

Report to Cabinet

Title:	Children's Services Update
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Author:	Cabinet Member for Children's Services Cabinet Member for Education & Skills
Contact officer:	Tolis Vouyioukas – 01296 382603
Local members affected:	All Electoral Divisions
Portfolio areas affected:	All portfolio areas

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Cabinet on both national and local developments in relation to Children's Services. In addition, this report includes an overview of progress made against the high level action plan put in place following the November 2017 Ofsted inspection.

Recommendation

Cabinet to note: (a) the key improvement activity in response to the November 2017 Ofsted inspection, and (b) the national and local developments in Children's Services.

A. National context

1. The following section gives an overview of the key national developments in Children's Services. We regularly assess the implications of these for Buckinghamshire and proposals will be brought to Cabinet, where appropriate.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

2. Following the Children and Social Work Act receiving Royal Assent on 27th April 2017, several pieces of emergent secondary legislation are now under Government

consultation. These include, the formation of Social Work England, a National Assessment and Accreditation System and reform of Working Together to Safeguard Children'. Local authorities are awaiting detailed outcomes on the changes this secondary legislation will bring.

Social Work England

3. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) currently regulates social workers in England alongside 15 other professions. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides for the establishment of a new regulatory body, 'Social Work England' to improve confidence in social work and raise the status of the profession.
4. Social Work England's central focus will be public protection, specifically to drive up standards in social work education, training and practice. The intention is that they will operate a quality assurance system for continuous professional development ensuring all social workers remain fit to practice. The consultation sought views on a range of proposals in relation to social work registration, fitness to practice regulation and education and training standards. This closed in March 2018. Lord Kamlesh Kumar Patel OBE has since been announced as the Chair of Social Work England and throughout 2018, the body will be recruiting staff and working with the current regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council, to ensure a smooth transition. Social Work England is not expected to be operational before Spring 2019.

National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)

5. In December 2017, the Government responded to the consultation to implement a National Assessment and Accreditation System for child and family social workers. The system has been designed to raise the professional status of child and family social workers, providing a clear career path and ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to practice effectively.
6. The initial roll out will be staged in two phases, with a number of voluntary selected authorities whose workforce will be assessed against specific 'effective practice' criteria, known as the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS). The KSS for child and family social work, which set out professional standards required from a number of different roles, were refreshed in March 2018. Additionally, the British Association of Social Workers introduced a refreshed Professional Capabilities Framework to stand alongside the KSS, providing the foundation for social work education and practice in England.
7. No plans for national rollout announced as of yet. The Children's Minister announced in a speech on 18th April 2018 that the first rollout would begin in July and stated 'we are working closely with all parts of the sector, including universities, to make sure we get the delivery NAAS right before we introduce it nationally. That is why we are beginning with 21 sites with around 5,000 social workers'.

Working Together to Safeguard Children

8. The Department for Education (DfE) recently consulted on significant revisions to 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', the statutory guidance which sets out what is expected of all agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
9. Revisions include proposals to replace Local Safeguarding Children Boards with new arrangements led by a group of safeguarding partners as well as changes to serious case review and child death review processes. Final regulations are expected by May 2018, with new arrangements to be in place by September 2019.

Independent Review of Foster Care

10. In February 2018, an independent review of foster care in England, commissioned by the Department for Education was published. The review, which examined the purpose of foster care and what it means for those closely involved in the system, drew on a wide range of information including a public call for evidence and interviews with agencies, families and children from across the foster care system.
11. The review makes 36 recommendations to improve the outcomes for children in foster care. These include guaranteeing foster carers are supported; improvements to commissioning and matching; and creating greater stability and permanence for those in foster care.

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

12. In January 2018, Ofsted introduced a new inspection framework designed to be more proportionate, risk-based and flexible than the previous Single Inspection Framework (SIF) introduced in 2014. A local authority's current Ofsted grade will determine the kind of inspection it is subject to and the contact and support it receives in-between visits. Frequent contact between inspections helps Ofsted to identify any issues of concern and supports local authorities to address them before services deteriorate.
13. Local authorities will be asked to annually evaluate the quality and impact of their social work practice, as well as having a formal yearly conversation with Ofsted about performance. Ofsted will continue to use the Single Inspection Framework for re-inspections of inadequate children's services.
14. It is worth noting, that Buckinghamshire will be re-inspected under the previous framework.

