

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:	12 DECEMBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR		
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 This report is one of a series of reports to ACE Committee from the Independent Chair of the Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB). The CSIB was established to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan and service improvements in Children's Social Care.
- 1.2 The CSIB meets monthly and this report covers the period from April to November 2017
- 1.3 During this period, the CSIB has overseen the development of a revised Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan. The original Learning and Improvement Plan was developed in response to the 18 recommendations for improvement identified in the Ofsted report of August 2017. The revised Learning and Improvement Plan builds on the improvements already secured and moves beyond the narrow focus of the Ofsted recommendations to establishing the foundations for delivering Children's Services that are 'good' overall.
- 1.4 The CSIB monitors progress against the plan and reviews a comprehensive range of performance indicators at each of its monthly meetings. A highlight report is produced for each CSIB meeting summarising progress against each of the actions and indicating a RAG rating. Where actions have been RAG rated RED or AMBER management action to secure improvement is included.
- 1.5 A storyboard approach to understanding and scrutinising key priority areas has been developed. The storyboards include a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence to map the improvement journey relating to a particular

priority. This evidence is used to outline and evaluate progress and to identify next steps to secure further improvement. The CSIB has reviewed storyboards relating to CSE/Missing, Recruitment and Retention, MOSAIC and Early Help.

- 1.6 In addition to monitoring the Learning and Improvement Plan, the CSIB also focusses on quality assurance evidence in relation to improvements in social work practice.
- 1.7 The period covered by this report has been characterised by increased stability in the leadership of children's services, active corporate support, better partnership engagement and increased focus on improving practice. As a result, this has been a period of tangible progress in improving services for children and young people.

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 in any future report from the CSIB.

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. Since the publication of the Ofsted report in August 2016 the CSIB has focussed on providing support, challenge and oversight of the Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan.
- 3.2 The Terms of Reference and **objectives** are attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The Board continues to be supported and attended by key partners and is well served by officers.

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 The CSIB has had a keen focus on securing a skilled and stable workforce at every level as this is essential to ensuring sustainable improvement in children's services. Stability in leadership of children's services over the last period has been a significant factor in increasing the pace of improvement particularly in relation to the quality of social work practice. Recruitment and retention remains a priority for CSIB and a storyboard approach has been used to aid understanding of the issue and to inform a more strategic approach. Although there has been some recent success in recruiting permanent

managers and social workers, the drive to reduce over reliance on temporary staff remains essential to securing embedded and sustainable improvement.

- 5.2 The Chief Executive attends and actively supports CSIB. He has promoted broad corporate support for the improvement programme and this has been most evident in relation to improvements in the functionality of MOSAIC (the case management system) and an increased focus on the issue of recruitment and retention.
- 5.3 Support from partners to the work of the CSIB has been more visible in recent months and there is good engagement from police and health representatives. A stronger working relationship between the CSIB and the LSCB has been established and this is contributing to more effective multi-agency working. The CSIB has actively promoted and influenced the establishment of the single point of access (SPoA) which has been an important development in securing more consistent threshold decision making and improved engagement from partner agencies. The work of SPoA has also contributed to improved timeliness of decision making and in their recent visit Ofsted found evidence of better joint working around complex cases including domestic abuse and missing children. Further work is now being undertaken by SPoA to improve the understanding of issues relating to re referral.
- 5.4 The CSIB has prioritised work on CSE and Missing and scrutinised a storyboard which demonstrated an improved partnership approach to this important issue. Children's social care and the police have worked proactively with support from the Chief Executive of Reading Borough Council and the corporate team. More robust arrangements are now in place to support the understanding of CSE in Reading and the development of effective multi-agency arrangements to address this issue. There is now daily liaison between the police and SPoA to ensure improved responsiveness to missing incidents. CSE awareness raising has been undertaken and all secondary schools have been involved. Improved arrangements for collecting data on CSE and Missing are now in place and regular analysis is being used to inform further developments in addressing this issue. The CSIB will maintain critical oversight of this important issue.
- 5.3 The Learning and Improvement Plan is complemented by a comprehensive performance data set. A RAG rating approach has been adopted to evaluate the status of individual performance indicators. Detailed management action is required where performance is identified as a Red risk and the CSIB scrutinises the effectiveness of this action. An area of Red performance that the CSIB is currently focussed on is the timeliness of planning for Children in Need (CIN), Child Protection (CP) and Looked After Children (LAC). Children's Services leaders are working to clarify and improve practice standards around planning so that social workers and managers are able to develop and implement SMART plans within defined timescales.
- 5.4 The introduction of a new quality assurance framework has supported the CSIB in its understanding of the quality of social work practice. The quality of the reporting on audit activity has improved and there is greater rigour in the evaluation of practice. The development of the 'Beyond auditing' model has provided CSIB with insight into how the approach is contributing to improvements in practice through live coaching and reflection with the worker

and manager. There is clear evidence that this approach is supporting a positive learning culture. This work has particularly impressed partners who have expressed increased confidence in the work to improve the quality of frontline practice. Quality assurance activity also supports the identification of areas requiring improvement. Some issues to do with compliance remain a challenge and there is evidence that management oversight needs to be more consistent, analytical and outcomes focussed.

- 5.5 The CSIB is well supported by officers from the Council. The DCS and her leadership team provide a range of regular reports and performance information which enable the CSIB to monitor, evaluate and challenge improvement. The quality of the reporting has become increasingly focussed and analytical over time, demonstrating a much clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. This clarity of understanding is a firm platform upon which to build further sustainable improvement in children's services.

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
- The Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan updates, storyboards and reports presented 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.