

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP  
SERVICES**

<b>TO:</b>	<b>ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>6 JUNE 2017</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE</b>		
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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on the progress being made in implementing the Council's Improvement Plan, approved at Full Council on 18 October 2016. The plan is currently being updated to reflect the progress we have made to date, the resources we have secured and the priorities for action we have identified. Therefore this report captures progress against a Learning and Improvement plan that is in the process of being superseded. The progress summary continues to be updated by the directorate on a monthly basis, and is routinely presented to the independently chaired CSIB for challenge and scrutiny.
- 1.2 Progress continues to be made against the actions set out within the plan. In April 2017 a total of 12 actions were rated as completed, these remain within the plan for 6 months and continue to be monitored by the CSIB to ensure that improvement is sustained and embedded.
- 1.3 Whilst progress is now being made against all actions, some timescales have been exceeded. This is predominantly due to the initial delay in securing some financial resources required to deliver and has been impacted further by changes to key personnel to deliver required improvement activity.

1.4 The original October 2016 Learning and Improvement Plan is currently under review to address progress made to date and outcome of the last 3 Ofsted Monitoring Visits. An updated plan will be completed by summer 2017.

1.5 The Children's Commissioner for Reading Borough Council, Mr. Whitfield, continues to meet with, and receive regular reports, from the CSIB Chair and the Director of Children, Education, and Early Help Services on progress against the plan.

## **2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

2.1 That the Committee scrutinises the progress being made and endorses the strategic approach being taken by the Director of Children, Education and Early Help.

2.2 That a further progress update report is presented to Committee in October 2017.

## **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

3.1 Ofsted's Inspection findings (report dated 5 August 2016) identified that safeguarding needs of children were not addressed through consistent and prompt enquiry. The impact on children being that they are left in situations of unknown risk. Inspectors found children in situations where they had not been seen by social workers and those in situations where their risks were not understood and acted upon with sufficient urgency.

3.2 Reading's Learning and Improvement Plan is structured around three key pillars of reform (People and Leadership; Practice and Systems; Governance and Accountability), that incorporates the 18 recommendations for improvement set out by Ofsted in its inspection of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in June 2016.

3.3 Ofsted undertakes quarterly monitoring visits to Reading Borough Council. The first Monitoring Visit was undertaken by Ofsted on 31 October and 1 November 2016; a second on 21 and 22 February 2017 and a third on 31 May and 1 June 2017. The Council has received the first two reports and the third in draft (due for publication on 29 June 2017).

## **4. CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 The Improvement plan is structured around 3 key pillars of reform with 18 cascading outcomes, consisting of 60 actions. A baseline was established in the initial stages of developing the plan (September 2016) and is reviewed monthly by the Children's Directorate Management Team (DMT) and the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

- 4.2 Progress and any proposed changes to the RAG status is scrutinised and approved by the independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB).
- 4.3 Progress continues to be made against the actions set out within the plan, with the overall direction of travel presenting some improvement since September 2016. In April 12 actions were completed. These remain within the plan for 6 months and continue to be monitored by the CSIB to ensure that improvement is sustained.
- 4.4 The original timescales for some actions have been exceeded. This is due the initial delay in securing some of the resources required to deliver the key actives, and has been further impacted by a number of changes in personnel to deliver required improvement activity.
- 4.5 A summary of progress report (appendix 1) provides an overview of the key achievements made by Reading Borough Council, up until the end April 2017, in delivering the improvement required across the 3 key priority areas.
- 4.6 The initial actions set out in the October 2016 Learning and Improvement Plan are being reviewed, in line with the progress made to date and outcome of the last 3 Ofsted Monitoring Visits. An updated plan will be completed by end June 2017.

#### **Other Options Considered**

- 4.7 There are no other options being considered at this stage. The Council is required to undertake these actions under central government direction.

### **5 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 This report is in line with the overall direction of the Council by meeting the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
2. Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living.

