



Report to the Children's Select Committee

Title:	Ofsted Monitoring visit update
Committee date:	Tuesday 15 January 2019
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Purpose of Agenda Item

The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with the inspection findings following the Ofsted Monitoring Visit on 11 and 12 December 2018.

Background

1. Following the November 2017 inspection of Children's Social Care, Ofsted conducted their second monitoring visit on 11 and 12 December 2018.
2. During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the arrangements for supporting children in need of protection, including:
 - a) the understanding and application of thresholds,
 - b) the quality, effectiveness and impact of assessment and planning in managing risk and improving children's outcomes,
 - c) the effectiveness of practice in response to increasing or reducing risks for children subject to a child protection plan, including pre-proceedings interventions, and
 - d) the quality and timeliness of supervision, management oversight and decision making, social work capacity and caseloads.
3. A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic case records, discussions with social workers and their managers and other supporting documentation. In addition, inspectors spoke with the judiciary and the children and family court advisory and support service.
4. The key findings as detailed within the monitoring visit letter are set out below:

- a) Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have continued to maintain a clear focus on improving services for children in need of help and protection. They have worked determinedly to deliver improvements across the service, with strong political support.
- b) The senior leadership team continues to maintain a clear focus on how best to improve children's services and have the political support to deliver this. They have an accurate understanding of the extent of the challenge and a realistic improvement plan in place to address this. The refreshed improvement plan, implemented in November 2018, brings an increased focus on strengthening practice and quality standards, alongside continuing to embed performance compliance.
- c) Leaders' work to tackle quality, performance and capability issues has resulted in a high turnover of staff, in social worker and managerial positions. This has created considerable shortfalls in capacity in some parts of the service, leading to high caseloads. Despite these pressures, morale across the workforce is positive, with most social workers reporting that they enjoy working in Buckinghamshire and feel supported by their peers and managers.
- d) Variable standards in social work practice and frontline management in some teams impedes the practice improvements that are needed, and that leaders aspire to. A clear plan is in place to ensure robust performance management of staff, where appropriate, to ensure the service continues to improve.
- e) The service is aware that it is difficult to achieve consistency and quality in practice, particularly when there are considerable gaps in supervision for social workers in some teams.
- f) Work to strengthen the quality of practice and ensure greater compliance with basic practice standards is beginning to show some early signs of improvement in some parts of the service.
- g) There remains too much variability in the quality of assessment, planning and intervention. The impact of this is that some children do not receive the help, protection and support they need.
- h) Prior to the monitoring visit, the service reported significant pressures in capacity which meant that just over 100 children's cases were held in managers' names. However, by the time of the visit, appropriate action had been taken to reduce this number.
- i) Most social workers visit children regularly and build effective relationships with them, taking time to understand their experiences. However, not all children are visited in accordance with their needs, with gaps in visiting evident.
- j) Social workers use a range of direct work tools to engage children and elicit their views, but there is more to do to ensure that this work is properly recorded.
- k) Strategy meetings are convened in response to concerns that children are suffering harm. Most include police and children's social care only and do not always include clear actions and timescales for delivery, or interim safety plans to ensure children are protected while enquiries take place.
- l) Initial child protection conferences are convened when children's needs escalate and most lead to an appropriate outcome. The timeliness in which these are

convened has declined over recent months.

- m) The quality of child protection plans requires improvement. Some do not have clear actions or timescales for delivery and language is often professional, making it difficult for parents to understand.
- n) PLO meetings are effective in tracking progress of the plan and engaging parents in planning. However, there is still further work to do to ensure that all children's plans are progressed without delay, particularly for those children who have been in PLO for extended periods.

Background Papers

Appendix 1: Ofsted letter of second monitoring visit of Children's Services

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, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on [Date]. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk