



## Letter of recommendation from the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee

**Title:** The Children's Services Improvement Plan

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014

**To:** Mrs Angela MacPherson – Cabinet Member for Children Services

**From:** Valerie Letheren - Chairman of Education Skills and Children's Services Select Committee

### Summary

The Education Skills and Children's Services Select Committee has considered the draft Improvement Plans of the County Council and the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). At its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2014, the Committee decided to put forward the key points outlined below on the Improvement Plans to assist the Cabinet in its consideration of the matter on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

The Committee noted that its previous recommendations to the portfolio holder on improving the cross reference linkages to the Ofsted Inspection report in the Council's Improvement Plan have now been incorporated and thanked the Cabinet Member for accepting this recommendation. The Committee also welcomes the appointment of David Johnston as Managing Director for Children's Social Care and Learning.

The Committee recommends that the Cabinet consider the following issues raised by the Select Committee:

#### Leadership, Governance and Partnerships

1. The Committee requests that the delivery of the project plans arising out of the six work stream activities is monitored regularly, not only by Cabinet, but also through the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee.

2. The Committee believes that partnership working is critical to the success of the Improvement Plans and statutory partners all need to be signed up to the BSCB Improvement Plan. The Committee believes that the BSCB Improvement Plan needs to link clearly with other agency plans and should link more clearly with the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The BSCB needs to drive the co-ordination of a single joined-up programme for improvement and make sure that there are not uncoordinated separate plans and implementation.
3. The Committee was disappointed by the lack of specific deliverable targets and more detailed measures in the draft BSCB Improvement Plan. The Committee would like to see greater clarity and more detailed and challenging measures of success, including "SMART" performance indicators/targets in the plan.
4. The Committee was not convinced that the BSCB governance arrangements were robust. The Committee was concerned that delegation to the various subcommittees/working groups may not be sufficient to provide effective partnership working.
5. The Committee believes that strong leadership of the BSCB is critical and in particular, the role of chairman is key to bringing partners together to deliver the improvement plan.

#### Social Work Practice Quality & Recruitment

6. The Committee were concerned that both Implementation Plans, but particularly the BSCB Improvement Plan, do not provide urgent action to ensure a common understanding of case referral thresholds and to make sure these are understood by all partners and used in practice.
7. Recruitment of quality social workers (non-agency) is critical to service improvement; however, the Committee were not convinced that the targets for this are achievable in the timescales stated. The Implementation Plan should provide for how this will be achieved. The Improvement Plan should also provide for analysis of whether the employment packages offered are attractive enough to deliver the recruitment of staff required and of exactly how this will be achieved.
8. The recruitment and retention of experienced staff is particularly important. The Improvement Plan and supporting project plans should include more detail for how the Council will retain experience and target the recruitment of more experienced social workers.
9. The Improvement Plan should show more detailed plans to improve management of existing staff, especially for staff continuity, caseload planning and staff wellbeing and staff sickness absences.
10. The Implementation Plan should provide greater clarity on the quality and monitoring of standards of social work practice.

## Fostering

11. The Committee would like greater clarity on how targets for increasing in-house foster carers will be achieved and recommends that the clarity on this is provided in the monitoring of the implementation of the Improvement Plan.
12. The Improvement Plans should provide clearer prioritisation of care leavers for the help they receive at 16/18 and transition in adult social care.

## Budget

The portfolio is asking the Cabinet to agree to a further £1.737m for 2014/15 and further one-off and on-going budget forecasts for 2015/15.

13. The Committee recommends that Cabinet considers the extent the newly identified budget investments are deliverable; contingent upon projected savings arising from actions to reduce demand; and that a robust assessment has or will be made on the programme risks.

The Select Committee looks forward to maintaining regular oversight of the Implementation Plans throughout their implementation.

I will be available to answer any questions raised at Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> October if required.

Yours faithfully,



**Valerie Letheren**

**Chairman – Education, Skills and Children’s Services Select Committee**