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**To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**  
**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

**Subject: Progress on Ofsted Recommendations and Improvement Board**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the progress with the Children's Services Improvement Plan reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board on 10 January 2018. The report is based on data from December 2017, unless stated otherwise. The next Improvement Board will be held on 11 April 2018.
- 1.2 The report also covers progress made against the Ofsted recommendations arising from the last inspection in March 2017 where Coventry Children's Services were judged to be "requires improvement".

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
  - 1) To note progress made against the Ofsted recommendations
  - 2) Receive regular updates from the Children's Services Improvement Board that will include further progress relating to the children's services improvement plan
  - 3) Identify any further recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member

## **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 The Ofsted Inspection of Coventry's Children's Services and the review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), published in March 2014, judged services and the LSCB to be inadequate. AS a result the Department for Education issued an Improvement Notice on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The two year review was held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and focused on quality of practice; the effectiveness of the children's services system and partnership working. Ofsted re-inspected Children's Services on 6<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> March 2017, the outcome of the inspection was published on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Children's Services were judged as "requires improvement to be good". Services for Children are no longer inadequate.
- 3.2 The Department for Education (DfE) removed Children's Services from intervention on 13 June 2017, the service is no longer subject to an improvement notice. Supervision and support will be provided by the DfE for the next 12 months, which will include two reviews. The first six month DfE review was held on 23 January 2018, followed by a further review in June/July 2018.
- 3.3 To oversee the improvement journey and as a response to the inadequate rating a Children's Service Improvement Board was established. An experienced Improvement consultant and retired Her Majesty Inspector (HMI), chairs the Children's Services Improvement Board. The Board includes elected Members, Council representatives and representatives from partner agencies in the City as well as a representative from the

Department for Education. Progress is reported to the Improvement Board every twelve weeks.

- 3.4 The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive have both given public commitment that Children's Services remains a key priority for the Council. This includes prioritising funding for Children's Services to maintain its capacity to improve. The Council, alongside partner organisations continue a relentless focus on securing improvements in services for children, young people and families to ensure they are safeguarded and achieve positive outcomes.

#### **4 Progress against the Ofsted Recommendations**

- 4.1 The re-inspection of Children's Services highlighted nine recommendations in the Inspection report published 13 June 2017. A summary of progress against the recommendations is highlighted below:

#### **5 Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and develop services through the work of the Improvement Board so that all children in Coventry receive the help and support that they need and their outcomes improve.**

- 5.1 An Improvement Board has been in place for some time and following the March 2017 inspection was reviewed in terms of its membership and remit. The Improvement Plan is rigorously monitored and partners are responsible for providing highlight reports of progress and impact on outcomes for children and young people. The Improvement Board is chaired by an Independent Chair and includes representation from senior leaders across the city. The overall objective is to ensure that the Improvement Board drives improvement with pace and holds partners to account by monitoring progress and impact through the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

#### **6 Recommendation 2: Ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board supports partners to understand and consistently apply appropriate thresholds to levels of need at every stage of the child's journey, including the early help pathway.**

- 6.1 A number of initiatives are underway with partners to enable better threshold application and create a more effective 'referral making' and 'referral taking' system in Coventry. The threshold document is being refreshed and will have greater clarity about levels of need and a stronger focus on how and where to source early help support and guidance. A review of the current Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has resulted in plans to develop a new early help assessment based on signs of safety methodology.
- 6.2 A number of reviews and quality assurance audit activity undertaken recently has surfaced a range of other system and cultural changes that will strengthen both the social care and partnership responses at the front door. These changes are underway and captured in a MASH Implementation Plan. The overall objective is to ensure that partners play their part in identifying and addressing need before problems escalate through early help support and make the right referrals to social care. This work will be further supported by the development of the Family Hubs.

#### **7 Recommendation 3: Ensure that the introduction of the risk management methodology across the authority includes partners and the authority at all stages.**

- 7.1 Partners in Coventry have agreed to adopt signs of safety methodology as the preferred approach in Coventry. All the forms being used in Coventry are under review so that they support this methodology, including the early help assessment that will replace the current CAF. A training plan for practitioners across the partnership to be trained in this approach is being scoped with some training already underway. To support this development a signs of safety Implementation Manager has been appointed to lead this work in conjunction with the Principal Social Worker. The objective is to ensure that the signs of safety methodology is understood and used across Coventry to support children and families.

