage young people in independent skills courses that are effective in increasing confidence and enable them to progress through stages to independent living.

The Positive Impact of Leaders on social work practice

- Since October 2016, the Council has made considerable progress in improving the quality of services to children and families; essential steps have been taken to meet the goals of the service improvement plan and Corporate Parenting has been strengthened
- The combination of restructure of services, focused investment and the “end to end” approach of service improvement has ensured changes are embedded in core practice and the trajectory for further improvement is established
- The Quality Assurance system has established a range of performance information that allows senior managers to better understand practice
- Effective improvement work has strengthened the workforce, meaning:
 - We now have stability and permeance in recruitment and retention
 - There are career opportunities within the structure of the service, with clear lines of career progression for staff
 - We have implemented Signs of Safety, a strength-based model of intervention
 - We can evidence, through Key Performance Indicator performance (KPI), reduced caseloads overall.
- As a result, staff are positive about working for Worcestershire, as demonstrated in the Social Work Health Check staff survey
- Good Strategic Partnerships have created conditions for improvement in practice and reputation in the local Judiciary. This has enabled the development of an encompassing “Get Safe” strategy to address exploitation.

Suggested Priorities for further improvement

7. The above paints a positive picture and demonstrates the impact of the improvement journey since 2016. **We are no longer an inadequate authority.** There remains work to be done in order for us to continue our work to achieve full consistency in high quality services for all children, and as such, the inspection report also outlines areas where challenges still exist. These areas are outlined below:

- Comprehensive analysis in assessments, effective use of chronologies and family-friendly, outcome-focused plans are not yet in place all the time for all children
- Team Managers and Independent Chairs are not always proactive or effective in identifying and improving quality or timeliness in all cases
- Robust case management and timely reflective supervision is not yet in place for all social workers all the time
- Partnership working in Early Help is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure all partners take active leadership roles in the provision of early help interventions
- Joint Commissioning of Mental Health Services with Public Health has not yet resulted in a clear pathway or priority of intervention for children in care or care leavers
- Accommodation for Care Leavers and those at risk of homelessness is not yet meeting demand and need and there is still reliance on Bed and Breakfast in the absence of anything more suitable being available
- Support services to prevent care and sufficiency of placements for young people with the most complex needs who do need to enter care are not yet meeting demand and needs.

8. The areas that need to improve as set out in the July 2019 Ofsted report are:

- The quality of intervention with families where there is a risk that children may be received into care if the right support and guidance is not available
- Assessments of need for 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless, including whether they should come into the care of the local authority. Young people should be told clearly about this option
- The timely availability of family support when children have a plan to leave care and return home
- Learning from the breakdown of placements for children by the holding of timely disruption meetings
- The availability of a dedicated pathway to the provision of mental health services for children in care
- The provision of personal assistants for care leavers when they reach the age of 17
- The availability of suitable accommodation and timely interventions that ensure that care leavers, including those aged over 18 years, are not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation or become homeless.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

9. Our Service Improvement Plan (SIP) has defined and driven our service improvement activity following the Ofsted inadequate judgement in October 2016. The plan was regularly reviewed and updated to reflect progress and work completed.

10. Following our “Requires Improvement to be Good” judgement it is important we make the cultural shift with staff and partners into our next phase of service delivery. In this phase we will focus on sustaining the progress made thus far, ensuring we have consistency in our recognised good practice and in continuing to develop and improve services as a “Continuous Learning” service.

11. Our aims and objectives are set out in the Worcestershire Children First Service Interim Business Plan (see Cabinet agenda for 5 September 2019 meeting for the full plan) and cascaded into directorate and service area-based plans.

12. The Social Care and Safeguarding Directorate Service Plan is summarised in our plan on a page (see Appendix 2). The plan shows the key areas which the leadership team will address at a strategic level around the edge, namely: workforce and culture; Ofsted inspections and focused visits; a directorate level quality assurance programme; and contribution to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

13. In the centre of the plan each service area has sections outlining the high level focus areas. These are structured under three key themes:

- (a) Ofsted Recommendations and areas for improvement – based on the findings from the June 2019 inspection as outlined in this report;
- (b) Business Development and Service Improvement Plans – the priority areas for service improvement, some of which continue from the former Service Improvement Plan. In this section, each service area also has reference to: a quality assurance programme to manage and monitor continuous improvement and evidence impact and outcomes for children and families; and financial

management savings and efficiencies to ensure opportunities for efficiencies are identified and progressed.

