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**To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

**18 July 2019**

**Subject: Children's Services Improvement**

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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 Children's Services improvement reported to the Continuous Improvement Executive Group on 23 May 2019. The next Continuous Improvement Executive Group will be held on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) To note the current progress
  - 2) Identify any further recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member

**3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 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 has been provided by the DfE up to June 2018. This has now ended.
- 3.3 A report on the future arrangements for continuing and sustaining improvements in Coventry was presented by the Independent Chair and the Director of Children's Services at Improvement Board on 3 October 2018. It was agreed that the Children's Services Improvement Board is replaced by a Continuous Improvement Executive Group to retain political and corporate oversight of Children's Services Continuous Improvement.
- 3.4 The Continuous Improvement Executive Group will ensure tighter focus on continuous improvement and Ofsted preparation. The impact of performance will be managed and monitored by the group. This is an interim measure before returning to business as usual in accordance with the revised arrangements for Children's Safeguarding, and subject to satisfactory inspection by September 2020. At this time the Executive Group would cease and oversight transferred to the revised Safeguarding Partnership and monitored as business as usual. Board members fully supported the revised arrangements and membership of the group.
- 3.5 The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive continue to give 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.

- 3.6 Ofsted's revised framework includes focused visits to local authorities who are judged to be 'requires improvement' the first visit was held on 30-31 January 2018. The visit focused on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The letter confirming the outcome of the visit was published on 22 February 2018.
- 3.7 The Ofsted Annual Conversation with regional representatives is undertaken each year, this took place on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The meeting is part of a broader meeting covering education and early years.
- 3.8 A further focused visit was held on 26-27 February 2019. The visit focused on permanency planning and achieving permanency. The letter confirming the outcome of the visit was published on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019. The next standard Inspection of Children's Services is likely to be between September 2019 and September 2020.

#### **4 Children's Services Continuous Improvement Progress**

##### **4.1 Children's Services Redesign**

- 4.2 The review of Children's Service redesign is in its final stages. The proposals for change will embed further changes to sustain continuous improvement. This involves minor changes as a result of changes to the profile of children in the system.
- 4.3 Ofsted stated in February that overall the visit was positive with strong evidence of an improving service. It was also noted that the redesign is having a positive impact for children who experience less turnover of social workers.

##### **4.4 Achieving for Children**

- 4.5 The DfE provide continuous improvement support to local authorities who have been judged requires improvement to be good. The cost of the work is funded by Partners in Practice funding through the DfE.
- 4.6 Children's Services have agreed to two proposals:
  - Coaching of Strategic and Operational leads
  - Quality of Practice workshops.

- 4.7 The coaching of Strategic and Operational Leads commenced in June 2019 and offers managers 1.5 hours of coaching per month for a period of six months. The quality of Practice workshops will be delivered in the autumn.

##### **4.8 Workforce**

- 4.9 83% of all permanent qualified social workers have been retained in the service since March 2018. Reliance on agency is reducing and to date 6 agency staff have converted to permanent Advanced Social Worker roles this year.

- 4.10 Children's Services held a further Open Evening event on 20 June. The event was advertised on local radio and promoted widely across the Guardian, various Social Media platforms, Coventry City Council Website and WMjobs. The event attracted a mix of newly qualified and experienced social workers and proved to be successful, follow up interviews are being arranged with candidates who expressed an interest in working for Coventry.

##### **4.11 Performance**

- 4.12 Current performance highlights a steady trajectory of rise in the first two years, with more recently this reaching a plateau. The Leader and Cabinet Member have requested further work is undertaken with the Senior Leadership team to review current critical performance indicators to improve this to make a significant difference by August and get the service on

an improving trajectory to good. Further work is being undertaken to address this issue. A separate meeting to review performance before the next Continuous Improvement Executive Group is being planned.

## **5 Sustaining Continuous Improvement**

- 5.1 A second draft of the Continuous Improvement Plan was shared at the meeting in May. This has been developed further with Leads and partners and includes areas for development identified from the last Ofsted Visit in February and actions that need further embedding from the last plan as well as new actions that the service in conjunction with partners need to undertake in readiness for the next Ofsted Standard Inspection.
- 5.2 Ofsted stated we knew ourselves well, and that our self-evaluation was accurate. More recent work is significantly better, and Ofsted recognised that there is a strategic drive to achieve permanence for our children. However, for some children this takes too long, and some children experience drift and delay.
- 5.4 Our audit and quality assurance function was complemented, reinforcing how important it is that we undertake our audits each month and then feedback the learning in to practice. It was also evident how our IRO function has improved. We need to challenge ourselves further to ensure that the robust challenge from IROs results in prompt improvement for our children.
- 5.5 A revised Children's Services Strategic Plan 2019-20 our journey in "Getting to Good" is being developed and will include transformation and improvement actions that will be implemented to embed the good practice achieved and fully embed areas requiring further development.
- 5.6 The Improvement Executive Group will provide oversight and accelerate at pace areas for development that need to improve over the next twelve months.

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