

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 JULY 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	THIRD QUARTER REPORT CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the meeting of the ACE Committee on 29 June 2015, the Committee agreed to establish a Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan and service improvements in Children's Social Care. The Committee also agreed to the appointment of an Independent Chair.
- 1.2 The CSIB meets monthly and this report is the third in a series of quarterly reports to ACE Committee. This report covers the meetings held in February, March and April 2016.
- 1.3 The CSIB has continued to provide support, challenge and oversight of the comprehensive Improvement Plan including the associated performance framework. Many of the tasks and activities in the Improvement Plan have been completed and some are now considered to be 'business as usual' for the service. As a consequence, it has been necessary for CSIB to become increasingly focussed on impact particularly in relation to performance, the quality of evidence in quality assurance findings, staff recruitment and retention and the consistency of practice.
- 1.4 The CSIB was originally established for a period of twelve months and it is proposed that its role and remit is reviewed over the next quarter with the intention of bringing proposals on the future governance arrangements for Children's Services to the ACE Committee. The role of CSIB will be reviewed

in relation to other governance arrangements within the Council, the roles of both the LSCB and the Children's Trust and in light of the findings and recommendations of the recent Ofsted inspection once the report is published. In developing the proposals it will be essential to ensure robust governance arrangements providing the appropriate levels of challenge and scrutiny to secure further sustained improvement in Children's Social Care whilst ensuring there is no unnecessary duplication of reporting arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the report be noted;
- 2.2 That Members identify any issues that they would like to see as a focus for the next quarter; and
- 2.3 That Members support the review of the role of the CSIB and agree to receive a report outlining proposed governance arrangements.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 At the ACE Committee on 29th June 2015 it was agreed that a Children's Services Improvement Board be set up to oversee the implementation of the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The remit of the Board is to provide impactful support and challenge through leadership and partnership working, ensure that the 'voice of the child' informs practice and actions of staff and to enable improvements to be made possible by doing the right things at the right time.
- 3.2 The Terms of Reference and **objectives** are attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The priorities agreed at ACE were based upon 6 key themes:
 - Leadership and Governance
 - Partnership working
 - Quality and Consistency of practice
 - Workforce development
 - Performance management and quality
 - Improving services for Children Looked After and Achieving Permanence
- 3.4 The Board has now met nine times, has been well attended by partners and well served by officers and has received a wide range of reports, including the new LAC data matrix and the Quality Assurance Framework.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 4.1 The work of the CSIB is aligned with the Strategic Priorities of Reading Borough Council as set out in the Corporate Plan and in particular 'safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable'.

5. PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES

- 5.1 Leadership and Governance - following a three month period, where the Director of Adult Care and Health Services covered both the Adults and Children's Directorates; an appointment was made in February 2016 to secure continuity of leadership for the position of Director of Children, Education and Early Help Services. Since the Director of Children, Education and Early Help came into post in February 2016, a number of significant senior roles have been filled on a permanent basis, including the Head of Safeguarding, the Head of Transformation and Governance, the Head of Education and the Head of Early Help. The CSIB has recognised that the establishment of a permanent senior leadership team within Children's Services is key to ensuring the capacity to secure and embed further improvement. The implementation of the proposed arrangements for service remodelling in Children's Social Care is underway with arrangements in place to minimise disruption to children and families. The CSIB has received regular updates on the implementation of the new service model and will continue to focus on the arrangements to manage risk during the period of transition. The updated Corporate Parenting Strategy is on track for delivery.
- 5.2 Partnership Working - partners continue to be well represented and engaged in the work of CSIB and it is positive to note that one partner provided interim cover for the chairing arrangements prior to the new Independent Chair taking up the role in April. The RSCB provides regular reports including progress on the development of multi agency strategies on Neglect and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and information on audit activity undertaken across the partnership.
- 5.3 Quality and Consistency of Practice - establishing a culture that drives improvement in the quality and consistency of practice is central to the success of the Improvement Plan. The Board has acknowledged that embedding quality and consistency has been difficult during a period of significant churn in terms of staff turnover. It is anticipated that recent improvements in the stability of the workforce, successful recruitment of permanent social workers and the establishment of a permanent leadership team will create a better climate for embedding quality and consistency of practice. The Quality Assurance Framework is now in place but it is too early to identify sustained impact as audit work is at an early stage of becoming regular systematic activity within the service. The recent appointment of a permanent Principal Social Worker will be central to supporting and enabling staff and managers to deliver quality and consistency of practice supported by effective management oversight. The Board has expressed concern about the frequency and quality of supervision and will maintain a focus on this important area over the next quarter.
- 5.4 Workforce Development - the two substantial actions concerning the