- 8 Recommendation 4: Improve the quality of chronologies to ensure they provide relevant detail relating to children’s histories and the impact of previous interventions.**
- 8.1 Quality assurance activity shows that chronologies are an area for development. Practitioners and managers understand the importance of ensuring that chronologies are up to date and of good quality. A range of initiatives have been introduced, including; workshops about good practice led by team managers and the Principal Social Worker, bespoke training as part of the learning and development offer, guidance on how to write a good chronology, and a reporting mechanism for managers to check cases that have not had a chronology in the last 3 months. First line managers have developed team action plans that set out specific actions that they are taking within their teams to strengthen this area of practice and embed this as part of core recording activity by practitioners.
- 8.2 Additional rigour has been introduced in the monthly quality assurance audit programme to report on the impact of these initiatives. This will be reported on within the monthly audit reports from February 2018. The overall objective is to ensure that practitioners develop chronologies that take account of the importance of the full history of the family and significant events, and use this to inform purposeful interventions.
- 9 Recommendation 5: Improve the quality of children’s assessments and the focus of plans, so that all children at every stage of their journeys have their needs fully recognised and met.**
- 9.1 The quality of children’s assessments and SMART (specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time-based) planning are themes for learning in recent audit activity. From October 2017, child protection chairs have been focusing on timely and effective planning at the second review. They are providing challenge where there is drift and delay in progressing child protection plans and where necessary raising formal alerts to managers. The response to resolving alerts is being monitored using a dashboard. In child in need cases, a pilot is underway where child in need reviews are being chaired by managers to ensure that case progression is timely and effective, and those cases stepped down from a child protection to a child in need plan is reviewed by a child protection chair at the first review. The overall objective is to ensure that all children and young people at every stage of their journey have their needs fully recognised and met, through good quality assessments and plans.
- 10 Recommendation 6: Ensure that managers, chairs of child protection conferences and IRO’s improve their practice, by robustly chairing children’s meetings and challenging any delays in their plans being progressed.**
- 10.1 Intensive coaching and observation of child protection chairs has been taking place since September 2017 to centre the focus of the child protection system on the child and ensure that plans are purposeful and address need. Child protection chairs are trained in signs of safety methodology and expected to apply this in a consistent way. Feedback is provided on a one to one and team basis so that the learning is shared across the team. The overall objective is to ensure that managers and chairs robustly challenge any drift and delay that impacts on outcomes for children, including through formal escalation processes
- 11 Recommendation 7: Review the authority’s arrangements for privately fostered children and ensure that those arrangements and associated practice comply with statutory guidance.**
- 11.1 One of the newly appointed Operational Leads has been identified as the new private fostering lead in social care to provide advice, support and additional oversight of private fostering cases across all teams. The brief includes reviewing assessments of private fostering cases to ensure that they meet the requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. All 11 private fostering cases (as at January 2018) were reviewed and actions identified to bring case files up to standard. The quality

of private fostering cases is included as a theme in the February 2018 monthly audit programme.

- 11.2 The private fostering procedures were updated in September 2017, and training is available as part of the training and development plan for local authority staff. Awareness about private fostering is raised in multi-agency training level 1 courses.
- 11.3 The LSCB issued communication about private fostering in its August 2017 newsletter. A communication plan to raise awareness has been produced with the engagement of partner agencies as well as an accompanying leaflet that explains what private fostering means and how to refer cases to children's social care for follow up. A letter was included in the monthly bulletin to all schools in December 2017 reminding them of their responsibility with regard to private fostering. The overall objective is to ensure that children who are living in private fostering arrangements are known to the local authority and are cared for safely..

**12 Recommendation 8: Strengthen arrangements to ensure that the management of allegations of professional abuse is robust and effectively safeguards children.**

- 12.1 A new Risk Management Co-ordinator that incorporates the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) function has been appointed and takes up post in March 2018. A manual data base is in place to track cases that are reported to the LADO and a project to build a dashboard on Protocol is underway. An audit of the quality of LADO casework took place in December 2018 and learning from this being taken forward by the Operational Lead. The audit found that thresholds for referrals to the LADO were appropriate and timeliness was generally appropriate. The overall objective is to ensure that allegations against professionals are addressed swiftly to protect children from harm.

