

Report to Cabinet

Title:	Children's Services Update
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Local members affected:	All
Portfolio areas affected:	Children's Services and Education & Skills

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of the national and local developments across Children's Services. In addition, this report includes (a) an overview of the key activity within the service during the last 6 months, and (b) the progress against the phase 2 Ofsted Improvement Plan.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to NOTE (a) the national, regional and local developments across Children's Services, and (b) the programme of work taking place to further improve Children's Services in Buckinghamshire.

National context

1. The following section gives an overview of the key national developments in Children's Services.

Homelessness

2. In December 2018, Shelter published a [report](#) looking at the number of children who are homeless in Britain and the impact homelessness can have on children and young people. Homelessness legislation in all parts of Britain means that children should never have to sleep rough although there are extreme cases where this can happen for a short time. There are, however, a huge number of children living in households who have been accepted as being officially homeless and are living in temporary accommodation. Even though these children have a roof over their heads they are still officially classed as homeless because it is not a permanent home and they can be moved on at very short notice. At the point the report was published it was estimated that 131,000 children would be homeless in Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) at Christmas. This is 3% higher than last year (or over 3,000 more children), 59% higher than five years ago (nearly 50,000 more children).

3. Senior managers within the service are working with districts colleagues to improve Buckinghamshire's responses to homelessness and this continues to be a key priority across the partnership.
4. In partnership with district colleagues, the service recently hosted a visit from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Youth Homelessness Team, where their advisor reviewed Buckinghamshire's approach to preventing young people from becoming homeless. Key points from the visit are shown below:
 - There is a strong commitment at senior officer level to improve outcomes for young people.
 - There is evidence of improved working relationships in recent years between front line staff and managers.
 - Senior managers across the districts are working well together.
 - There is more work to do to make sure that the housing protocol for 16 and 17 year olds is well cascaded across services.
 - The knowledge of front line staff in relation to the Homelessness Reduction Act needs to be improved.
5. The service will be working closely with our district colleagues in the coming months on the points raised above.

Review of children in need: interim findings

6. In December 2018, DfE published the [interim findings](#) of the Children in Need review. The findings through the review so far, provide an assessment of why the educational outcomes of Children in Need across England are so poor, and what is needed to improve them. The DfE will use these findings to identify, target, and implement changes in support of this, using evidence of what works to improve the experiences and outcomes of all Children in Need. The ambition of the Children in Need review is that every child should have the opportunity to realise their potential, recognising that where children have faced adversity, trauma, or are disabled, achieving high educational standards often requires high support.
7. The DfE's assessment of what is needed to identify and overcome the barriers faced by children in need spans leadership and multi-agency working; practitioners' skills and training in assessing needs, planning support, and building relationships with children and families; and effective educational support itself – ranging from inclusive whole school approaches, to day-to-day adjustments, and targeted specialist interventions. The importance of high aspiration and advocacy for Children in Need was a theme throughout. Based on these findings, the DfE will identify where there are gaps in policy and practice, and what more government can do to support the change that is needed. The work of bridging the gap between what is needed, and the current reality for children in need, will be the main focus of future work.
8. In light of these findings, the Business Intelligence and Insight team will be analysing the results of children in need within Buckinghamshire compared to their peers.

Young people's alcohol and drug use

9. In December 2018, Public Health England published [statistics](#) on alcohol and drug treatment in England for young people under 18-years-old in 2017/18. Information on young people's mental health needs were included for the first time this year. There were 15,583 young people in specialist substance misuse services in 2017 to 2018. This was a 5% decrease from 2016 to 2017 (16,436) and a continuation of a year on year downward

trend. There has been a 35% decrease since a peak in 2008 to 2009 when 24,053 young people received treatment.

