

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:	11 July 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR		
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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 December 2017 to June 2018.
- 1.3 During this period, the CSIB has overseen the revised Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan and monitored progress at each meeting. Each improvement area is given a RAG rating of Red, Amber or Green and the CSIB challenges areas where progress is rated Red to ensure that management oversight is rigorous and that barriers to improvement are identified and addressed. The data which underpins the Learning and Improvement Plan comes under rigorous scrutiny and there are key performance indicators such as the timeliness of visits which have been an area of particular focus. Each meeting of CSIB includes a report from the Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) which ensures that partnership working is aligned to the overall improvement programme. The CSIB has also considered additional reports including: an overview report from the Head of the Virtual School, regular updates on the implementation and improvement in functionality of Mosaic (the social care case management system) and progress reports on the development and implementation of the Early Help Strategy.
- 1.4 The period covered by this report has seen some challenges such as the issue relating to unallocated cases and some successes particularly in relation to the

increasing stability of the workforce including the recruitment of permanent managers. The CSIB meetings have been provided with active corporate support particularly in relation to improvements in recruitment and retention and the increased functionality of the Mosaic case management system. The Chief Executive is an active champion of the work of the CSIB and attends regularly. Partner engagement has been a little patchy during the period but there is regular support and attendance from Health colleagues and the Independent Chair of the LSCB.

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 Performance indicators for this period which have shown improvement include: timeliness of Early Help assessments; timeliness of Child in Need visits; percentage of Looked After Children with an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP); percentage of established social work manager posts and established social work posts filled with permanent staff. In December, January and February an issue emerged relating to a significant number of unallocated Child in Need cases. This was a serious issue which has now been resolved. There were concerns that this issue was not identified quickly enough and as a consequence the number of unallocated cases is monitored rigorously on a weekly basis by the DCS with updates sent to the Chief Executive, the Commissioner and the Independent Chair of CSCB. Data relating to the percentage of cases that have supervision recorded has shown some improvement, but performance is uneven across the different social work

teams. The approach to case supervision is under review and additional support from Achieving for Children has been identified to support those teams that are performing less well.

- 5.2 Quality assurance arrangements have been through a number of changes and a more settled framework of reporting has been developed. A report on all the quality assurance activity undertaken in 2017/18 was presented to the June meeting of CSIB. There is some evidence that there are pockets of improving practice for example in Early Help and the Children in Need Team. In their most recent monitoring visit Ofsted identified improvements in the quality of direct work with children undertaken by the two specialist children in care teams. They noted that 'work is planned, thoughtful and effective. IROs are strengthening their oversight of children's plans and children's progress towards permanent, settled homes. Children are given good support to meet their health and educational needs.' Through the range of quality assurance activity three main areas of practice have been identified as priorities for improvement: timely purposeful visits; management oversight and supervision and quality of recording. These areas will be the focus for improvement activity over the next few months.
- 5.3 The CSIB has maintained its keen focus on securing a skilled and stable workforce at every level as this is essential to ensuring sustainable improvement in children's services. In recent months significant improvements have been made in securing permanent managers and the current position shows the greatest stability for over a year. In addition, the appointment of a substantive Director of Children's Services brings stability to the senior leadership team. This increased stability in leadership and management is of critical importance in assisting Reading to secure embedded and sustainable improvement particularly in relation to the quality of social work practice. The most recent Ofsted monitoring visit commented positively on the increasing stability of the workforce and 'the calm, purposeful working environment in the teams they visited'. Recruitment and retention will remain a priority for CSIB because of its critical importance to the pace and sustainability of improvement.
- 5.4 Ofsted have highlighted that the percentage of distant and out-of-borough placements for looked after children has increased and this is an issue that CSIB will review in the next period. The data shows that current performance is significantly out of kilter with national and statistical comparators. The review will include consideration of the provision of residential therapeutic placements for older children with complex and challenging needs.
- 5.5 The CSIB is well supported by officers from Children's Services. The Interim 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 continues to improve and there is a tangible and increasing sense that the service understands its emerging strengths and, more importantly, areas requiring more focussed improvement activity. Members of the senior leadership team are increasingly effective at analysing the impact of improvement activity and are actively developing the skills of social work managers to own and manage the performance of their teams.

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.