



Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	Development of the Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit under the Future Shape Programme
Committee date:	Tuesday 23 February 2016
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Purpose of Agenda Item

Information - The committee requested an update on how the Children's Social Care and Learning (CSC&L) Business Unit were developing under Future Shape programme

1. Background

The CSC&L Business Unit have been under intense scrutiny since its Ofsted inspection in June 2014. There has been significant scrutiny and challenge: Red Quadrant undertaking a diagnostic of the critical issues and offering challenge and support, and writing monthly reports to DfE; OFSTED audits, LGA Peer review in October; LGA interviews looking at DMA; DfE visit in November to review the improvement notice; which resulted in 6 days auditing in January. In addition there have been several multi agency improvement events, monthly Improvement Board with an independent chair. There has also been regular internal challenge: Several 'deep dives' from One Council Board to support future thinking and shaping of services, staff events such as courageous conversations, practitioner's board, leadership collaboration events, Cabinet, LAG, Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board and Select Committee reviews.

These interventions have meant most aspects of social care have been subject to rigorous review. This allows us to reflect not only on our improvements but also evaluate where we

are on our improvement journey and ensure we amend our focus on continuous improvement.

Future shape went live on the 1st April 2015; we have been developing as a business unit over the last 10 months. We are focusing on our statutory duties to safeguard and support children but also developing our systems and procedures into a more business focused model. Whilst we are not in a position to charge for the majority of our interventions due to the statutory nature of our intervention, we have been ensuring that we spend public money judiciously, and explore alternative delivery models which improves interventions for children

2. Vision and key priorities

The business plan highlights how the service delivers the Council's strategic priorities:

- Safeguarding Our Vulnerable Children and Families
- Creating Opportunities & Building Self-Reliance
- Keeping Buckinghamshire Thriving & Attractive

Safeguarding and protecting our vulnerable children and supporting all children and young people to reach their full potential through learning and building resilience is an essential focal point for the Local Authority. The work of unit is critical and at times very challenging. Teams provide meaningful intervention and appropriate assessment in order to protect and support children. A significant area of priority is the continued focus on the recommended actions following the inadequate inspection of our safeguarding services. Developed in partnership with our stakeholders, the Improvement Board regularly monitors and challenges progress.

With increasing referrals and predication patterns showing need is not likely to cease (this increase brings us in line with other council's), it is essential that time and energy is given to protecting our most vulnerable children. Along with the statutory powers of investigating and supporting children in need / children in need of protection/children requiring care, responding to and preventing child sexual exploration (CSE) and radicalisation is a high priority for the business unit.

Our education system is highly regarded with the majority of our performance indicators above national average. We remain focused on championing education and building relationships with education providers to make sure that necessary change and improvements happen and all Buckinghamshire children and young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential. A key priority area is to continue improving outcomes for vulnerable children and those at risk of underachievement. We have a duty to ensure there are enough school places (based on DfE statutory guidance), having diversity in provision to enable parents to have a choice as far as practicable. Pupil projections are highlighting larger than average rises and there are complexities such as availability of

funding, land, transport and trends i.e. migration away from independent schools. As such another the key priority area is the strategic planning for school places and seeking influence in order for pupils to be places in local good schools/ provision.

3. Customers

Unlike other Business Units, with social care statutory powers most of our customers are not actively looking to engage with us. We are intervening in family's lives at a very critical time; often they are in crisis, angry, may have drug or alcohol dependencies, mental health issues. Sometimes families can be caught in a cycle of deprivation where lives have spiralled out of control and abuse has been prevalent for many years, in some cases generations.

There is no quick fix solution, lives change through determined, motivated staff that work patiently and slowly with a family at their pace, to protect children and to turn lives around and have sustained positive improvement's. Some of our families can be very affluent and their intervention by social care is judgemental, rebutting the services attempts at support. Equally, some families will recognise there is an issue and engage well with us willingly

Children of all ages present a wide variety of needs and we need to focus our interventions to best support their well-being throughout their life. Our staff deal with a myriad of emotions not only from the child, whose is there first priority, but also the family. With over 400 referrals a month, staff are skilled at working at pace; with so many variables they do not know what will happen from one day to the next. The business needs to be planned with an ability to adapt quickly and responsibly.

Other customers are commissioned services who deliver statutory duties on our behalf. Our role often changes where we need to work in partnership in order to gain trust, influence and change to the market place i.e. school places. This requires skilled officers to ensure providers are not only engaging but also challenged to keep improvement and delivering excellent outcomes for our children.

Majority of our work is dependent upon good collaborative working, both at a strategic and operational level. With a multi-agency approach (police, health, foster carers / agencies, education providers, childcare providers etc), it requires skilled, patient working that utilises all resources available in order to achieve a collective vision. In order to prevent children and their families requiring statutory interventions, work over the last 6 months has also focussed on the development of early help panels; to ensure a coordinated response to children and their families. Over 500 families have been considered and this approach has ensure that the right service has been delivered to children and their families with only 50% of lead through our own in- house service (Family Resilience Service)

Our staff (and staff within other business units) are also essential customers and we work to ensure they are motivated (the recent various interventions can often leave staff exhausted

and demoralised, this is on top of very stressful work pressures), have regular opportunities to engage with managers and members through staff feedback sessions, work shadowing etc. and encouraged to be innovative coming forward with ideas for improvement. We have also been working with the Innovations Team to develop opportunities following staff ideas. The social work academy which was launched last year in collaboration with Bucks New University has offered continual learning and a pipeline for future social workers

We have a responsibility for monitoring complaints, as a business unit we regularly assess numbers of complaints and compliments (the nature of some interventions means there will always be complaints about the service). The compliments are recorded centrally and shared throughout the service, it is important that teams receive recognition for their work as well as learning from best practice. The response rates and themes to complaints are monitored centrally, performance is challenged where necessary and training is given to enhance services. Work has also been done on standardisation and being clear about expectations (both on our staff and for those receiving services).

4. Business Improvement

Demand for services is increasing, the number of rising social care and SEND referrals has knock on effects into other areas of the service. There is increase pressure to find suitable accommodation which meets the child's needs, with a lack of placements nationally it means costs for children's care is rising, putting greater pressures on budgets. There is an increased pressure on SEND which results in further cost pressures for home to school transport. There is an increased demand for school places due to increase in birth rates and inward migration, prediction for growth in pupil numbers is concerning. Shortage of key workers places pressures on budgets and could influence outcomes for children.

With demand pressures on services and there is a constant challenge to provide value for money services that have the right intervention and the right time in the best interests of the child. As a unit we are focusing (and will continue to focus on) on bringing the unit together. Traditionally the unit has been separated into Social Care, Education and Commissioning with, at times, a silo mentality. We are generating a new way of thinking that focuses more holistically on the child. The same children often are seen in various parts of the service, we need to be more joined up in our approach to working with these children and families. This has involved staff training, more communication across the service, more engagement and sharing of best practice.

Being more commercially aware is always at the forefront of service development decisions. With increasing pressures on resources, there is a need to think differently and approach work with a different perspective. With the dramatic rise in the number of Buckinghamshire children in care, the service has increased the use of external foster placements and residential care with significant cost implications (a residential placement costs £4,000 a week on average). The resource panel has been focusing on challenging

need and looking for best value whilst meeting the child's needs. Approximately 52% of looked after children are placed outside county borders; this is the highest in the Country. We are exploring how we can develop more market opportunity in placing children including development of fostering services. Changes to the market place have also taken place within Adult Learning, exploring novation of services.

There are various digital platforms used across the units as the work is so diverse. Plans are developing to critique all use of platforms and working with customer digitals board to maximise our developments. The unit is also challenging teams to be paperless, something that has already saved the council money. Officers have now got used to taking lap tops to meetings rather than having papers (which also makes the service more resilient in terms of business continuity planning), emailing forms rather than posting, scanning rather than keeping documents. Changes to mobile phones and apps help staff (and provide a more responsive service) when off site. Teams will be challenged further and ideas monitored.

The council has a lot of data and we are getting better at recognising where the data exists, where gaps are, utilising reports more by having more insight with data analysis. The unit is working with HQ Business Intelligence Team to develop a tool to help social workers and managements in their decision making and demand management. Using predicative modelling techniques, the tool can predict the likelihood of children requiring a social care intervention. The model uses a variety of factors we know about children we have been in contact with, including key issues for families, demographics and information about what services they are currently or have previously accessed to predict the likelihood of the child needed different levels of intervention in the future. For example, the model calculates a likelihood score of a child becoming looked after or becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan. This tool is about to be piloted with operational managers to support them in decision making, case management, supervision and prioritisation. It is hoped that this will provide insight into the relationships of key factors about children to support their professional judgement and also be used to manage demand and provide the right service at the right time to families to prevent the need for high level intervention

Summary

The service is working towards future shape and has developed significantly over the last year. There will be more changes throughout the year as practice develops, more sophisticated data predications are generated and further improvements within business functions. Teams have been working hard to continue with the day to day complexities of service demands whilst under intense scrutiny, thinking more broadly in respect to asset and resource management including accessing match funding or seeking alternative funding or delivery vehicles where appropriate.