Action to Improve Outcomes for Children with Additional Needs

15. In March 2018, the Government announced plans to transform education for children with additional needs and to improve the experiences of children in alternative provision. They include an externally led review of school exclusions; a £4 million fund to develop new ways to help children with additional needs move from alternative provision into mainstream education or special schools; and measures to drive up standards in alternative provision education settings. Aspire, the secondary pupil referral unit in Buckinghamshire, submitted an application that aims to support children to reintegrate into suitable mainstream or special school placements. If successful, the project will run for two years from September 2018 to July 2020. The DfE are expected to announce who has been successful in June 2018.

Children and Young People's Mental Health

16. In late 2017, the Government consulted on a green paper setting out measures to improve mental health support for children and young people. The paper focused on earlier intervention and prevention, especially in and linked to schools and colleges. Proposals included:
 - Creating a new mental health workforce of community-based mental health support teams.
 - Every school and college to be encouraged to appoint a designated mental health lead.

- A new 4-week waiting time for NHS children and young people's mental health services to be piloted in some areas.

17. The consultation concluded in March 2018 and the Government will publish a response in due course. In May 2018, the Education and Health and Social Care Committees published a joint report regarding the proposals set out in the Green Paper and have made a series of recommendations for the Government to consider when responding to the Green Paper consultation.

New Measures to Support Children with SEND

18. In March 2018, the DfE announced a range of measures to provide support for children with special educational need and disabilities. Measures include sponsors for 14 new special schools nationally, creating more than 1100 school places for children with multiple learning needs; a national trial to give the SEND Tribunal new powers, allowing parents and young people new rights to appeal on the social care and health parts of their plan alongside existing rights around education; an additional fund to support local authority regional SEND coordinators; and a SEND review tool to help schools identify priorities and build school to school approaches to improvement.

B. Local context

The following section focuses on the current issues and key priorities in Children's Services.

19. By way of reminder, Change for Children is our transformation programme that supports the implementation of the Buckinghamshire Children's Strategy 2016 to improve outcomes for children and young people, whilst at the same time ensuring that services are financially stable and affordable in the long term. Robust governance arrangements are in place to monitor the progress of the programme. This includes a Programme Board, chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services. Both Cabinet Members are part of this Board. A summary of progress against each of the main work streams is as follows:

Early Help for Children and Families

20. The Council will be launching a pre consultation on the new model of delivery in the coming months. This will be followed by the full consultation later in the Autumn.

Support for Looked After Children

21. This work stream focuses on improving placement sufficiency for Buckinghamshire's Looked After Children population. Our residential care homes project will create an additional 20 in-house residential beds to reduce the number of children placed outside the county and improve placement stability.

- Home 1 is located in Aylesbury and will be a 5 bed home. The home is now fully refurbished and will be ready to open once the Ofsted registration process is complete. The registration is due in June.
- Home 2 is also located in Aylesbury. This will be a 4 bed, short placement/assessment home, with an attached 1 bed unit for emergency placements. We anticipate that the home will open in December 2018.
- Homes 3 & 4 will be located in the south of the county. Both of which will be 5 bed homes. Unfortunately, the previously identified sites are no longer suitable and as a result further scoping work is required to find alternative locations. We are aiming to have both open in 2019, subject to the identification of appropriate sites.

22. The second project is about increasing the capacity of in-house foster placements. This is an area which requires further work and to support this a new recruitment and retention strategy has been developed. There is a strong focus on improving our offer to achieve a 20% net increase in placements year on year to 2021. This includes working with Bucks Business First to engage with the business community through the foster friendly employer initiative.

Educating our Children

23. The loss of the Education Support Grant alongside significant policy changes in relation to education has contributed to ongoing discussions between the Council and the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT) on the sustainability of the current level of investment.

24. Following the January 2018 Cabinet decision not to extend the agreement with the BLT, we have proceeded with the transfer of statutory functions previously delivered by the BLT to the Council. In April 2018, the first phase was completed and this included:

- Specialist Teaching, Cognition & Learning Service
- Early Years Service (including workforce development)
- Schools Financial Management Advisory Service

25. The final phase will include the transfer of the statutory functions within School Improvement and Governor Service. It is expected that these two services will transfer on 1 August 2018.

26. In parallel, we have been consulting with schools and providers on a new Education and Skills Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to create a shared vision for Buckinghamshire that clearly articulates our ambition for children and young people in the County. The final version will be presented to Cabinet on 18 June 2018.

