

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 OCTOBER 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	OFSTED MONITORING VISIT AND DEEP DIVE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Reading Borough Council (RBC) Childrens Services received an inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers by Ofsted, ending in June 2016. The overall outcome grading from the inspection was given as 'Inadequate.'

Following this inspection RBC children's services have been subject to regular monitoring visits from Ofsted and Deep Dive exercises by the Department of Education through the appointed Commissioner.

On July 31st and August 1st 2018 Ofsted undertook the 7th monitoring visit focussing on Looked After Children over 16 years and Care Leavers.

On September 5th and 6th 2018 the Commissioner undertook a Deep Dive exercise which looked at the overall Children's Social Care system with a strong focus on Children in need who had recently been referred to the Department.

1.2

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/reading/072_%20Reading_Monitoring%20visit%20of%20LA%20childrens%20services.pdf

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the report and outcomes from the associated Deep Dive and Ofsted monitoring visit be noted.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1

- Improvement of Childrens Services.
- *Decision by Council in September 2017 to set up a Childrens Company Brighter Futures for Children*

4. THE PROPOSAL

This report is for information and update.

4.1 Current Position:

Ofsted monitoring visit

The main finding from the visit was that Young people leaving care receive better services than they did at the last inspection two years ago.

Ofsted observed that there was careful preparation of young people to leave care, there were sustained efforts to help all young people in this cohort, there was determined and dedicated work seen and that there was a strong intent to improve the lives of care leavers which permeated the work of practitioners.

Inspectors stated that senior managers have worked methodically to improve the range and suitability and availability of accommodation for young people. The housing department and children's social care work were found to be working in partnership, offering 12 social housing flats for care leavers each year. The housing department also supports and advises young people on how to obtain suitable and decent standard accommodation in the private rented sector. Importantly no young people are placed in bed and breakfast or unsuitable houses of multiple occupation.

Young people who arrive in Reading as unaccompanied asylum seekers were judged to be carefully supported and found accommodation suitable to their needs.

Progress has been achieved in engaging more young people leaving care in meaningful education, employment and training opportunities (EET).

Key areas for further development were identified as:

- Improving our participation and involvement of young people in developing and influencing provision
- Ensuring a clear pathway for emotional health and wellbeing service with our health partners
- Continuing to improve supervision practice to eradicate variability

Deep Dive

We are still awaiting formal written feedback from September's Deep Dive visit. At the verbal feedback session from the Commissioner to senior managers and the Lead Member for children on 7th September 2018, the key areas that are going well were defined as:

- Better match between senior managers and front line narrative regarding identified need improvements being made
- Improved partnership working and relationships
- Greater stability with senior managers and good political drive for improvement
- Good support to our newly qualified social workers
- Good specialist skills and response from front door
- Stability and good local knowledge in Early Help Services
- Some growing evidence of 'children's voice' evidenced in work seen

Areas that still needed more work were described as:

- Recording needs to be embedded. The electronic recording database, 'Mosaic', needs to be simplified and greater 'floor walking' support is required from Mosaic team.
- Chronologies need to start earlier and be of good quality to help casework through system
- Transition points and internal threshold for children's cases needs improving to reduce duplication of effort
- Numbers of social workers and managers in safeguarding service need to increase to further reduce caseloads and enable front line staff to manage complex work.
- Communication with staff
- Embedding of new supervision policy and approach

A full report is expected in the near future.

The verbal findings of the Deep Dive event were accepted as helpful. Key improvements will be built in to the refreshed Children's Services Improvement Board plan which will be presented to the Board in November 2018

4.2 Options Proposed

Key next steps

Improvement work is happening every day across key areas in children services. Particular focus is on reducing demand, ensuring manageable caseloads for social workers, recruitment and supporting delivery of best practice. Examples of work undertaken within this includes:

- A focus on Court work practice with expert resource brought in to mentor workers on care planning and undertaking parenting assessments.
- Practice Week held week beginning 17th September with a series of observations of practice to assess quality as well as identify good work undertaken and share this across the service
- Launch of a new supervision methodology encouraging a more dynamic approach to ensure effective and developmental management oversight of practice
- Getting to Good events delivered via our improvement partner Achieving for Children.
- Continued drive to improve recruitment with increased presence in the industry press and dedicated resource leading full time to attract more staff.

- A service transformation delivery plan focusing on improvement to appropriately reduce demand, improve practice and deliver associated savings targets.

A full self-evaluation of Children's Social Care is being undertaken to evaluate progress of improvements and look at next steps, an external 'critical friend' process is being booked for mid-October.

A refreshed improvement plan based on the self-assessment will be presented to the Childrens Services Improvement Board at end of November. This will set the course and areas of focus for the next phase of improvement journey and feed into our Annual Conversation with Ofsted in February 2019 as detailed within the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) guidance 2018.

Reading can expect a further monitoring visit before a full re-inspection, as within the current inspection framework inspection dates are unannounced.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The report is for information but is in line with the overall direction of the Council by meeting the Corporate Plan priority:

1. To protect and enhance the lives of vulnerable adults and children

5.2 The relevant strategic aim is:

- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 This report is for information only and there is no proposal to consult.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 There is no decision required with this report that is relevant and therefore no Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in line with this.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This report is for information only and no decision is requested.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This report is for information only and no decision is requested.