### **6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 The Ofsted Inspection Report is a public document and is widely available to provide the community with the judgement of Reading's Children's Services.
- 6.2 The second and subsequent quarterly Ofsted Monitoring Visits are published by Ofsted and as such are public documents that are available to provide the community with an update on the progress.
- 6.3 The community have not been engaged in the preparation of the immediate improvement response to the Ofsted report publication. However, the

improvement plan has been implemented in conjunction with partners, particularly Thames Valley Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Berkshire Health Care Foundation Trust, Royal Berkshire Hospital and Public Health, Schools and The Foster Care network.

## **7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An Impact Assessment is not relevant to the preparation of this report.

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Whilst there are no legal implications in relation to this report, it is important to note that under Children's Services Legislation, we are required under a general duty of the Children's Act 2004 to address the quality of services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## **9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 All of the resource requirements associated with the actions identified in the initial Ofsted report and related plan, are met. The Council is currently working under significant financial constraints (as have been outlined to Policy Committee), so as far as practical the action plan is being resourced within the approved budget for 2017/18.

## **10 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding board.  
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/reading>

Monitoring local authority children's services judged inadequate.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-local-authority-childrens-services-judged-inadequate-guidance-for-inspectors>

Putting Children First: Delivering Our Vision for Excellent Children's Social Care  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

Report of the Independent Improvement Board Chair, Diane Smith, to ACE  
<https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/6964/Item10/pdf/Item10.pdf>

## **LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN SUMMARY OF PROGRESS**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview on the progress to date (April 2017) in implementing the Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan for Reading Borough Council.
- 1.2 The Learning and Improvement Plan is structured around three key priorities, (pillars of reform) (1) People and Leadership; (2) Practice and Systems; (3) Governance and Accountability. The 18 recommendations for improvement set out by Ofsted in its inspection of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in June 2016, are incorporated within the three key priority areas.
- 1.3 A contextual summary of the improvement and progress made to date, is set out against the three key priorities, based on the position as at the end of April 2017.

### **2. Progress against priority 1 - People and Leadership**

- 2.1 As at end April 2017 56% social work posts were filled with permanent staff and 20% of social work management posts. A new, national recruitment campaign was launched on 5<sup>th</sup> June which includes a dedicated microsite, with a targeted approach on the benefits of working for and living in Reading. The offer to prospective applicants is competitive within the Berkshire region. Our aspiration is to have an increased permanent workforce in place by September 2017.
- 2.2 In line with our priority on workforce planning and skills audit we are developing a learning and development programme that will support our workforce in getting to 'good', allow for career progression within the existing workforce, and provide continuity of best practice across the child's journey. At an operational level the experience and expertise being shared at a management level is starting to embed a 'learning culture' and raise the quality of practice.
- 2.3 As a consequence of addressing throughput at the early stages of casework we have seen a reduction in the number of open cases over the last 2 months from a position of 1986 as at end March 2017 to 1778 as the beginning of May 2017. To further enhance this position we have streamlined the requirements within teams, for example creating a new dedicated Court Team, which has welcomed by the Designated Family Judge, and will ensure timely outcomes for permanency for children and young people.
- 2.4 Reading Borough Council's practice model 'Signs of Safety' has been partially implemented. The service is now at a point where an operational decision

needs to be made about the strengths and weaknesses of this model, to ensure that it is consistently supporting good outcomes for children and young people.

### **3. Progress against priority 2 - Practice and Systems**

- 3.1 In line with the development of the single front door the multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Help Service has undertaken a review of functions to ensure that we have the capacity and expertise in place to deliver a best practice model.
- 3.2 The introduction and delivery of monthly performance surgeries, facilitated by the Head of Services, has secured the analysis of quantitative and qualitative information resulting in a better understanding of children's social care delivery and performance.
- 3.3 The Virtual School in line with the other developments in the service has prioritised children and young people that are not in education, training or employment (NEET). The introduction of the e-PEP (Personal Education Plan) is starting to show early signs of improved educational outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by the local authority. The Council ambition that all children and young people receive access to good education is beginning to be realised through the contribution of the virtual school ensuring that looked after children are in schools that are providing them with a good educational experience.
- 3.4 The Council's continuing commitment to ensure that all care leavers have access to appropriate accommodation and that all requests for 'staying put' arrangements are met, continues to be a significant strength.
- 3.5 The Independent Review Officer (IRO) establishment has been increased by 1 full time equivalent to respond to the increase in demand on the service. A new dedicated Quality Assurance Team is being created to support the service with its ambition to become a learning organisation, whilst providing independent scrutiny and challenge on the quality of practice.