27. As a result of the consultation a new delivery model has been developed which focuses on enabling schools to take responsibility for their own improvement, in line the national agenda. To facilitate this, we have developed 'Side by Side', a programme which is built on the premise of sharing expertise within an environment of mutual trust across school sin Buckinghamshire. 'Side by Side' as a delivery mechanism will ensure that we are able to develop a system led model of leadership and school to school led model of improvement.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

28. Having considered the initial proposals for the changes to Post-16 SEN Transport provision, the Council has decided that it is timely to review the entire Home to School Transport for the 0-25 cohort of children and young people attending education and training.

29. A comprehensive communications plan has been produced, following the recommendations from the Consultation Institute. This plan has included feedback from our internal communications team, as well as both Democratic and Legal Services, to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are included at appropriate stages throughout.

30. A project plan is in the final stages of production to ensure that there is ownership of all tasks, and that accountability is maintained throughout the life of the project. Regular reports are to be provided to both the Change for Children Programme Board and the Integrated Transport Board in acknowledgement of the contribution of work across both portfolios.

31. The SEN staff restructure will commence in June which will enable the team to manage the demand for assessment requests and provide greater support within schools.

Key improvement activity

Senior appointments

32. The Executive Director of Children's Services undertook a targeted recruitment campaign to appoint a new senior management and leadership team. The details of the new team are as follows:

- Interim Service Director (started 15th January 2018) and is now the Interim Service Director for Improvement (from 16th April 2018)
- Permanent Service Director (started 16th April 2018)
- Permanent Head of Service for First Response (started 3rd April 2018)
- Permanent Head of Service for Safeguarding (started 9th April 2018)
- Permanent Head of Service for Care Management (recruitment pending)
- Permanent Head of Service for Care Services (Fostering, Adoption, Residential & Placements) (interim appointment became permanent)
- Permanent Head of Quality, Standards and Performance (retained)
- Permanent Head of Youth Offending Service (started 7th May 2018)
- Permanent Head of Early Help (started 14th May 2018)

Placement at Home with Parents Arrangements

33. During the November 2017 inspection, Ofsted raised concerns in relation to children subject to Care Orders who are placed at home with parents. These arrangements are part of the legal framework set out in Regulations 15 to 20 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulation 2010 which govern practice and decision making regarding the return of children, who are the subject of Interim Care Orders or Care Orders, to the care of their families.

34. Inspectors found that these arrangements were not always effective to ensure that parents comply with expectations to keep their children safe and well. Following an immediate review that was completed during the inspection, further action was taken to check that these arrangements are sufficiently robust to assure the safety and wellbeing of all children placed at home with their parents.

35. A more comprehensive review has since taken place of all children who are placed at home with parents. This has included an analysis of the child's care planning history by the relevant Independent Reviewing Officer with oversight by the Head of Service for Quality, Standards and Performance. The review also included, a home visit to each child, updated assessments of needs, risks and circumstances, a review of the views, wishes and feelings of the children and parents plus individual case consultations led by the Interim Service Director. Actions have now been agreed for each child.

36. Going forward, a number of wider system issues will continue to be improved as part of a planned review of the Public Law Outline process for court care proceedings. These changes will ensure that care planning, case monitoring and court outcomes identify and track all new placement at home with parents arrangements.

Safeguarding Service Re-alignment

37. In 2017, a decision was taken to implement a Safeguarding Service restructure to introduce joint Court and Child Protection Teams and establish separate Child in Need

Teams made up of predominantly newly qualified social workers who were in their first Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). These arrangements were unpopular with staff and difficult to manage. Staff consistently reported that the changes did not support them to deliver best practice.

38. Staff 'Solution Groups' for practitioners and managers, that were established immediately following the Ofsted inspection, have worked collaboratively with the Senior Leadership Team to reach a consensus about the need to re-align the Children in Need, Child Protection and Court Teams within the Safeguarding Service. Children in Need, including those in need of Help and Protection, will now be supported by social workers and managers from the same team. There will also be a separate dedicated Court Team. Staff within the Safeguarding Service were invited to steer and shape arrangements for the re-aligned teams, with multiple opportunities to share and influence ideas. The realignment of the teams in the Safeguarding Service offers a number of anticipated benefits including:

- A clear focus on Public Law Outline specific practice within a county wide dedicated Court Team based in Aylesbury to be near Legal Services and the local family court in Milton Keynes.
- Improved workload balance across the service.
- Improved Social Worker continuity for children in need of help and protection.
- Co-working opportunities for newly qualified social workers to learn alongside more experienced social workers and benefit from improved observation, joint working and coaching opportunities.
- Increased opportunities for enhanced practice and skills development for newly qualified social workers working with children in need of help and protection.

