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

3 October 2019

Subject: Children's Services Improvement

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 12 August 2019. The next Continuous Improvement Executive Group will be held on 22nd October 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 6th -30th March 2017, the outcome of the inspection was published on 13th 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 have 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 Coventry Safeguarding Children's 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 14th 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 21st March 2019. The next standard Inspection of Children's Services is likely to be between September 2019 and September 2020.

Children's Services Continuous Improvement Progress

4 Children's Services Redesign

- 4.1 The review of Children's Service redesign is in its final stages. The distribution of case work across the city has been reviewed. Currently this varies within teams. An even distribution will ensure children and young people and families get the Right Help at the Right Time and enable social work to flourish. A new model has been developed to increase management capacity so that managers oversee a smaller manageable caseload.
- 4.2 To implement the changes, posts funded in Help and Protection will be moved to provide additional resources needed in the Looked After Children and Through Care teams. The feedback report and changes will be communicated to trade union colleagues and staff in October 2019.

5 Workforce

- 5.1 In the first quarter of this year (April – June 2019) the service has recruited 20 social workers; 8 social workers have left during this period. The progression framework launched in January 2019 for social workers to progress via a career pathway, has demonstrated a positive impact with less social workers leaving and more social workers being retained. Reliance on agency staff continues to reduce; as at the end of July 2019 this was 29 compared with 40 in February.
- 5.2 In September a further cohort of 11 Newley Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) commenced the Social Work Academy for six months, this will be followed by a further cohort of 9 NQSW's commencing in November 2019. The Social Work Academy will revert to business as usual with two cohorts a year from May 2020.

6 Recording Workshops

- 6.1 Ofsted stated at the focused visit held in February 2019 that children's files did not always contain all relevant documentation to track the decisions making process. This was highlighted as an area for improvement. In response to this several Recording workshops have been held, facilitated by the Principal Social Worker and the Strategic Lead for Help and Protection. A further 5 workshops are planned between August and December. Those staff who have attended have been very positive about the workshops.

7 Back to Basics Programme

- 7.1 Children's Services Leadership will be launching a 'Back to Basic programme' for staff. The purpose of the programme is:

- To develop skills, knowledge and practice confidence across the key areas of improvement
- To support practitioners to have knowledge, tools and skills to enable good social work practice and early help practice with children and families to thrive; and overall improve the quality and consistency of practice

7.2 The extended Leadership Team agreed a programme of workshops to be delivered between October 2019 and March 2020 on:

- Recording Skills
- Undertaking Assessments and Analysis in Practice
- Direct Work with Children and Young People and their Families and Carers
- Developing Confidence and Skills in Outcome Focused Plans for Children
- Permanency, Care Planning and Legal Literacy

8 Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC)

8.1 On 24th July 2019, the FDAC bid as part of the Supporting Families; investing in Practice Programme was successfully awarded to Coventry's FDAC team. A public announcement of all successful LA bids was communicated in August. Following the announcement of the award to successful sites, the FDAC national partnership at the Centre for Justice Innovation will actively engage sites in designing and deciding which variations to existing practice are to be tested, working in partnership with What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). Children's Services is currently awaiting further information from the Department for Education regarding this development.

8.2 Whilst the exact variations are yet to be finalised for Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, the suggestions proposed in the successful expressions of interest will be considered in determining approaches to further test the FDAC model.

9 Performance Progress

9.1 The Leader and Cabinet Member requested an additional meeting in August to review performance progress. The Director (Children's Services) presented a deep dive briefing highlighting success factors; the performance management arrangements in place; current issues, performance and action to be taken for each Critical Performance Indicator. The deep dive provided a helpful insight and understanding of current performance. Overall the 18 indicators highlight a mixed picture, with an upward trajectory on some of the indicators. The deep dive presentation was shared with Executive Group members on 12th August 2019, members agreed to a targeted approach to focus on specific critical performance indicators that need to improve to ensure an upward trajectory.

10 Sustaining Continuous Improvement

10.1 A final draft of the Continuous Improvement Plan was shared at the meeting in August. 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. The final version will be incorporated into the Children's Services Strategic Plan 2019-2022 and shared with Board members at the October meeting before publishing. It will then be presented to this board.

10.2 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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