10. Cannabis remained the most common drug by far which young people came to treatment for. The majority (88%) of young people in specialist services said they had a problem with this drug. The proportion of young people in treatment saying that cannabis is their main problem substance has been on an upward trend from 2007 to 2008. Although total numbers have decreased slightly in recent years, the proportion of young people in treatment who have cannabis problems has remained stable in the last 2 years at 77%. The next most commonly reported problematic substance was alcohol. There were 7,206 young people in treatment for alcohol problems (46%). The number of young people receiving help for alcohol problems continued to steadily decline from the peak in 2008-09 when 16,047 were treated for alcohol. The number of young people entering treatment for problems with ecstasy in 2017 to 2018 increased by 16% from the previous year (1,815 to 2,112) and has almost doubled since 2013 to 2014. The increase in ecstasy treatment numbers was seen across all age groups.
11. Two-thirds of the young people accessing specialist substance misuse services were male (66%). Around three-quarters (74%) were aged 15 or over. The median age for both females and males was 15 years old. Only 43% of females were aged 16 or over compared to nearly half (49%) of males.
12. In Buckinghamshire, the number of young people using the young people's substance misuse service has remained stable between 2012/13 and 2015/16 with no statistical evidence of a trend; however, in the last two years that number has continued to decrease.

Year	No. of young people
2012/2013	224
2013/2014	181
2014/2015	186
2015/2016	202
2016/2017	176
2017/2018	171
2018/2019	121

13. In line with national trend the majority of young people accessing the service are males. In 2016/17 69% of young people using the young people's substance misuse service were male (121 people) and 31% were female (55 people). More than 70% of young people who used Buckinghamshire's young people's substance misuse service in 2016/17 were aged between 15 and 17.
14. Locally, Switch Bucks is the commissioned children and young people substance misuse service, delivered by Cranstoun. The service which commenced operation in October 2018, delivers support that focuses on reducing risk, reducing harm and building resilience, to children and young people age 10-18 years (and up to 25 years in exceptional cases) across Buckinghamshire who are:
 - experiencing substance misuse related issues; or
 - at risk of developing problematic substance misuse; or
 - are impacted by parental or other family member substance use.
15. The service offers easy and rapid access to support from premises in the town centres of High Wycombe and Aylesbury, as well as delivering from a variety of community venues across Buckinghamshire, including schools. The service operates five days per week from 9:30am-6:00pm. In addition, when required the service will deliver specialist interventions during the evenings and attend events such as festivals. Switch Bucks

offers support and information, and helps young people to develop life skills to make healthy choices regarding their alcohol and drug use. Switch also provides support and information for the families and carers of young people who are struggling with substance misuse.

Teacher recruitment and retention in England

16. In January 2019, the DfE published a [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#) in response to the national shortage of teachers. The strategy's central reform is the introduction of [Early Career Framework](#), which will underpin an entitlement to 'a fully-funded, 2 year package of structured support for all early career teachers' including 5% funded off timetable time in the second year of teaching. Teaching remains a popular career choice for many with over 2,000 more trainee teachers for the 2018 to 2019 academic year than in 2017 to 2018, continuing the positive trend from the previous year; however, the growing number of pupils of secondary age means that even more teachers are needed. This is at a time when more teachers are leaving the profession than before.
17. At the core of the strategy is the understanding that there are no great schools without great teachers. No other profession is as important to the fate of the next generation or is as uniquely rewarding as teaching. The strategy outlines four key areas where focus, investment and reform can have the biggest impact on improving teacher recruitment and retention:
 - a) Create the right climate for leaders to establish supportive school cultures.
 - b) Transform support for early career teachers.
 - c) Build a career offer that remains attractive to teachers as their careers and lives develop.
 - d) Make it easier for great people to become teachers.
18. Locally, we have developed a Schools Recruitment and Retention Steering Group, made of Headteachers across all stages of education, officers from within the service and colleagues in HR. To date, this group has led on the successful implementation of the following:
 - New processes for secondments, exit interviews and succession planning.
 - Revised templates and information for schools to use.
 - A new recruitment website to showcase opportunities within schools.
 - 'Get into teaching' events organised to promote teaching as a career option.
 - Preparing to pilot the postgraduate teaching apprenticeship in the county from September 2019.
19. In Buckinghamshire schools, many Headteachers have reported that it is becoming slightly easier to recruit staff during the last year; however, this is not the picture for all schools or at all times of the academic year.
20. In addition, to support teacher retention, on 15 March 2019, the DfE announced a new expert advisory group to look at how teachers and school leaders can be better supported to deal with the pressures of the job and will promote better well-being for teachers.