39. The re-aligned structure, co-produced with Team Managers, became operational on 1st May 2018.

Children in Need Audit and Review

40. In February 2018, Children's Services began an ambitious audit and review of 1,120 open Child in Need to provide assurance about their safety and wellbeing. The audit and review will provide an opportunity to evaluate social work practice, through scrutinising electronic case records and consulting with allocated staff, to reach a professional judgement about the overall standard of practice and the child's safety and well-being.

41. An escalation protocol is in place for audits judged to be 'inadequate' so that the Service Director and relevant Head of Service are notified to address the immediate remedial action that is required and assure the safety and wellbeing of children. The central tracking system enables each Head of Service and relevant Team Managers to have oversight of the audit findings, recommendations and remedial actions for all audited cases. Weekly team meetings and individual supervisions are used to ensure that there is no drift or delay to progress the audit recommendations and remedial action plans for children and young people.

Quality Assurance Framework "Beyond Auditing"

42. Ofsted identified that quality assurance activity was not consistently driving improvement in practice and the audit tools in place did not give sufficient attention to qualitative as well as quantitative data. As a result of those findings, a new quality assurance framework approach, called 'Beyond Auditing' has been developed and launched. The approach connects the processes of audit, feedback, learning and

change through direct work between auditors and operational staff before, during and after auditing has taken place. This maximises the engagement and participation of practitioners and operational managers in the process of audit. This promotes service, team and individual ownership of audit outcomes and enhances the insight of operational staff in relation to strengths and areas for development in practice.

43. A rolling programme of deep dive 'audit weeks' are scheduled to take place across all three key sites. During the period of auditing activity, the Beyond Auditing Team will be on site with Social Work staff and will sample work from each team within the service to form evidence based conclusions about the overall quality of practice. The audit will be conducted through a review of case files and other associated documentation, speaking with Social Workers and Managers, direct observation of practice including supervision sessions and team interactions, including speaking to children and families and contacting other agencies. Real time feedback will be provided as part of a coaching conversation with staff in relation to the identified practice issues.
44. At the start of the audit week there will be a set up meeting to establish the arrangements and any specific areas of focus. At the conclusion, individual and thematic findings will be provided to the Team Managers and Head of Service, providing an opportunity for check, challenge and ownership of the audit outcome. Themes drawn from each period of auditing activity, specific to the outcome for individual teams and the overarching service, will feed into an overarching programme of learning and development for the whole of Children's Social Care Services.

Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager Development Centre

45. Ofsted identified a significant concern about the lack of management oversight and decision making in Children's Social Care. It has been recognised that there is a need to provide additional support and challenge at the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager levels. The aim is to create an environment where Team and Assistant Team Managers are confident and capable to manage service operations, make informed decision decisions about children's needs, risks and circumstances, monitor service delivery, provide management oversight and offer regular and reflective supervision to staff.
46. A series of Development Centres have been organised, in consultation with external occupational psychologists, as a way to support Team and Assistant Team Managers to evaluate individual strengths and areas for development and provide bespoke learning and development opportunities to improve overall performance standards and outcomes for children, young people and their families.
47. The Development Centre Assessment Framework includes the following:
 - Setting direction and standards
 - Managing and monitoring progress
 - Managing performance
 - Managing information and making decisions
 - Professional knowledge and practice
48. The Development Centres started at the beginning of June 2018 and will run through to August 2018.

Re-inspection of 1A (the Council's residential home)

49. Following the inadequate judgement received in December 2017, our residential home has recently been re-inspected by OFSTED and was rated to be Good.

