

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION & EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	12 JULY 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	8
TITLE:	OFSTED UPDATE REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANN MARIE DODDS	TEL:	01189 372421
JOB TITLE:	DIRECTOR	E-MAIL:	Annmarie.dodds@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update ACE on the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit that was carried out on 31st May and 1st June 2017 with the resultant monitoring letter published on the Ofsted website on 29th June 2017 (see link).
- 1.2 The Service accepts that there are 'limited strengths' and that there remain significant weaknesses across Children's Services.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee recognise that some improvements have been made as documented by Ofsted though there is much improvement activity still to be undertaken.
- 2.2 That the Committee accepts the proposal for management oversight of a single improvement plan through the Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB).
- 2.3 That the Committee receive updates on Ofsted's findings post publication of subsequent monitoring letters.

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 being, on children 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 As a result of the 'inadequate' judgement 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 next monitoring visit will take place during October 2017.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

- 4.1. In addition to the work undertaken by the Directorate Management Team, Lead Member briefings, Corporate Parenting Board and ACE, service improvement activity is overseen by the Children Services Improvement Board (CSIB). Existing service improvement and development plans have been integrated into a single learning and improvement plan which incorporates the 18 recommendations for improvement set out in the Ofsted report as well as corporate saving delivery targets.
- 4.2 The original learning and improvement plan is in the process of being refreshed to ensure an outcome focus on all improvement activity. This will move away from the process orientated approach identified by Ofsted. The revised plan will be presented to the July meeting of the CSIB.
- 4.3 Ofsted recognises the 'slow' progress made by Children's Services, their judgements documented in previous monitoring letters. Slow progress has resulted from two key delays, those being lack of focused and targeted improvement activity in the period immediately post inspection (summer 2016) and the delay in securing financial resource to deliver improvement until the commencement of the financial year 2017/18.
- 4.4 Work to stabilise the workforce was judged as ineffective based upon high vacancy rates and 'churn' within the workforce. A revised national recruitment campaign commenced in June which is showing early signs of progress in the recruitment of permanent staff.
- 4.5 Senior management positions are scheduled for recruitment through the late summer and autumn of 2017.
- 4.6 There are a number of cases across the whole children's services caseload that have a legacy of historic, weak practice, resulting in drift and delay. These cases are being addressed with improved current practice though historic and some current weaknesses continue to be visible in case files. Positively social work with children in some permanent teams is stronger and social workers work hard to build relationships.
- 4.7 The audit function of the Local Authority has seen an increase in capacity with a new focus on coaching and mentoring in order to develop a learning culture and further expedite pace to the social work practice improvements required.

- 4.8 Caseloads have been stabilised, transition arrangements are improved, accommodation is mostly suitable and there are examples of regular management supervision.

Options Proposed

- 4.9 It is proposed that the role of the CSIB is continued and strengthened in order to provide ongoing challenge and scrutiny to the service improvement work of Reading Borough Council in collaboration with its partners.
- 4.10 It is proposed that improvement activity is reported to the board on a quarterly basis through update reports from the independent chair of CSIB.
- 4.11 It is proposed that Ofsted update reports are brought to committee following all subsequent Ofsted monitoring visits.

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:
- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
 - 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 monitoring judgement of Reading's Children's Services.
- 6.2 Previous and subsequent quarterly Ofsted Monitoring Visits have been and will be published by and as such are public documents that are available to provide the community with an update on the progress.
- 6.3 The community were not been engaged in the preparation of the immediate improvement response to the Ofsted report publication nor are they engaged in the refresh of the learning and improvement plan. 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 and sequenced within the approved budget for 2017/18.

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Monitoring visit of Reading Borough Council children's services

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/reading/055_Monitoring%20visit%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf..pdf

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

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/6964/Item10/pdf/Item10.pdf>

Third monitoring letter to Local Authority

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/reading/055_Monitoring%20visit%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf..pdf