development and implementation of the Social Worker recruitment programme and the review of models of sector-led improvement and the rollout of the management/leadership development programme are all on track. The recruitment activity is well resourced and focused but although it is having some success this is against a backdrop of high attrition rates between November and February which has left the authority with a large number of agency social workers and a high number of vacancies to fill. The bulk recruitment activity, together with the Reading Offer, has attracted an encouraging number of permanent social workers and since this work is so essential to securing improvements in service quality the CSIB has asked for monthly updates.

- 5.5 Performance management - the report received by the CSIB in April 2016 provided an update on five actions and included the completed actions regarding the review and development of the Purple book indicators. The new series of dashboards are now nearly all in place and provide the framework for the monthly management of performance within the service. It is evident to the CSIB that there has been a clear focus on the work to secure a robust structure for the performance management framework and its associated infrastructure. A programme for gathering the views on the quality of the service from children, young people and families has been established and this has been included in the work programme for the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Similar progress has been made with the Participation Strategy and is outlined in the annual report 'You said, we did'.
- 5.6 Services for Looked After Children and Permanency - there are processes in place to monitor the NYAS contract, the use of independent visiting and the planning for children through the Solutions Panel. The CSIB has welcomed improvement in the completion of PEPs and the increased focus, supported by audit activity, on the quality of these plans. The CSIB has expressed concern about the high number of looked after children placed outside the borough and the impact this may have on the quality of support they receive. There have been some improvements in permanency planning and this will remain a focus with the aim of improving the speed of early matching to a long term family, the quality of care and the provision of adoption and special guardianship support services and the achievement of delivery targets. The development of the fostering and adoption dashboard is still under development but it has been reported that this will 'go live' during the summer.
- 5.7 In summary, the CSIB continues to recognise the enormous amount of work that has been undertaken to deliver the Improvement Plan over the last nine months. Officers have provided clear and timely reports to the Board and these have identified areas of progress together with those requiring further improvement. As many of the tasks and activities in the Improvement Plan have been completed the CSIB is becoming more focussed on evaluating impact particularly in relation to performance, the quality of evidence in quality assurance findings, staff recruitment and retention and consistency of practice.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 Whilst an EAI has not been completed in compiling this report, CSIB members do focus on making sure that the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and young people are met in a timely and appropriate way.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no known legal implications.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The CSIB has no budgetary responsibility.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Minutes of CSIB meetings
- Children's Services Improvement Plan highlight reports and reports by other officers to the CSIB have been used to complete this report

Appendix 1

Reading Borough Council Children's Services Improvement Board

Objectives for the CSIB

The main objectives for the Board are to ensure that:

- System wide leadership is in place and creates the conditions for effective partnership working and practice which will make a difference to children and young people who fall under responsibility of Reading Borough Council;
- There is a golden thread of oversight from 'top to bottom 'with a clear line of sight between leaders, practitioners and children;
- The voice of the child informs everything that the Children's Services in Reading Borough Council does;
- There are robust and effective quality assurance framework in place to support the Improvement Plan;
- Impactful support and challenge from the board with a clear oversight of the improvement plan and subsequent outcomes for children, young people and families is welcomed and embedded; and
- It supports Reading Borough Council to be a confident learning organisation.