

Children's Services Ofsted Improvement Plan – Progress Report November 2014

On 10th November, Cabinet agreed the Draft Children Services Improvement Plan which will be submitted to Ofsted on 14th November. Cabinet also agreed to recommend to Full Council the release of £1.6m from the General Fund Reserve required to fund the additional 2014/15 measures in the Improvement Plan.

Work is already well underway on making the improvements needed. Since the inspection concluded we have responded quickly, and with a sustained pace, to focus on addressing immediate opportunities for change while at the same time laying the foundations to build pervasive and longer term changes in practice.

Actions taken in relation to Children's Social Care since September 2014:

- Appointment of David Johnston as the new Director of Children's Services who has a strong social care background (our local title is Managing Director of Children's Social Care [0-25] and Learning).
- Appointment of a new Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Local Safeguarding Board, Frances Gosling-Thomas. She is a high performing and experienced strategic leader operating at senior management and Director level for over 15 years in both local authorities and national improvement agencies.
- Detailed discussion with colleagues in our health economy involving the Hospital Trust, two CCGs and the Mental Health Trust to both identify the reasons for the increase in referrals between 2012/13 and 2013/14 and to agree an action plan for better controlling these referrals. Similar discussions have been had with Thames Valley Police.
- A meeting between the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Safeguarding and the Regional Crime Commissioner to discuss these issues.
- Funding arrangements of the Safeguarding Board are being reviewed in conjunction with all contributing parties.
- Reviewed and re-launched the Thresholds document, and related guidance, and developed a Multi-Agency Referral Form for social care and early help.
- The establishment of a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) which went live six weeks ago.
- An initial seminar for Members and Senior Officers on their Corporate Parenting responsibilities was attended by over 50 Members and Officers. Further training sessions are planned.
- Reviewed Children's Services budgets following recommendations from the Member Led Task & Finish Group leading to an increase of £4.8m funding in the base budget as well as additional in year one off funding of £2.67m to address the Improvement Plan. Future year Improvement Plan funding, one-off and ongoing, will be considered within the Medium Term Planning process of the Council.
- Engaged an Improvement Adviser, Ann Goldsmith, with a significant children's social work senior management background, to support the implementation of service improvement initiatives that will assist with embedding robust good quality social work practice.

- Introduced five Practice Improvement Manager roles to the structure to support improvements to frontline practice and reduce the burden on more senior managers to free them up to make longer term strategic plans.
- Introduced retention and recruitment payments to social worker and manager roles in the First Response and Children in Need teams to create a stable and sustainable workforce.
- Reviewed and agreed changes to the First Response Service which are being implemented. This has included increasing the size of the team, and related budget, from 12 to 27 social workers and introducing the role of Contact and Referral Coordinator.
- Established a Resource Panel to scrutinise all requests for services where a child may need a high-level support package to prevent accommodation, or is otherwise at risk of being accommodated, and to review all cases of Looked After Children where the child may be supported to exit accommodation, or to receive a more appropriate package of care.
- Transferred the responsibility for completing Child Permanence Reports to the Children in Care units.
- Reviewed internal processes to ensure that all foster carers are reviewed annually and visited in line with National Minimum Standards.
- Completed a Health Check of our ICS system with the provider to develop a clear work plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.
- Implemented a new performance management framework. New service and team performance information reports have been created to provide a platform for focused performance conversations to take place. The DCS reviews progress on performance targets and quality standards across the service every month with service managers. This new approach is driving a culture change using casework data to measure practice standards and performance targets.

There are strong governance arrangements in place to drive the delivery of the improvement programme in Buckinghamshire. A dedicated Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, is in place to review progress on the improvement plan. This Board will be held monthly and includes attendees from across the Council as well as representation from partner organisations and other Local Authorities. The first meeting of the Improvement Board is scheduled for 25th November.

The Improvement Plan is split into 6 workstreams which will be run as projects within an overall Improvement Programme. We hope to appoint a Programme Manager and team of Project Managers to support the Workstream Sponsors and Leads to drive through the changes shortly. The Risk and Insurance Manager is supporting the Workstream Leads to develop project and programme risk registers which will be monitored by the Improvement Board as well as by the Regulatory and Audit Committee. Cabinet and the Health & WellBeing Board will receive a quarterly report detailing progress against key milestones, success measures and risks.

Trevor Boyd
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13/11/14