

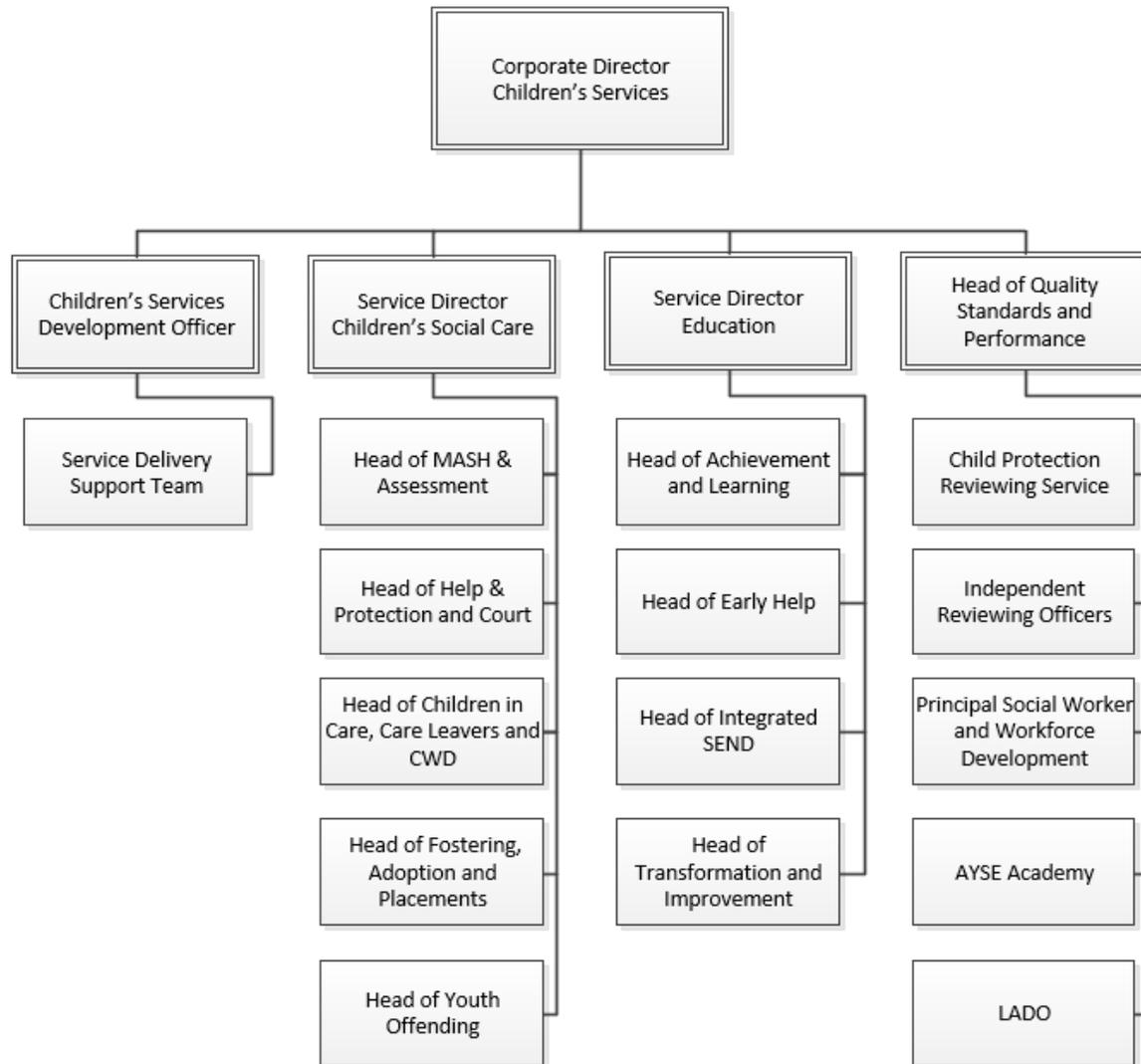


Ofsted: ILACS Focused Visit/Covid-19 Context Self Evaluation

February 2021



Children's Services Structure



COVID-19 Response (1)

1. It became clear during March 2020 that reducing the risk of infection and protecting the community as well as our staff was of primary importance. At that point in time, the entire service was being delivered remotely and the majority of social work activity was based on virtual interactions with children, young people and their families. Home visits took place only when agreed by the relevant Head of Service and these were triggered when there was no other way of being confident of the safety of children.
2. A number of key decisions and actions were immediately taken to mitigate risk and ensure that close management oversight was maintained. These included:
 - a) The creation of a new case note type on our electronic recording system (LCS) so that all virtual contacts could be tracked and performance data reports run. This has allowed all virtual contacts to be isolated on the recording system and be audited.
 - b) Heads of Service started daily touchdowns with their staff using Microsoft Teams. These daily meetings managed and controlled the move to a 100% remote service. This included discussions on how to achieve virtual statutory meetings, virtual visits, virtual assessments and the basis on which home visits would be conducted.
 - c) A set of practice standards were created and issued to all staff highlighting the expectations in relation to a virtual visit, as well as the process for agreeing a home visit.
 - d) A comprehensive audit and dip sampling process was set up so that the whole service including senior managers could have a clear understanding of the work of the service in the current high risk environment.
 - e) Systems were put in place to ensure that all social workers had access to PPE in the event they were required to complete a home visit. The social worker had the final decision on whether they enter the family home, based upon responses received from the family at the 'doorstep'.