**13 Recommendation 9: Ensure that the progress of prospective adopters is tracked effectively so that the potential for children to be placed without delay is minimised.**

- 13.1 The Regional Adoption Agency (ACE) is using 'Coram I' to track adoption applications and the progress of children's permanence plans to make sure matching takes place at the earliest opportunity. All adopters who had been waiting in excess of a year have been reviewed for learning and next steps for their progression as adopters.
- 13.2 Adopter training has been reviewed and includes information on making successful matches and placements. Lessons from disruptions are included with an emphasis on maintaining attachments for children with their new parents. Adoption disruptions are reviewed and learning is presented to the Adoption Panel and rolled out across the service. The timeframes of reports being completed in 1 month and presented to the adoption panel 1 month later has been challenging. There have been no disruptions since April 2017. The overall objective is to ensure that there are no delays in the adoption process with a particular focus on improving the learning and development offer for adopters, ensuring that all children and young people benefit from early preparation for permanence and learning from adoption breakdowns

**14 Review of the Children's Services Improvement Board**

- 14.1 The Independent Chair of the Improvement Board recommendations were accepted by Board members and have been implemented.
- 14.2 The changes included reviewing the Improvement board membership. The LSCB Chair, West Midlands Police, Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group, University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire, Schools, Voluntary Action and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust and Schools will remain as a board member. NHS England have written to relinquish their current membership as the work on the Board is focussed on identifying and prioritising areas for improvement and on monitoring delivery of the Improvement Plan. Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group are better placed to support and assure the health service contribution to service improvement and are represented on the Board.

14.3 The Implementation Group has been strengthened to hold members of the group to account for delivering the improvement plan and reporting up to the Improvement board on issues that need strategic direction. The Implementation Group meet every six weeks to review progress and agree Highlight reports submitted to Improvement Board.

## **15 Improvement Plan Progress**

15.1 Highlight reports confirming actions in the Improvement Plan that have been fully completed and embedded within the service were submitted to Improvement Board on 10 January 2018. Board members signed off the following actions as completed:

- Multi-Agency FGM Audit
- Review of adopters waiting in excess of a year
- Review of CAF system
- Development of the Advocacy Service
- Recruitment and Retention Plan

15.2 The Implementation Group will meet in February and March to sign off Highlight reports for the next Improvement Board in April 2018.

15.3 At the last Improvement Board in October, some changes to completion dates were highlighted. It was agreed by Board members that this is further reviewed to reflect accurate completion dates. Strategic Leads and partners have completed this review and new timescales have been agreed and will be published in the Children's Services Strategic Plan on the website very shortly.

## **16 Children's Services Redesign**

16.1 The Children's Services re-designed has now been fully implemented.

16.2 Staff have been allocated to Family Hubs operating from 8 locations in the city. Staff includes: Health visitors, Family hub workers and assistants, Youth worker, Early help co-ordinator, Partnership co-ordinator, senior parenting practitioners and Early help social worker.

16.3 The CAF process has been reviewed by partners and details of the work completed were presented to Board members.

16.4 Recruitment to the Operational Lead posts within the new structure is complete with a permanent senior and middle management leadership team in place. All Operational Leads have completed a comprehensive induction programme. The new leads bring a wealth of experience and expertise and will be significant in the next phase of our improvement journey.

## **17 Department for Education DfE Review**

17.1 The Department for Education 6 month review was held on 23 January 2018. The focus for the visit included:

- Front Door and Assessment
- Recruitment and Retention
- Balancing Restructuring and Improvement Work
- Continuing the momentum for a consistent 'Requires Improvement' service
- A visit to a Family Hub

17.2 Feedback from the visit to the Family Hub is positive, the review went well and the DfE have confirmed that they have received the level of assurance required. The next review will take place in June 2018.

## 18 Communications

18.1 The e-newsletter continues to be produced focusing on Children's Services. This is issued to all staff in Children's Services, all partners, senior managers and Members to ensure everyone is aware of the progress made so far, what has still to be achieved and the role all employees can play in supporting the service in 'getting to good.' In addition to this, the Director of Children's Services holds open sessions for all staff and gets out and about visiting teams and talking to staff.

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