Changes to the education inspection framework

21. In January 2019, Ofsted opened a [consultation](#) for proposals on how Ofsted inspects schools, early years settings and further education and skills providers, to take effect from September 2019.

22. Curriculum will become a key focus of Ofsted under the plans, with inspectors looking for evidence that 'young people are being taught the best of what has been thought and said'. Rather than focusing on pupil outcomes in isolation, Ofsted will consider whether schools are teaching a 'broad and rich learning' and not narrowing the curriculum or 'teaching to the test'. The consultation acknowledges that it will take schools some time to change their curriculum, and that schools showing positive intentions will not be penalised. In addition, a single 'quality of education' judgement will replace the existing 'quality of teaching, learning and assessment' and 'outcomes for pupils' categories. Pupil outcomes will instead be assessed in the context of the school, and inspectors will focus on 'how providers are deciding what to teach and why, how well they are doing it and whether it is leading to strong outcomes for young people results are achieved'. By focusing on curriculum rather than outcomes, Ofsted wants to challenge the increasing practice of 'off-rolling' pupils, removing them from the school in interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil. Other changes set out under the proposal include:

- The current judgement for 'personal development, behaviour and welfare' will be split in to two separate categories – 'behaviour and attitudes' and 'personal development'.
- Inspectors will not use internal data as inspection evidence but will ask school leaders to explain 'why they collect the data they do, what they draw from it and how it informs their curriculum and teaching'. This is to ensure that inspection does not create unnecessary work for teachers.
- That inspectors will arrive at the school on the same day as the school is notified of the inspection, so that the inspectors carry out preparation onsite the afternoon before the visit, working with the senior leaders.

23. For those responsible for governance, the draft handbook sets out that inspectors will:

- Evaluate the role that governors and trustees play in the school's performance as part of the judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management, and each report will contain a separate paragraph that addresses the governance of the school.
- Talk to the chair of governors/board of trustees by telephone if they are unable to attend a face-to-face meeting with the inspector in the school.
- Have discussions with those responsible for governance without the headteacher or other senior staff being present.
- Share the preliminary findings of the inspection confidentially with the senior leaders of the school including all those responsible for the governance of the school so long as they are clearly marked as provisional and subject to quality assurance.

24. The service welcomes these proposals fully.

Elective home educated

25. In February 2019, the Children's Commissioner for England published a [report](#) looking at the growing number of children who are being educated at home. The report finds that, while many parents who make a decision to home educate their children provide them with a high quality education, many other families are home educating for other reasons and are struggling to cope. The Children's Commissioner's report notes that while there are many parents who make a positive philosophical choice to educate their children at home, and do an excellent job, this is not always the case. There are tens of thousands of children in England receiving no school education. Many of them are 'off-grid', invisible to local authorities. Following these investigations and research in the Commissioner's report, the Children's Commissioner is now calling for a compulsory home education

register, stronger measures to tackle 'off-rolling', more support for families who home educate, and a greater oversight of home schooled children and decisive action against unregistered schools. Later this year, the Children's Commissioner's Office will also collect data from all councils in England and publish it, school by school, identifying which schools have high numbers of children being withdrawn into home education which may suggest practices of off-rolling.

26. Some of the findings in the Children's Commissioner's published report include:

- In 2018, there were almost 60,000 children in England being home educated at any one time, although the precise figure remains unknown because parents do not have to register home-educated children.
- The number of children who are known by councils to be home educated was 27% higher in 2018 than in 2017. It has risen by 20% in each of the last five years, doubling since 2013/14.
- Across the local authorities studied by the Children's Commissioner, from 2015/16 to 2017/18 there was a 32% increase in the number of primary school children moving from school to home education, alongside a 71% increase in secondary schools.
- A very small number of schools are responsible for the majority of moves into home education. Nine out of ten schools saw no more than two referrals into home education a year, but for a minority of schools it can be more than 15 a year.

27. In Buckinghamshire, 640 children are recorded as being electively home educated, a 19% increase in the last year, which is in line and reflects regional and national trends. To support our oversight in this area, the service continues to remind schools of their responsibilities to report children missing education and regular training is delivered to support schools in monitoring irregular attendance. In addition, an officer will visit every family who chooses to home educate their child within four weeks of being notified.

28. In addition, the DfE has just concluded a consultation that proposes changes to legislation that will require:

- Local authorities to create and maintain a register of home-educated children.
- Local authorities to provide support to home educating families if it is requested.
- Parents to inform their local authority when their child is not attending a mainstream school.
- Settings attended by the children on the register to respond to attendance enquiries from local authorities.

29. The measures above are in response to growing concerns from across the children's sector about the rise in the number of children being home schooled and the difficulties faced by children's services in monitoring the quality of education they receive and to identify and address any safeguarding issues. Whilst a register in and of itself will not keep children safe, it will help to establish exactly how many children are being educated other than at school and assist with the identification of children who are vulnerable to harm.

Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation

30. In February 2019, Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, published an in-depth study looking at children in England who are members of gangs. The report, ["Keeping kids safe: Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation"](#), estimates there are 27,000 children in England who identify as a gang member, only a fraction of whom are known to children's services. Some of these children may only identify loosely with a gang and may not be involved in crime or

serious violence. More concerning is the estimated 34,000 children who know gang members who have experienced serious violence in the last year.

31. The research looked into the characteristics of children involved in gangs compared to other children known to children's services or other child offenders. Those with gang associations are:

- 95% more likely to have social, emotional and mental health issues and more than twice as likely to be self-harming;
- 41% more likely to have a parent or carer misusing substances and eight times more likely to be misusing substances themselves;
- 37% more likely to have witnessed domestic violence; and
- 37% more likely to be missing/absent from school.

32. The Children's Commissioner makes a number of recommendations in the report:

- a) The government needs to make child criminal exploitation a national priority, and lay out clear expectations about the role of all organisations working with children – including the police, schools, children's services and NHS bodies.
- b) Joint inspections between Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and the police and probation inspectorates should be rolled out across England, starting with the areas with high gang violence which were unable to respond to the information request for this report.
- c) More support from the NHS, including better mental health support for children at risk of gang membership and exclusion.
- d) An urgent commitment to what will replace the soon-to-expire Troubled Families programme, alongside a long-term family-based approach to supporting children at risk of gang involvement.
- e) Ensuring councils have enough resources to provide the youth and early help services required to meet the needs of children at risk.

33. In Buckinghamshire, the children's services partnership has been working hard to ensure there is a more coordinated approach to tackle the exploitation of children and serious youth violence. This work includes:

- a) Revising the work of the service's sexual exploitation hub in the MASH to consider all forms of exploitation rather than solely sexual exploitation of children. The purpose of this hub is to support and deliver interventions to children at risk of/being exploited. This is linked to the wider strategic Missing and Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference (M-SERAC) which is attended by senior representatives from Thames Valley Police, Social Care, Education providers, Youth Offending Services, Youth Services, Health and commissioned voluntary sector services to ensure trends, patterns and emerging themes are identified and a partnership approach is applied to any agreed interventions.
- b) The Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service (YOS) alongside colleagues has secured funding for one year from the Early Intervention Youth Fund. This will fund a youth worker post to work with schools offering intervention to at risk children, as well as working with those children who may have been arrested but not charged with an offence. In addition, the funding has also secured one full time Speech and Language Therapist to work in 8 secondary schools to screen, raise awareness of and deliver intervention where needed as there is clear research which links offending to unrecognised speech and language needs.
- c) The Youth Offending Service has also reallocated resources to consider how best to maximise engagement at an earlier stage of a child's life to prevent offending. As a result, a pilot programme is currently underway where a YOS worker is based within a

particular school one day a fortnight to work with children within their school setting and support positive engagement within their communities.

- d) Schools are being trained by the YOS in restorative based approaches to increase the use of restorative principles with an aim to reduce exclusions and improve experiences in how children manage conflict and challenging situations.

34. The priority in this area of work is to improve responses to violence and criminal exploitation across all agencies by way of raising awareness, understanding of our local trends and ensuring resources and interventions are appropriate and proportionate to identified needs.

