

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE
23 AUGUST 2016

Present: Councillor McElligott (Chair)
Councillors D Edwards, Ennis, Gavin, Hoskin, Jones (for item 19 only), O'Connell, Pearce, Robinson, Stanford-Beale and J Williams.

Apologies: Councillors Eden, Livingston and Vickers.

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted, and answered by the Chair:

Questioner	Subject
Councillor Josh Williams	Education Health and Care Plans
Councillor Josh Williams	Frequency of ACE Committee Meetings

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

19. OFSTED SINGLE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK AND NEXT STEPS

The Director of Children, Education and Early Help Services submitted a report asking the Committee to accept the findings of the the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Inspection of the Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, to acknowledge the progress made against Ofsted's recommendations and to inform the Committee of the proposed plan for further improvement across Children's Services. The Ofsted report was published on 5 August 2016 and the inspection had taken place from 23 May to 15 June 2016. The following appendices were attached to the report:

Appendix 1	Summary of Good and Improving Practice as Identified in Ofsted's Inspection of children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
Appendix 2	DfE System Diagram of Intervention
Appendix 3	Recommendations aligned to 'Putting Children First' Pillars
Appendix 4	Work in Progress against Ofsted Recommendations

The report stated that the overall judgement by Ofsted was that Children's Services in Reading were 'Inadequate'. This judgement was as a result of Children who needed help and protection being 'inadequate'; Children looked after and achieving permanence being 'inadequate' (including graded judgements of 'requiring improvement' for both Adoption Performance and Progress of Care Leavers) and Leadership, Management and Governance being 'inadequate'.

Ofsted had identified serious persistent and systemic failures in the services provided to children who were in need of help and protection. They were of the view that the instability of senior leadership over the period had impeded progress and they had also concluded that children's social care services had deteriorated

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since 2012. The impact of the high turnover of staff, particularly front line social workers had impacted upon the relationship with children, families and foster carers and had adversely affected the quality of child protection inquiries and assessments and had militated against consistent management oversight. The planning of sufficient local placements for children who were looked after was taking too long to develop and it took too long to place children into adoptive placements. Greater involvement of children in the reviewing and planning of services was required and the services to care leavers required strengthening.

The Ofsted report had identified that since early 2016 there were signs of positive progress involving the establishment of performance management systems helping managers to tackle the weaknesses more swiftly, that the reduction of and heavy reliance on short term agency social workers was progressing, that services featured some strengths, including the MASH, targeted early help, the disabilities service and the stability of looked after children. The report had identified that concerns referred during the inspection had been acted upon swiftly and appropriately and they had noted that permanent appointments had been made to senior posts in the local authority, that rigorous plans were in place to recruit and retain social workers and frontline managers. The inspectors had noted the realistic understanding which senior managers had of the scale of practice weaknesses and that recent action to address these failings was having an impact on timeliness and quality of practice. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board was deemed to 'require improvement'. The Board had received a number of positive judgements and whilst it required further improvements, partners were well engaged and that partners and young people had shaped the priorities of the Board and that the most recent Annual Report was comprehensive and well written.

The report stated that as a result of the overall judgement of the inspection of the services, Edward Timpson MP, Minister of State for Children and Families, had written to the Leader of the Council of his intention to issue the Council with a Direction under sections 497A(4) and (4B) of the Education Act 1996. The Direction would require the Council to co-operate with, comply with instructions from and provide assistance to a Commissioner for Children's Services and the Secretary of State for Education. The Commissioner would be appointed from 1 September 2016 and would report on improvements and options for removing the service control for a period of time and transfer them to a different organisation in order to secure sustainable improvement. A judgement would also be made if the authority had the capacity to improve.

The report explained that much work had already been done to address weaknesses that had already been identified in the report that had been submitted to the Committee on 29 June 2015 (Minute 4 refers) and in the report submitted to the Committee on 4 July 2016 (Minute 5 refers). This had been acknowledged in the Inspection report but had referred to the improvement work being stalled during autumn 2015 until it was picked up again in early 2016. At the meeting on 29 June 2015 it was agreed to establish a Children's Service Improvement Board (CSIB) which was independently chaired. The Board met monthly and was tasked with overseeing the implementation of the improvement plan. The Chair presented a quarterly report to the ACE Committee. It was proposed that the role of the CSIB was strengthened in order to provide on-going challenge and scrutiny to the service

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improvement work of the Council in collaboration with its partners. Where there were outstanding actions in existing service improvement and development plans they would be integrated into a single improvement plan which would also incorporate the 18 recommendations for improvement set out in the Ofsted report.

The Inspection Report did acknowledge that the ACE Committee had shown a clear and focused understanding of the challenges and performance of Children's Services and that the Committee received regular, comprehensive performance management reports and ensured that officers were held to account.

The report explained that Ofsted's recommendations for improvement had been matched against the Department for Education's three pillars of reform (People and leadership; Practice and Systems; Governance and Accountability) in order to demonstrate how Reading's vision and drive for improvement would deliver fundamental reform across the children's social care system in order to safeguard the needs of children.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Duveen addressed the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) That the findings of Ofsted's Inspection of Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers be acknowledged and accepted;**
- (2) That the improvement journey currently underway in Reading identified through both the inspection report and the recent improvement activity be recognised;**
- (3) That the proposals for management oversight of a single improvement plan through the CSIB be accepted;**
- (4) That the draft Ofsted Action Plan be received at the next meeting on 3 October 2016 prior to submission to Ofsted;**
- (5) That the Ofsted Action Plan be presented to Council on 18 October 2016.**

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.35pm)