Commissioner Related Activity

50. On 5 March 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) appointed a Children's Commissioner for Buckinghamshire. The Commissioner is John Coughlan (CBE) who is the Chief Executive of Hampshire County Council. His role is to apply additional external impetus and insurance on Buckinghamshire's improvement work. In cases such as Buckinghamshire, where there has been a repeat inadequate judgement, the DfE require that a key "presumption" is tested. The presumption is that a local authority which has experienced a repeat inadequate judgement may not have the wherewithal to sustainably improve and so should no longer have unilateral control of its children's services. In such cases an Alternative Delivery Model (ADM), such as a children's trust or a formal partnership with another organisation may be introduced.
51. The Commissioner with his Director of Children's Services, Steve Crocker, are reviewing the service. They have been on site, visiting and interviewing senior leaders, elected members, managers and social work practitioners. The Commissioner has also requested information to enable him to form a view about the most appropriate way to secure improved outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire.
52. On 24 April 2018 the Improvement Board, chaired by the Commissioner, met to consider progress against the improvement action plan and provided challenge and support to drive forward improvements across Children's Services. The Commissioner is expected to provide an initial recommendation to the minister at the beginning of June 2018.
53. Since the publication of the Ofsted inspection report on 29th January 2018, the high level plan has been developed further to incorporate the 10 Ofsted recommendations. A significant amount of immediate remedial action has been undertaken to establish a firm foundation upon which to build improvement across the service.
54. A large proportion of the immediate actions set out within the action plan have been progressed, with many requiring ongoing scrutiny as part of the continuous journey of improvement. The next phase of the improvement journey will focus on testing the foundations now in place and adapting our improvement plans accordingly to ensure that services are strengthened and able to respond with grip and pace to the significant legacy and emergent issues.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit activity

55. Ofsted will be carrying out a series of monitoring visits. The first post-inspection monitoring visit will be undertaken on 3 and 4 July 2018 and will focus on Children in Need. In due course, Children's Services will receive a further unannounced re-inspection in accordance with the Single Inspection Framework.

Children's Services Workforce Strategy

56. There has been a great deal of investment in the Children's Services workforce and we recognise how vitally important our people are in providing the right outcomes for children and families.
57. Workforce data is regularly reported to Senior Leadership and the Workforce Board. We have a monthly operational Resourcing Group chaired by a Head of Service, as well as a strategic Workforce Board chaired by the Head of Quality Standards & Performance. Both groups are attended by recruitment managers across Children's Services and by members of Human Resources/Organisational Development and Resourcing teams including our commissioned services partners for agency recruitment.

58. We have a Workforce Strategic Plan and a regular monthly dashboard of data and trends provided to the service.
59. The Executive Director for Children Service's (DCS) has held individual/team staff surgeries across the 3 office locations. These provided an opportunity for staff to share their views, feelings and ideas with the DCS. Further surgeries will be scheduled termly.

Recruitment & Retention

60. We actively focus on recruitment of permanent staff to replace agency workers and our stats show that we have brought the percentage of agency workers down from the peak of over 25% in 2016. We have sustained this reduction and now fluctuate between around 18-20% of the workforce depending on operational needs. In comparison, this is still slightly higher than the average for both England (16%) and the South East (15%).
61. We are fortunate to demonstrate a sustained increase in the permanent workforce and a relatively stable number of agency workers over the last 2 years. Over this time period our combined workforce numbers have gone up because of increased case-loads but the percentage ratio of permanent to agency has gone down. We have converted 29 agency Social Workers to permanent contracts since 2016.
62. Our turnover rate has been steadily improving over the last year and is now equal to the national average (15%). We conduct on-boarding and leaver surveys to inform us about relevant issues and have implemented a number of initiatives over the last 3 years to help attract and retain staff.
63. We need to further develop our recruitment and attraction strategy and agree a realistic budget to support and maintain this.
64. We also need to further embed the critical role Team Managers play in welcoming, supporting and mentoring new staff.

Reward & Recognition Arrangements

65. Market data has allowed us to demonstrate that in some cases, special reward arrangements are necessary for us to attract and retain the best quality of people into the Children's workforce. New allowances have been signed off by SABPAC for Social Workers and Educational Psychologists in 2018/19. These will be reviewed annually with the next review scheduled for early 2019.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

N/A

C. Resource implications

N/A

D. Value for Money (VfM) Self Assessment

N/A

E. Legal implications

N/A

F. Property implications

N/A

G. Other implications/issues

N/A

H. Feedback from consultation, Local Area Forums and Local Member views

N/A

I. Communication issues

N/A

J. Progress Monitoring

N/A

K. Review

This report is intended to provide a six monthly update on the full range of policy developments and service transformation activity taking place within children's services in Buckinghamshire in response to national and local drivers.

Background Papers

None