### **4. Progress against priority 3 - Governance and Accountability**

- 4.1 Based on the needs analysis completed in October 2016 a new Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked after Children and Young People in Reading has been developed. The purpose of the strategy is to ensure value for money and provides us with an opportunity to manage the market, therefore leading to better outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.2 The introduction of the Access to Resources team (ART) will provide dedicated expertise and capacity within Children's Services to increase the range of placement choice, availability, and interventions at best price. This is fundamental to the Council realising its ambition to ensure that we can offer affordable local placements for local children and young people.

4.3 The Council's ambition as a corporate parent is in part realised through the corporate parenting panel. To ensure the panel is effective we are reviewing the corporate parenting strategy.










4.4 A review of the Council's current commissioning arrangements for advocacy is due to be completed by July 2017. This will ensure that we engage with children and young people in a different way to strengthen their voice within the service. We will now include an independent visitor service to fulfil our statutory duty.










4.5 We are implementing a new approach to casework audit and review, underpinned by our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The approach, led by our new Quality Assurance Team, goes beyond a traditional 'audit' process and is designed to embed practice evaluation and quality assurance into the day to day business of our teams. It will be delivered by dedicated quality assurance officers via direct work and coaching between auditors and operational staff before, during, and after the audit has taken place. It embeds audit and feedback into a systematic process of learning and development, by collating thematic outcomes, planning and intervening to promote practice change, and then re-evaluating the quality of practice at regular intervals.

## 5. Summary of Key Performance Indicators

5.1 Table 2 below provides a summary of performance progress against the key performance indicators within the CSIB dataset over a 5 week period to end April 2017.

*Table 2 - Performance Progress Summary @ 30/04/2017*

	2/4/17	9/4/17	16/4/17	23/4/17	30/4/17	Direction of Travel
No. of open cases	1864	1852	1848	1824	1784	
No. of Looked After Children	265	267	270	266	264	
No. of children subject to a CP Plan	352	349	361	371	370	
No. of unallocated cases	58	68	60	61	0	
No. of Contacts received	181	121	114	100	146	
No. of Referrals received	31	21	15	21	36	
Referrals not progressed to a single assessment	0	10	1	5	2	
Single Assessments completed in week	47	41	16	22	24	
Single Assessments Outstanding and Overdue	36	43	40	24	17	

No. of cases closed in the week	80	45	41	45	7	
No. of Child Protection Visits outstanding	108	96	61	75	0	
No. of looked after children visits outstanding	94	98	105	109	121	
CIN Visits outstanding	351	365	351	350	367	
Highest caseload in A&A Teams	31	28	34	34	26	
Highest caseload in Safeguarding Teams	32	31	33	30	30	
Highest caseload in LAC Teams	22	23	23	24	24	
Highest caseload in Disabled Children Team	28	28	27	27	27	
Highest caseload in Care Leaving Team	19	18	27	27	27	

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 A total of 12 actions were completed as at the end April 2017, which remain on the Learning and Improvement Plan for 6 months for performance monitoring by the CSIB.

6.2 Whilst there has been an increase in the number of actions that have moved into RED during April, this is due to the actions not being fully achieved within the original timescale set during September 2016.

6.3 The significant increase in actions now RED is in part attributable to the delay in the directorate securing the required resources to undertake key improvement activities. It is also reflective of the delayed implementation of the plan (December 2016) and that the true baseline of key activity and performance (and therefore the extent of the action required to achieve the necessary improvement) has only been properly understood since January 2017.

6.4 Progress is being made against all of the outstanding actions, with resources now secured to deliver the key activities and improvement required.

6.5 The refresh of the Learning and Improvement Plan will ensure that all outstanding actions are reviewed against the current baseline, with any remaining activities being clearly set out, with realistic timescale for delivery, in the updated plan.