

Title	Children's Services Update
Date	Thursday 27 th September
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Purpose of this report

1. To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the key headlines within Children's Services.

Recommendation for the Health and Wellbeing Board

2. To note the key developments within the service and the specific issues identified in relation to children's health and wellbeing.

Children's commissioner

3. Following his appointment in March 2018, the DfE appointed commissioner, John Coughlan has completed his 3 month review of Children's Services. His main findings included:
 - a. A significant amount of work is required to establish and normalise good social work and child care practice across the organisation.
 - b. Good early progress is being made but unquestionably this engagement needs to be made more systematically and then sustained relentlessly.
 - c. Previous officer leadership had driven a hard and data based approach to performance management which did not take sufficient account of the quality of practice.
 - d. Changes to practice are already being implemented, supported by changes in performance and quality assurance.
 - e. Changes are being driven at pace but nobody should be under any illusions that there are quick fixes as the scale of the necessary improvement is significant.
4. The commissioner's recommendation to the Department for Education is that there should be no alternative delivery model in Buckinghamshire and that the Council should retain its Children's Services. The current direction of travel should be endorsed in terms of the internal leadership's improvement planning. That said, he recommends that some external support should be commissioned. A primacy should be placed on the support and development of front line managers and staff, balancing a firm application of consistent high standards with a systematic range of mechanisms to ensure those managers and staff are closely involved in and own the improvement process.

Ofsted Action Plan Update

5. Following the Ofsted inspection, a significant amount of immediate remedial action has been taken to establish a firm base for improvement within the service. 97% (35 of 36) of immediate actions set out within this high level action plan have been progressed, with many ongoing as a continuous, integral part of the delivery of our services.
6. The most recent review of progress against the identified improvement actions show that

the majority have been progressed satisfactorily. On the whole, there is more to do to improve compliance across the service. On their own, however, these do not necessarily demonstrate to what extent children, young people and their families are experiencing improved outcomes.

Ofsted monitoring visit

7. Following the November 2017 inspection of Children's Social Care, Ofsted have recently conducted a two-day monitoring visit in July. During this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas:
 - a. Thresholds for working with children in need.
 - b. The recognition, understanding and response to risk for children in need.
 - c. The quality of direct work with children and parents, and the links between this work and children's plans.
 - d. The quality of plans, the quality and timeliness of arrangements for the review of children's progress, and the understanding that children and their families have of these plans, and of what needs to improve.
 - e. The quality of management oversight and supervision, particularly in the following areas: assessing the impact and progress of work; support for social workers to address any difficulties in working effectively with families; and the guidance and support provided to social workers in their direct work with children.
 - f. The speed and decisiveness of the response to escalating risks.
 - g. The effectiveness of the quality assurance of social work with children in need.

8. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including case files, meetings with social workers and managers, discussions with senior managers and analysis of other documentations and data. The key findings are shown below:
 - a. From a very low base, the local authority is making some early progress in improving services for children and young people who are the subject of a child in need plan.
 - b. Senior leaders have a clear and well-informed understanding of the significant weaknesses in the quality of work with children in need. Plans to improve practice are credible and well devised. Senior managers are strongly committed to moving forward at a realistic pace, and are determined to achieve rapid and sustainable improvements in children's circumstances and outcomes.
 - c. While the impact of most social work remains too weak, there are encouraging signs of early improvement, underpinned by realistic plans to build on this foundation.
 - d. The majority of social workers who spoke with inspectors said that they have opportunities to express their views, and that recently appointed permanent senior managers are more visible, responsive, approachable and practice orientated. Staff expressed cautious optimism that practice is slowly improving, and that the culture is increasingly transparent.
 - e. Caseloads are too high, and this limits the time that social workers have available to spend working directly with children and their families.
 - f. The quality and impact of management oversight and supervision are too variable: managers do not consistently support and assist social workers to evaluate and build an improved understanding of the needs of children.
 - g. Not all risks are fully recognised or understood, and this leads to failures and delays in the safeguarding of a minority of children. Some children's cases continue to be stepped down too quickly before children's circumstances and outcomes sustainably improve.
 - h. Most child in need plans lack focus and specificity and do not achieve purposeful, timely and measureable outcomes for children. Most contingency plans are too vague and generic and are not tailored to individual children's circumstances.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

9. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership brings together partners from children's services, health, the police and the voluntary sector to work together to improve outcomes for children and young people across the county. This is achieved by delivering the key priorities of the children and young people's plan as well as reducing duplication and improving coordination of services across the partnership.
10. The Children and Young People's Plan identifies the vision and priorities of the Partnership and sets out how all those working with families in Buckinghamshire aim to help them improve their lives. The vision and priorities inform and be reflected in the plans of all those working with children, young people and families in the county and steer the commissioning intentions and the resource allocations of appropriate partner organisations.
11. The Plan covers children and young people aged 0 to 19 years and up to 25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities or using after care services. The Plan does not include everything we will be doing, but concentrates on the outcomes and priorities which will make the biggest difference to children, young people and families in Buckinghamshire.
12. The Plan aims to support the delivery of the following outcomes for children, young people and families:
 - a. Children and young people are safe.
 - b. Children and young people live fulfilling lives.
 - c. Children and young people are healthy.
 - d. Children and young people reach their potential in education and in other aspects of their lives.
 - e. Children, young people and families are resilient and build their own solutions – this connects with all four of the below priorities.

The priorities which will drive these outcomes are:

- a. Keep children and young people safe and in their families wherever possible.
 - b. Enable and support children, young people, parents and carers to overcome the challenges they may face.
 - c. Improve children and young people's health and well-being.
 - d. Provide opportunities for children and young people to realise their full potential.
13. The Plan is due to be updated and revised before the end of the calendar year.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

14. Work continues to improve support provided to children and young people with SEND. Compliance with the 20 week Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) statutory timescale continues to rise with 60% of Education Health and Care Plans being issued on time in June 2018. This is an increase from 6.5% in January 2018.
15. A training programme has been delivered to SEN officers to equip them with the skills to work effectively with families. This training programme included input from Buckinghamshire parents who were able to provide feedback on their experiences to increase understanding.
16. Quality Assurance work continues and plans are being developed to join up with the Beyond Auditing initiative currently being implemented by Social Care colleagues. This

will ensure the child's journey is looked at holistically through many different lenses and provide consistency of approach.

17. We continue to await the SEND inspection conducted by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted. The next potential date for inspection is 10th September and then every Monday thereafter, excluding school holidays.

Schools

18. The Side by Side initiative continues to grow with opportunities now for schools to learn from each other as part of a peer led school improvement model. These opportunities include supporting secondary schools who are not yet graded "good" by Ofsted to identify areas for improvement and work with colleagues from across the school community to raise standards.