COVID-19 Response (2)

3. The decisions taken by the service in response to Covid-19 were put in place before any guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) was issued. The DCS and his senior team maintained close contact with the DfE and OFSTED colleagues via regular Microsoft Teams meetings. The service carefully explained all of the actions that had been taken in detail, as highlighted above. Our response to Covid-19 was supported and indeed confirmed that a number of other local authorities were about to take similar steps.
4. Our partnership with schools has not only been sustained throughout the pandemic but has been strengthened significantly. The DCS and his teams have been meeting at least twice a week to consider emerging themes and trends and solve problems. Issues resolved have included: lateral flow testing, access to laptops and re-opening of schools. These meetings have been pivotal to our collective response and have given us a very clear understanding of what is happening across our family of schools.
5. Supporting our staff to manage the demands of the work remains as always a high priority; however, there has been a greater need to check on the well-being of our front-line workers given the continued need to work remotely and deal with a high volume of difficult and disturbing case work. This has been supported by the corporate centre and staff survey results during the pandemic showed that 89% of our staff felt supported by the council.
6. Changes and increases in demand have put considerable pressure on front-line teams. There have been significant increases in the seriousness of incidents involving children and young people. As a result, the service has moved resources internally to support the MASH and the Assessment Teams. In addition, strong political and corporate support has released funds for an additional 21 social workers. Recruitment is underway with some successful appointments already made.

COVID-19 Response (3)

7. Physical visiting to children and young people has been maintained throughout. Visits are risked assessed and significant resource has been put into supporting, analysing and managing visits to vulnerable children and young people. This has resulted in strong performance and the maintenance of effective relationships with children, young people and their families.
8. The corporate, political and MP support has been critical to our success as a place to keep services going for children and young people across Buckinghamshire. The DCS and the corporate management team led by the CE have been briefing cabinet and members twice a week since the beginning of the pandemic with Children's Services being a standing item in all those meetings.
9. The Children's Services Improvement Board continues to maintain robust oversight of the progress the service is making in improving outcomes. Furthermore, since making the transition to the Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements in 2019, clear priorities and an effective performance framework have been developed to coordinate local work in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to ensure the effectiveness of what the member organisations in Buckinghamshire do individually and together.
10. As a standing member for the Health Protection Board chaired by the CE, the DCS and his corporate and public health colleagues have made sure that support and information for staff across the council and beyond have been consistent including such things as access to PPE, Covid-19 secure working arrangements and vaccinations to name a few. At the time of writing this report, all PRU and Special Schools staff have been vaccinated as a result of prompt decision making locally.
11. We remain alert to changing demand as a result of Covid-19. Our experience to date demonstrates the effectiveness of the approach we have taken and the need to act decisively in response.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

1. Statutory performance for assessments has improved from a very low base of 35% in December 2019 to 95% in December 2020.
2. A new SEND Strategy and Improvement Plan has been co-produced with parents and partners and is going through the political process.
3. A quality assurance framework for Education, Health and Care Plans is in place which includes regular multi-agency audits.
4. A 5-year Sufficiency Strategy is being developed with partners.
5. The monitoring of annual reviews by schools is improving and pathways for children preparing for adulthood are being improved.
6. Numbers of caseworkers have increased to ensure that the experience for families improve.
7. The number of complaints has reduced and the experience of schools working with us on SEND has improved.
8. Similarly to early help, a locality based approach to SEND has made a difference to outcomes.

Children in Need of Help and Protection

What we know	How we know it
Children and young people benefit from effective step up and step down processes, to and from Early Help.	Performance data set, both internal and external audit activity with Hampshire.
The MASH has remained effective and is continuing to improve the timeliness of decision making and is able to effectively prioritise on the basis of risk. 89% of contacts have a decision within 24 hours.	Monthly performance data set, quality assurance processes and feedback.
Thresholds are consistently and correctly applied in the MASH.	Quality assurance processes and assessment team feedback.
Timeliness of 45 day assessments is improving. 83% currently.	Performance data set, quality assurance processes and feedback.
Section 47 enquiries are completed in a timely way with a strong focus on risk.	Performance data set, quality assurance processes and feedback.
Visits to children and young people are managed effectively and risk assessed.	Performance data set, implementation of practice standards and quality assurance processes.
PLO work is timely and manages risk effectively.	PLO tracking panel and impact of Court Team on practice.
Areas Requiring Further Attention	
Sophisticated thinking and planning in casework needs to be more consistent. Action: Increase confidence of workforce through feedback via managers, QA and learning events.	
Continuation of improvement work focused on SMART plans and use of chronologies to inform practice. Action: QA activity using targeted audits and learning events. Confident management oversight.	
Increased participation of the partnership in the delivery of plans for children. Action: Feedback to partners, confident social care presence at multi-agency meetings, support from BSPB.	