Mental health and well-being in schools

35. At the end of February 2019, the DfE confirmed that from September 2020 pupils of all ages will be taught a new subject, 'Health Education', focusing on promoting the positive link between physical and mental health. All children in England will be taught how to look after their mental well-being and recognise when classmates may be struggling. This comes alongside the introduction of compulsory relationships education for primary-age pupils and relationships and sex education for secondary-age pupils, to ensure children have all the knowledge they need to grow up healthy, happy and safe. The draft statutory guidance, as it stands, states at primary level children would study issues including:

- the importance of mental well-being alongside physical health,
- understanding and discussing emotions,
- benefits of physical exercise,
- loneliness,
- where to seek support, and
- that it is common to have mental health problems and that these can be resolved with support.

At secondary level, children would study issues including:

- how to talk about emotions,
- that happiness is linked to being connected to others,
- how to recognise the early signs of mental well-being problems,
- common types of mental ill health, and
- the positive and negative impact of various activities on mental health.

36. Given that mental health is the primary reason for referral in just under 10% of cases, the introduction of this new subject into the curriculum is welcomed by the service.

Building a workforce that works for all children

37. In March 2019, The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) published a new policy position paper setting out aspirations for a 'workforce that works for all children' and what is needed to achieve this goal. This paper highlights the importance of workers across children's services being supported to forge the relationships necessary to make a difference in the lives of children and families they work with.

38. ADCS comment that they have welcomed the government's continued commitment to raising the quality and profile of the social work profession; however, it is noted that there is a lack of focus on the 'wider children's workforce', such as youth workers, health visitors, school support staff and others, who also make a real difference to the lives of children and families.

39. The paper states that all those who work with, and support, children and families are ambitious about enabling them to thrive but it is only through a well-resourced wider workforce that this can be achieved. The paper calls on government to provide adequate funding and focus to develop a strong and functioning workforce to build a country that works for all children.

National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020

40. In March 2019, the DfE published the outline findings from the evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020. The Troubled Families Programme 2015-20 aims to:

- improve outcomes for families;
- transform local services; and
- provide savings for the taxpayer.

41. The national evaluation of the programme looks at how well the programme is achieving those aims. This is the fourth evaluation update and it brings together findings from the latest analysis of national and local datasets, a cost benefit analysis, case study research, staff survey research and follow up family survey. Overall, the evidence in this publication suggests that the programme is making a significant impact on some of our key outcomes measures and there is evidence from the case study research, staff survey and family survey to indicate further value not reflected in the data. The cost benefit analysis shows that it is providing a good rate of return on investment even using only a limited set of outcomes and a conservative estimate. However, there is scope to go further in integration between services and improvement of data management and access to specialist services. The report also notes that performance varies across the country. Evidence from this set of reports will inform future policy and programme development. The programme will also look to expand the evidence base through further analysis particularly looking at impacts in different areas and on specific cohorts. This will provide valuable insights for policy makers.

42. Whilst there are similarities locally, there is some local variation specific to Buckinghamshire. The 3 most prevalent outcomes for Buckinghamshire are in the categories of 'Children who need help', 'Parents and children with a range of health problems' and 'Families affected by domestic abuse and violence'. Based on the last 3 claims periods, over 89% of the successful outcomes were in relation to these 3 areas. Further work is required to progress people into work; however, relationships and data exchange with colleagues from Job Centre Plus will enable the team to focus on this area in the future.

43. In terms of our performance, based on the quarter 3 performance dashboard, Buckinghamshire had completed 43% of the total claim because of the time required (6 to 12 months) for families to be able to evidence sustained improvement, compared to an average of 33%. This places Buckinghamshire:

- 37th out of 141 Local Authorities;
- 6th out of 25 in the South East region; and
- 5th out of our 13 statistical neighbours.

44. The programme is due to end in March 2020; however, discussions are taking place between The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Treasury about the future of the programme

Funding to train more educational psychologists in schools:

45. In March 2019, the DfE also outlined plans to support more young people with additional educational needs. Funding worth £31.6 million will be used to train more Educational Psychologists ensuring that thousands of children across England will benefit from mental health and special needs support. The multi-million pound fund will see over 600 Educational Psychologist trainees receive free tuition and grants.

Supporting care leavers to stay in higher education:

46. Universities across the country are being called on to do more for young people leaving care by giving them personal support, helping them pay for accommodation and providing money to buy books and join social clubs. On average, just 6 per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 go into higher education, and those that do are nearly twice as likely to drop out than their peers. The new 'Higher Education Principles', published in 14 March 2019, set out how universities should do more for young people leaving care by providing them with personal support through buddy systems as well as giving them money for course materials and to fully experience student life. Currently, we are supporting 17 care leavers through university and this is something which the service continues to encourage.

Consultation of professional standards

47. On 1 May 2019, Social Work England closed a consultation on professional standards of social workers as the organisation prepares to become the new regulator for social workers in England, taking over from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

48. Now that the consultation has closed, Social Work England is in the process of analysing the responses before publishing a document which summarises the responses and explains the decisions that have been taken as a result.

Local context

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

School Inspections

50. Since the beginning of the year, 21 schools in Buckinghamshire have been inspected by Ofsted: 14 primary, 2 secondary, 2 all-through and 3 special schools. Of these inspections, 2 primary schools have not yet had the report and judgement published and therefore their outcomes remain confidential. The grades of the 19 published inspections are as follows:

	Primary	All-through	Secondary	Special
Outstanding				1 33%
Good	11 92%	2 100%	2 100%	2 66%
Requires Improvement	1 8%			
Inadequate				
Total	12	2	2	3

51. The overall picture within Buckinghamshire is that 91.5% of pupils attend a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' school, compared to 85% nationally. Our schools across the county continue to perform well which is very reassuring as this provides children and young people in Buckinghamshire with the best opportunity to flourish.

Sufficiency of places for looked after children

52. Over the last year, the service has continued to concentrate on developing and reinforcing a really clear message to the public regarding the benefits of fostering for Buckinghamshire County Council. In April 2018, the team set out to achieve a 20% growth of in-house fostering placements, to date we have in fact exceeded this target and we currently have 37 more in-house placements (24% increase) than we did in April 2018. This alone has avoided costs of over £5 million, compared to placing with an Independent Fostering Agency.

53. Our first new home in Aylesbury opened 6 months ago and recently had its first Ofsted inspection, where it was judged to be 'good'. Our second new home, also in Aylesbury opened in May 2019. In addition to residential beds, this home also has a welfare bed which allows the team to make short term placements for those who come into care in an emergency, helping us keep more young people within the county and find placements which better match their needs. The team is currently in the process of purchasing and completing the planning application on a property in High Wycombe for our third home. It is anticipated that if all goes to plan then the home will open in Spring 2020. We continue to review potential properties which match the criteria for the fourth home and unfortunately, none have been identified to date.

Special Educational Needs and Disability

54. Our SEND Improvement plan was revised in December 2018 and now includes contributions from a range of stakeholders. The immediate priorities are:

- a) Compliance with the statutory Education, Health and Care Planning 20 week timescale, annual review process and effective use of panels.
- b) Improving the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans and the family experience.
- c) Ensuring children have their needs met locally in mainstream schools where possible.
- d) Developing early identification and early intervention support as part of the Early Help programme.
- e) Developing a shared understanding of co-production.
- f) Improving transition arrangements as young people prepare for adulthood.
- g) Improving support to children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- h) Upskilling the workforce across the local area to ensure children and their families benefit from skilled and knowledgeable professionals.

55. Alongside these improvement priorities, work to remodel the Specialist Teaching Service, Educational Psychology Service and SEN Team into an Integrated SEND Service has been completed and a multi-disciplinary area based model has been adopted.

56. Preparation for a potential SEND Ofsted/CQC inspection is continuing and the Self Evaluation Framework is currently being updated by stakeholders from Health, Education and Social Care. Themes from inspections of other local areas are collated and are used to inform the ongoing preparations and improvement work.