(c) Innovation – this section is for new transformational activities

14. Sitting under the plan on a page, each service area will develop a detailed plan setting out the outcomes, activities with owners and timescales, what good looks like and KPIs for each area of the top level plan. These detailed plans will be managed by the Assistant Directors to ensure effective delivery against the high level outcomes.

15. We have a range of tools to help us monitor performance against our objectives, from live case data used by individuals and front-line managers to weekly, monthly and quarterly performance reports used by managers to analyse service delivery and impact and report to senior leadership and strategic stakeholders. An outline of these reports is included in Appendix 3. Also included as Appendix 4 is our most recent quarterly performance report, quarter 1 2019/20.

16. From 1 October 2019, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) will be accountable for delivering continuous improvement. The Quality Assurance and Monitoring arrangements for the company are set out in the WCF Interim Business Plan. Our framework will continue to be based on three core principles:

- A continuous focus on service improvement at all levels of the organisation
- Embed a culture of learning from quality assurance and performance management
- Know the difference we are making to the lives of Children and Young People.

17. Monitoring of performance and progress will take place through the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). A number of KPIs will be monitored covering all service areas of the Company reflected in the Service's Specification including social care, early help and education. These will be monitored monthly, quarterly or annually as set out against each KPI and set out against any future or amended KPIs. KPIs will be reviewed jointly by the Council and the Company as part of the Annual Review.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

18. No Legal implications to be considered.

19. A Growth Proposal for 'Getting to Good' was discussed and agreed at 2018 Corporate Strategy Planning and incorporated into the Children, Families & Communities budget for 2019/20. It is expected that the work on further improvements will be completed from this existing resource, with no additional investment requested at this stage. The Interim Business Plan for Worcestershire Children First, as approved by the DfE, was agreed at Cabinet on 5 September 2019, and highlighted the demographic pressures for the company for 2020/21 and indicative contract sums for the following two years. The budget has therefore been set, aligning with the Council's budget setting process, with no additional financial implications for the proposals set out in this report.

20. There are no foreseen negative HR implications of this report. The Children's Social Care Workforce Steering Group was formed out of the former Service Improvement Plan in 2017. HR are heavily involved in this group, actively participating in the meetings, and

leading on many of the supporting components. This work feeds into the overall Workforce and Culture aims and imperatives for WCF. The work achieved in the Workforce group to date has seen staff permanency increase, vacancies decrease, and staff feeling more valued. As such, the HR implications from this report, and continuing focus on workforce and culture, would be seen as having a positive effect on the workforce.

Privacy and Public Health Impact Assessments

21. Information, risk and privacy screening has been carried out and identified no potential concerns.

22. Public Health Impact Screening identified no potential concerns.

Risk Implications

23. The risk to consider is the risk that improvements are not achieved, and we fail to deliver an effective safeguarding service, leading to an “Inadequate” rating from Ofsted. There is a risk to children and young people in that there may be an escalation of need/risk, increase in children suffering significant harm and/or being in need of Local Authority accommodation. There is also a reputational risk to the Council which could lead to a loss of confidence from the public and our partners.

24. As outlined above, our trajectory of improvement is strong. We are no longer an inadequate authority, we are a strong “required improvement to be good” authority. Therefore, this risk is reducing. We will continue to drive forwards continuous improvement and monitor progress.

Equality and Diversity Implications

25. An Equality Relevance Screening has been completed in respect of these recommendations. The screening did not identify any potential Equality considerations requiring further consideration during implementation.

Supporting Information (digital versions only)

- Appendix 1 – Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Social Care Services Report - 29 July 2019
- Appendix 2 – Worcestershire Children First, Social Care and Safeguarding Plan
- Appendix 3 – Children’s Social Care Performance Framework
- Appendix 4 – Quarter One 2019/20 Performance Dashboard

Contact Points

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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 papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 September 2019