Children in Care and Care Leavers

What we know	How we know it
Looked After Children placed with a parent(s) are safe and benefit from clear planning.	Regular reviewing and HOS oversight, 89% seen on time.
Looked After Children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 have appropriate plans in place.	97% of reviews on time, HOS oversight.
Social workers visits to Looked After Children are in the main timely and closely monitored.	80% seen on time and 86% have management oversight recorded within timescales.
Young people are benefitting from improved and growing understanding of good practice. Social workers and personal advisors generally know their young people well and reflect this in their case recording.	Case file audits and dip sampling, feedback from reviews, changes in recording practices, improved management oversight.
There has been a strong focus on the well-being of children in care and care leavers.	Performance data, including keeping in touch data, review of casework, steps taken to create stability in the team.
Care leavers benefit from a stronger focus on their pathway plans and accommodation needs.	Performance data set, 90% live in suitable accommodation, quality assurance processes, HOS oversight, partnership with Housing, improved outcomes.
Areas Requiring Further Attention	
Improved consistency from managers in their oversight of virtual visits. Action: Ensure there is effective use of team level data set, performance reporting and compliance.	
Improve the consistency of care plans and performance in updating assessments. Action: Continued use of performance management information, audits and IRO oversight.	

Arrangements for Permanence

What we know	How we know it
As at end of December 2020, 21 adoptions completed compared with 19 at same stage last year.	Performance data set
Significant benefit from digital approach to recruitment of adopters has increased approvals.	24 approvals at end of quarter three compared with 11 last year.
Permanency tracking and consideration of early permanency has improved outcomes for children.	Permanency tracking panel, reviews.
Effective placement decision-making and impact of commissioning enable safe placement decisions to be made including clear matching decisions.	Analysis of placement data, evidence of impact of commissioning work, impact and oversight of the Head of Service. Increase in staying put arrangements, increase in Bucks foster carers.
Areas Requiring Further Attention	
Further work to ensure consistency of approach in considering permanency at the earliest possible stage for a child or young person. Action: Feedback from Permanency tracking, audit and QA work.	
Improved placement choice and stability for adolescents. Action: Targeted commissioning work to identify a wider range of good quality placement providers.	

Impact of Leaders

What we know	How we know it
<p>Leaders have a strong focus on the quality of practice and the impact on children and their families.</p>	<p>Quality assurance work, particularly the focus on physical and virtual visits, the work of HOS with their management groups, dip sampling and audit work completed by senior leaders, the embedded use of data to provide a line of sight to specific supervision groups and individual staff.</p>
<p>There has been and continues to be, a strong focus on management and workforce capacity as well as staff well-being.</p>	<p>Response to demand changes, additional social work capacity, intervention in specific teams, individual and group support to staff in response to specific incidents. Corporate and political support.</p>
<p>Leaders have a strong focus on multi-agency working and are prepared to take action to improve outcomes for children and young people.</p>	<p>Progress made on exploitation, work with schools, CAMHS and Police individually and as part of BSPB.</p>
Areas Requiring Further Attention	
<p>Further work is required to continue the consistency of practice across the service, including the use of the Strengthening Families model of practice. Action: Continued learning from audit activity and quality assurance processes.</p>	
<p>Further work is required to enable first and second line managers to build on their existing effectiveness in quality assuring work and supporting professional development of their staff. Action: HOS led work with first and second line managers.</p>	

Focus on the next 12 months

In addition to the specific comments in the previous slides under each heading, we are determined to:

1. Continue to ensure there is stability in the workforce in all teams especially the children in care service for the reasons we have already shared with you throughout the pandemic. This will be achieved by recruiting additional staff, supporting and enabling the current workforce to perform well, continuing the success of the ASYE Academy and continue working with HR colleagues to deliver effective recruitment.
2. Continue to deliver service improvements in line with our Improvement Plan. This will be achieved by maintaining the current robust focus on improvement whilst effectively managing the impact of Covid-19 on the service, the local community and our staff benefitting from the council's public health advice.
3. Complete the planned work on service user engagement to ensure there is even greater involvement of children, young people and their families in service planning, delivery and design building on the success of our approach to SEND in involving young people and their families.
4. Continue to manage well expectations and service demands in the context of the pandemic, whilst keeping our staff safe and healthy and providing them with the guidance, advice and support they require to keep services going during this time.
5. Continue scrutinising performance through various means (scrutiny committee, cabinet, corporate management team, safeguarding partnership, our QA activity and work with HCC) and getting the balance right between challenge and support for our staff across the directorate.
6. Continue our successful partnership working with schools to make sure no children in Buckinghamshire are disadvantaged because of the impact of the pandemic.