Ofsted Monitoring Activity

57. Following the November 2017 inspection of Children's Social Care, Ofsted conducted their third monitoring visit on 22 and 23 May 2019. During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made, with a particular focus on:

- the quality of management decision making in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the application of thresholds for intervention.
- the quality, effectiveness and impact of assessment and planning in managing risk, and improving children's outcomes when they are first referred to the local authority.
- the arrangements in place to respond to children missing and at risk of exploitation.
- the quality and timeliness of supervision, management oversight and decision making, social work capacity and caseloads.

A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic case records, discussions with social workers and their managers and other supporting documentation. The monitoring visit letter is provided as Appendix 1, with the key findings set out below:

- a) Leaders are making steady progress in improving the service to children when they are referred to children's social care.
- b) Leaders' persistence in seeking to strengthen management oversight is beginning to deliver results. Supervision is taking place and the quality of management oversight has been strengthened.
- c) The senior leadership team has a sound understanding of the improvements that are needed in children's services and are steadfastly determined to improve the quality of services for children.
- d) The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides a mostly effective response to children's needs for early help and statutory intervention.
- e) Considerable work has taken place to strengthen social workers and managers understanding of thresholds. This has led to more confident, timely responses for most children.
- f) Management oversight has been strengthened since the last monitoring visit, and social work caseloads have reduced. This is beginning to provide social workers with the conditions they need to better support children and families.
- g) Children and families benefit from a range of early help services, but the early help service is under-developed.
- h) When children need protecting, the response is mostly effective, but the threshold for child protection intervention is not consistently applied.
- i) Contact and referral missing officers in the MASH ensure there is effective oversight of children who go missing. Not all children who go missing are offered return home interviews and, when they are offered, they are not always completed.
- j) Most children are visited regularly, but sometimes initial visits to children take too long and there can be gaps in visiting after initial intervention.
- k) Most child protection enquiries are thorough and lead to appropriate decisions. The quality of recording of the child protection enquiry remains too variable, with insufficient analysis.
- l) Managers are now more consistent in driving children's plans and supporting social workers, though leaders recognise that this work is not yet of the consistency, quality or regularity needed.
- m) Staff spoken to during the visit, told inspectors that they enjoy working in Buckinghamshire. They report being well supported by managers and, that leaders are visible and approachable.

- n) Newly appointed staff receive a thorough induction, which helps their transition into the service.
- o) In a small minority of children's cases, there are delays in convening strategy discussions and not all relevant agencies are consistently engaged in strategy discussions, particularly health partners.

58. The next monitoring visit is likely to take place in Autumn 2019.

Report to DfE by the Improvement Adviser

59. John Coughlan (Chief Executive, Hampshire County Council), Improvement Adviser for Children's Services in Buckinghamshire has provided the DfE with the first of his progress reports on the improvement of Children's Services. Whilst the report identifies that the improvement journey remains extremely challenging on a number of levels, John reports that progress is just about as well as can be expected in the circumstances. John comments that there is an extremely strong "core" from Chief Executive, to Director of Children's Services and to Assistant Director and in addition, the new heads of service are of high calibre and are settling well and getting to grips with the management group. John goes on to acknowledge that whilst it is generally too early to define positive outcomes to the partnership work, it is a general positive to note that all of the elements of the package of support, as agreed between Hampshire, Buckinghamshire and the DfE are in hand and have progressed as should be expected by this stage. A range of workshops have been completed and more are on stream. The sense from these is of positive and constructive engagement from managers, which is pleasing to note. Our view is that the report accurately reflects the current position and will continue to work with Hampshire over the coming months.

High level action plan update

60. The Phase 2 improvement plan continues to embed performance compliance and further develops practice and quality standards. The plan outlines the actions that the service has been taken to address the 10 Ofsted recommendations and, in addition, a further 3 actions have been developed in response to more recent findings. It also incorporates the Commissioner's report and the Secretary of State's statutory direction, including the Improvement Adviser role provided by Hampshire County Council. The successful implementation of this plan relies on effective and competent first line managers as this tier is critical to achieving and maintaining good standards of social work practice. The Senior Management Team will provide support and guidance to managers to improve outcomes for children and young people. It is acknowledged that in order to embed and sustain change, staff will require the right balance of performance management and support. Currently, it is too early to demonstrate the impact of initial progress against actions on improving outcomes. The plan will be under regular review to ensure that progress is tracked and actions are further expanded where it is necessary. The action that is taken and the progress made to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families will be monitored and reviewed by the Children's Improvement Board which is chaired by the Independent Improvement Adviser. The latest version of the plan is provided as Appendix 2.

