



Report to Cabinet

Date: 16 February 2021

Title: Children's Services Improvement Plan Update

Relevant councillor(s): Cllr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Service

Author and/or contact officer: Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director Children's Services

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendation: For Cabinet to note the continued impact of COVID-19 on the service and the current progress against the Ofsted Improvement Plan.

Content of report

1. COVID-19 continues to be a significant challenge to manage on all levels; however, the service's response to ensure children and young people are kept as safe as possible continues to be of paramount importance.
2. The impact of COVID-19 has led to changes in demand that continue to be unpredictable. This coupled with an increase in the complexity and seriousness of situations that children and young people find themselves in, is having a significant impact on workloads.
3. The challenges created by increases in demand which require our intervention continued throughout the latter part of 2020 and in November specifically, the service experienced a significant rise in demand creating further pressure on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Assessment and Help and Protection Teams. In order to manage the changes in workload safely, the service has moved resources to support the 'front door' and has moved casework to create capacity. The Senior Management Team (SMT) has remained focused on ensuring that staff are supported and that standards in practice are maintained. This has been achieved to date in spite of the uncertainty all local authorities face in the current environment.
4. Analysis of our data confirms the changes that the service is experiencing but what is more pronounced are the changes in 'seriousness' of incidents involving children and young people. Overall, there has been a 15% increase in volume of work. The volume of work in Children's Social Care does not follow a uniform pattern and there has been some significant peaks in activity.

5. This increase at this point in time coupled with significant changes in casework that is complex such as sexual abuse, mental health and substance misuse, results in a disproportionate impact on the social work time required to manage each case. The issue of 'seriousness' and peaks of activity comes further into focus when one considers the amount of Initial Child Protection Case Conferences (ICPCC) held in November compared with previous months. There were 93 ICPCC in November 2020 compared with 35 and 25 respectively in October and September.
6. Despite the pressures in the service during the last few months, work on the Improvement Plan has continued. The stability of and steady improvement in the Help and Protection Teams have largely enabled the actions against the quality of assessments and plans to move from red to amber. The Assessment Team Managers, despite being under significant pressure are demonstrating strong management oversight and have maintained strong performance in relation to key performance indicators for Section 47 enquiries. For example, despite increases in volume 85% of all Initial Child Protection Case Conferences are held within timescales, against a target of 78%. The increase in volume of Section 17 assessments has led to a decrease in performance in timeliness, with quarter 3 data showing the rate completed on time has fallen from 84% to 72%. Actions are in place to address this which will lead to performance improvement.
7. The impact on staff of having to frequently deal with disturbing information involving children and young people, consistently working very long hours responding to children in crisis and the overall increase in volume translating into higher caseloads, is significant. Throughout this period of time we have made sure there is a strong management focus on staff well-being.
8. We know that there is always more to do to maintain standards over time and tackle inconsistency whenever it arises. Improvements in the quality of the service provided to vulnerable children have continued despite the current very challenging circumstances. However, it remains the case that the general service to looked after children who are in our care in the long-term is not yet as consistent as we would like. This is reflected in the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rated plan included as an Appendix. Recruitment of staff who are going to be able to contribute to service improvement remains our top priority.
9. The service is determined to continue to develop and improve, despite what is going on, and be in the best position possible to manage the potential challenges that lie ahead.

Other options considered

N/A

Legal and financial implications

N/A

Corporate implications

N/A

Consultation and communication

N/A

Next steps and review

N/A

Background papers

Appendix 1 – Improvement Plan

