

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

Title: Ofsted Improvement Plan Update

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Cabinet Member sign-off: Councillor Warren Whyte

1.0 Purpose of Agenda Item

The purpose of this report is to provide the Select Committee with an overview of recent activity undertaken as part of the improvement programme following the November 2017 Ofsted inspection.

2.0 Background

In November 2017, Ofsted re-inspected Children's Services under the single inspection framework, following the inadequate judgement received in 2014. This inspection found that the overall judgement of Children's Services remains inadequate.

As the Local Authority's Children's Services has been judged to be 'inadequate' for a second time, the Department for Education (DfE) has appointed a commissioner to work with the Council. The Department for Education has appointed John Coughlan CBE as the Children's Services Commissioner for Buckinghamshire. John is the current Chief Executive of Hampshire County Council, a former Director of Children's Services and a past President of The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

The commissioner is currently assessing the Council's capacity and capability to improve its Children's Services within a reasonable timeframe and will report to the DfE with a recommendation about the future of Children's Services in Buckinghamshire by June 2018.

In addition, Ofsted will also undertake a series of monitoring visits and a full re-inspection of Children's Services.

3.0 Summary

During the inspection, a high level strategic action plan was promptly developed and presented to Ofsted to deal with the immediate and emerging concerns raised by inspectors.

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. This plan has been shared with Ofsted, DfE and the Children's Commissioner. In addition, operational improvement plans have been developed to ensure that the necessary operational improvement actions are undertaken. The operational improvement action plans are aligned with the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework and focus on:

- Leadership, management and governance
- Children who need of help and protection
- Children looked after and achieving permanence (including adoption and care leavers)

Following the Ofsted inspection, a significant amount of immediate remedial action has been undertaken to establish a firm foundation upon which to build improvement across the service.

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.

4.0 Key improvement activity

4.1 Senior appointments

Following the 2017 Ofsted inspection, 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 (starting 14th May 2018)
- Permanent Head of Early Help (starting 14th May 2018)

4.2 Placement at home with parents arrangements

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.

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.

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, home visits to each child, updated assessments of needs, risks and circumstances, including 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.

In addition, pre-existing procedures concerning placement at home with parents arrangements have been refreshed and strengthened, including a new requirement to seek authorisation from the Service Director whenever a placement at home arrangement is being considered.

A follow up case consultation is now being planned with the Service Director to ensure that the previously agreed actions have been satisfactorily completed and that arrangements for children placed at home with parents are appropriate. In some cases, where the arrangements are no longer required action will be taken to return the matter to court to apply for the Care Order to be discharged. For older young people nearing their 18th birthday, Care Orders will be allowed to lapse. In some cases, the current arrangements need to be strengthened and further intervention is necessary. All placements at home with parents continue to be tracked.

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

- Appointment of a Public Law Outline (PLO) Court Manager to oversee court practice across the Service
- Review all new care proceedings
- Development of the Court Tracker to monitor the progress and outcome of all existing care proceedings

4.2 Children's Care Planning and Resources Panel

The Interim Service Director prioritised the chairing of the weekly Children's Care Planning and Resources Panel to address concerns about management oversight and decision making of children looked after. This has included modelling practice leadership through direct engagement with frontline social workers and team managers. Following a review of the Panel's activity, the terms of reference have now been reviewed and refreshed. There are now improved controls regarding the authorisation of all new placements and any changes to existing placements. The Panel process ensures improved collaboration, co-ordination and communication between key services, including the Social Work, Placements, Commissioning, Finance, Special Education Needs, Fostering and Residential Care Services. The Panel has been able to intervene to improve care planning and the allocation and authorisation of resources to ensure that children's care and placement plans meet their needs, risks and circumstances. The Children's Care Planning and Resources Panel has also been able to improve the connectivity with the Complex Needs Panel which oversees joint and tripartite decision making between social care, education and health service partners.

4.3 Safeguarding Service Re-alignment

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 have been unpopular with staff and difficult to manage. Staff have consistently reported that the current arrangements do not support them to deliver best practice.

The current arrangements are counter intuitive to meeting the needs of children and young people, jeopardising the continuity of care and support for children in need of help and protection. The arrangements do not protect and support the learning and development needs of newly qualified social workers and the continuing professional development of all social work teams.

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.

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

4.4 Children in Need Audit and Review

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.

It is anticipated that all audit and review activity will be completed by June 2018. The audit and review team includes three external auditors and a group of identified internal social care managers. More recently the Children's Commissioner has identified an additional resource of four managers from Hampshire who will support the audit and review activity. Completed audits and reviews are tracked via a central on-line tool and regular update meetings are convened to review progress. A sample of completed audits have been subject to an internal moderation process to test the overall standard of auditing practice and review the judgements that have been reached. A mid-point review will be undertaken to report on emerging practice themes and issues.

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.

4.5 Quality Assurance Framework “Beyond Auditing”

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 maximises the insight of operational staff in relation to strengths and areas for development in practice.

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 sufficient 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 some 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.

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.

4.6 Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager Development Centres

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.

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.

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

The Development Centres have been developed to assess the current strengths and weaknesses across the first line management teams. Each Development Centre will have three key stages include pre-preparation, centre based activity and follow up feedback and report. This will form the baseline for a package of bespoke support, learning and development for each Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager. It will also provide the Leadership Team with a strategic picture of the first line management cohort, allowing opportunity to tailor appropriate interventions where necessary.

Work to date has included a full review of the roles and responsibilities with the creation of an assessment framework, design of assessment and development materials, assessor training and the development of plans to support training and development interventions following the Development Centres. The Development Centres are scheduled to run from in 7th June 2018 to 8th August 2018.

5.0 Commissioner related activity

On 5th 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.

The Commissioner with his Director of Children's Services, Steve Crocker, are undertaking a diagnostic of 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.

On 24th 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 will provide an initial conclusion to the DfE by mid-June 2018.

6.0 Ofsted Monitoring Visit activity

Ofsted will be undertaking a series of monitoring visits. The first post-inspection monitoring visit will be undertaken on 3rd and 4th 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.