Peer review

61. Buckinghamshire is part of the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP), which is a membership group of all single/upper-tier local authorities in the South East that aims to:

- Improve outcomes for children and young people across the South East.

- Establish a culture of honest and constructive dialogue and challenge within and between authorities.
- Demonstrate the capacity and capability of the sector to achieve a coherent and consistent self-improving system.

62. As part of the programme, local authorities routinely take part in a range of improvement activities and on 26 February 2019, the service's senior leadership team participated in the new peer challenge process, with West Berkshire and Brighton and Hove, facilitated by a member of the SESLIP team. Feedback on the service included:

- a) Honest, pragmatic, brave and realistic approach to improvement.
- b) Passion and drive from the leadership team; impressed with tenacity and resilience of the team and ability to not shy away from difficult decisions.
- c) The development centre programme for first line managers and the increase in in-house placements for looked after children were seen as key strengths.
- d) Child focused approach and strong value base demonstrated.

63. The service was very pleased with this feedback and will continue to utilise the learning from the sector led programme of support to assist the improvement journey in Buckinghamshire.

Children's Services Workforce Strategy

64. The implementation of the Children's Social Care Workforce Development continues to be a key priority. The workforce continues to receive significant investment and remains at the heart of the service delivering the necessary practice and Service improvements that are needed to deliver the right outcomes for children and families as well as achieve an improved rating from Ofsted. The Board continues to meet on a quarterly basis and focuses on:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Service and Individual Resilience and Well-being
- Learning & Development
- Quarterly people metrics

65. The Board is currently producing a plan of activities for the next 12-18 months that, is envisaged, will provide a supportive, nurturing environment for the workforce to develop the skills needed to work well in their role and to progress their career within the Council. Work is currently underway on a revised Career Progression process for qualified social workers, an improved induction offer to new starters and essential management training, with Employee Relations training being offered to team managers and assistant team managers.

66. Since the beginning of the year, the Board has also held service specific Workforce Development Boards for each Service within Children's Social Care. In line with the Children's Social Care ethos, these meetings have been on the basis of 'high challenge and high support' and have covered the following:

- a) Current staffing structure and team set up
- b) Team scorecard and associated workforce issues
- c) Discussion around future staffing, structure, pay and grading
- d) Analysis of leavers and retention of staff
- e) Employee Relations cases within the Service and any trends
- f) Recruitment, induction and training
- g) Priorities for the Service

These Service Specific Workforce Development Boards are run on a 6 monthly basis with the second round in 2019 commencing in September.

Recruitment

67. There has been a move away from generic recruitment adverts within Children's Social Care with targeted campaigns for specific teams to meet their needs. This approach allows us to include information that aids recruitment for recognised 'hard to fill' roles in certain teams, particularly those located within the High Wycombe office.
68. Children's Social Care is developing a social media presence and has, over the past 6 months, advertised successfully in both local and national press. Consideration is always given to alternative ways of recruiting with the Service and HR&OD colleagues attending local recruitment fairs and also directly targeting potential candidate groups through LinkedIn.
69. The turnover rate is at 25% which is higher than the national average (15%). This is reflective of the period of change whilst the service focus on managing and improving performance. The completion of on-boarding and leaver surveys and results of exit interviews are actively reviewed and have resulted in a number of initiatives to help attract and retain staff including focused HR&OD support to team managers around formal HR processes.
70. Currently the senior leadership team and heads of service within Children's Social Care are permanent employees with the majority being in post for over one year, creating greater stability and direction within the service.

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

Appendix 1 - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter

Appendix 2 - Ofsted Improvement Plan (Phase 2)

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Friday 19 July 2019. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk