

PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER, AND CARE LEAVERS (“OFSTED ACTION PLAN”)

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REASON FOR ITEM

The purpose of this paper is to provide a progress report on improvement activities that have occurred in the Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) as a result of the Ofsted Inspection in December 2013. The action plan has now been signed off and will be reported to Ofsted as completed (Appendix 1). There are some residual actions from the plan that will now be incorporated into the LB Hillingdon Children's Social Care Improvement Plan.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMITTEE

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) **Notes** the contents of this paper;
- b) **Endorses** the proposal for the completion of the Ofsted Action Plan
- c) **Endorses** the proposal to implement the Children's Services Improvement Plan and to report back to the Children, Young People & Learning Policy Overview Committee in September 2015.

INFORMATION

Background

- 1 The Council is required to prepare and publish a written statement of the action it intends to take in response to the Ofsted report. On 10 June 2014 Ofsted endorsed Hillingdon's "Ofsted Action Plan" that was developed to address the 11 areas of improvement, following the "Requires Improvement" judgement. In September a summary report was submitted to the Children, Young People and Learning Policy Overview Committee that reported good progress was being made.
- 2 With the completion of the Ofsted action plan, further improvement work will continue through the ongoing delivery of the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan (Appendix 2). This plan is based upon 7 work streams that will deliver improvements to the specified services including a cross cutting project 'embedding new ways of working and improved practice management arrangements'.

- 3 The improvement plan is designed to deliver a sustainable improvement programme through good social work practice. The high level work streams are:
- Workforce development.
 - Performance improvement work in Triage, MASH and Children Social Work Teams.
 - Defining new ways of working within the CSWTs.
 - Improving outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) and Young People.
 - Improving the quality of Fostering & Adoption provision.
 - Embedding new ways of working and improved practice management arrangements.
 - Effective Quality Assurance.

Contextual Information

- 4 In August 2014 the level of risk in the Children's Social Work Teams was deemed to be unacceptably high. This followed a high degree of disruption and changes in all levels of management and staffing within the service. A significant additional amount of resource was committed to the service, coupled with the arrival of a new Senior Management Team within CYPS and the service was stabilised. The leadership team is now firmly focused on driving forward service improvements and a new service plan is being developed.

Progress towards Improving Outcomes

- 5 The service objectives for the Ofsted Improvement Action Plan were to:
- Implement all key deliverables of the Improvement Plan and drive a sustainable programme of challenge and quality assurance to achieve the highest standards of professional child care practice; and
 - A Quality Assurance programme is in place that drives up service standards and learns from staff and service user feedback.
- 6 The Ofsted Plan has now been substantially completed with only a minority of actions remaining that will now be transferred to the new Service Improvement Plan (see appendix 2). The table below summaries the progress that CYPS has made against the Ofsted Action Plan actions:

Action Status	Number
Completed	30
Residual Actions for the Service Plan	11

- 7 A quality assurance programme is now in place (Appendix 3). The service improvements are underpinned by a new Quality Assurance Framework to provide both a baseline for practice, and to measure progress towards improved performance. The framework underpins social work practice in CYPS, and the findings from audits are used to support practice improvement and build evidence of management

oversight. Case file audits completed by managers have increased incrementally from 31% in June 2014, to 100% in January and February 2015.

- 8 More comprehensive updates in relation to the specific 41 actions in the Ofsted Action Plan can be seen in Appendix 1.

Recent Service Background

- 9 In August 2014 the Children's Social Care Service was at a critical stage, characterised by a high turnover of frontline staff and managers at all levels, high caseloads and significant backlogs of cases, within which there were children who had not been visited by social workers to the required frequency. The Council's reputation with partners, including the Courts, the Police and Schools was in turn characterised by a lack of confidence and concern that standards to keep children safe were not being met.

- 10 The key points to note as at August 2014 included:

- Average caseloads for social workers peaked during September with qualified workers on average holding 30 cases and newly qualified staff with 33 cases.
- The Director of Children's Services and the two Assistant Directors responsible for safeguarding children and child protection activities left the Council at a time when there was limited cover at service manager level.
- The council was unable to attract or retain agency cover to achieve a degree of stability in the service
- Permanent social workers in post were continuing to leave

- 11 Due to the issues illustrated above the Ofsted Improvement Plan had not achieved the level of service improvement expected. This had resulted in key parts of the pathway failing to operate adequately, leaving children, the service and the Council at risk due to not seeing children when required and not planning for their stability and permanency. This included:

- MASH had not been functioning fully for most of 2014 and Triage was not working effectively, resulting in a high ratio of referrals against contacts and complaints from residents and agencies about the low level of responsiveness of the Council.
- The average time to complete assessments was 33 days, resulting in only 75% being completed on time. 141 assessments were overdue.
- 7.5% of child protection visits were overdue (or not recorded as completed).
- The number of children in need cases reached a peak of 2066 by October 2014, with 828 having no plan in place
- Public Law Outline (court timescales) at 57 weeks against the expected 26 weeks
- Data quality was variable in specific service areas, with managers establishing their own local spreadsheets to track cases. There was limited confidence in the quality and timeliness of data recording on the children's social care IT system for some of the higher risk case work.
- Few managers had undertaken case audits to check on the quality of practice and decision making – no audits were undertaken in July and August 2014.

Progress from September 2014

12 The Council's investment in a managed service in September 2014, to help stabilise the workforce, raise the performance of frontline practice, whilst also testing a future operating model has:

- Supported the Triage, MASH and assessment service to reach 'steady state'.
- Supported other social work teams to clear all assessment and children in need backlogs.
- Reduced caseloads to best practice levels (average 17 per qualified worker).
- Given a clear understanding of expected service volumes.
- Implement a safe and consistent assessment service.

13 The key improvements in the service from September 2014 provide strong evidence that the service is now at a 'steady-state' position with realistic prospects of achieving good during 2015/16. They include:

- Multi- Agency safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Triage - Thresholds, early intervention and early resolution - the MASH is now up and running and both the Police and other key partners have commented on the quality of thresholds being managed and decisions being made. Despite an increase in contacts the ratio of contacts moving through to referral has fallen (from 32% in September 2014 to 29% in January 2015). This is ensuring children who need support and safeguarding interventions receive these in a timely way. It also provides a proxy measure of the increased use of 'step down' and early support – key aspects of the children's pathway.
- Reduced caseloads – now below the target average at 17 (February 2015), from the high of 30 in September 2014. Manageable caseloads for staff are contributing to a more stable workforce and also ensure that children receive timely intervention and support where needed.
- Tackling the backlog of cases – the total number of open children in need (CIN) cases have reduced from a peak of 2,066 on 13/10/14 to 1463 on 02/02/15 – an average reduction of approx. 43 cases per week. The 'steady state' number of cases at any one time is estimated to be 1,300 and this will be reached by April 2015.
- The number of CIN cases without a care plan for 6 weeks or longer has also fallen sharply since a peak of 828 cases in September 2014 to 250 cases as at early March 2015.
- Improving practice & outcomes for children looked after - Since September the number of children looked after has reduced to below the benchmark level for Local Authorities similar to Hillingdon. During the same period the number of children subject to a child protection plan has increased as thresholds are applied consistently and higher risk cases are assessed and appropriate interventions are

taken. This will mean that more children move into the care system as cases progress to care proceedings during 2015.

- During this period there has also been an improvement in key performance and compliance measures with a reduction in late visits by social workers for looked after children and also those with no visits recorded. Sustained progress has been made by the service to implement the Public Law Outline (PLO) to ensure children achieve a final care order and permanency plan within 26 weeks. The current average for completed care cases is 34 weeks, down from 57 weeks in 2013/14. The projected average for current active care proceedings cases is now 29 weeks and falling. From April 2015 the average care case in Hillingdon will be projected to finish within 25 weeks. This is one of the best performances in the Family Court area and within the national standard set by the President of the Family Division. The outcomes of proceedings have also seen a marked increase in the number of permanent placement orders being made (Special Guardianship Orders and Placement Orders).

14 To sustain the high social care standards for local residents and deliver the aims of the children's pathway, the service will be subject to a new Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. This plan seeks to:

- Ensure sufficient capacity, competency and flexibility in resourcing to maintain high standards of service delivery to Hillingdon's residents.
- Focus and organise resources on delivering the aims of the children's pathway to ensure children remain safeguarded, prevent need escalating, intervene early and focus on permanency where this is the agreed plan.
- Deliver an affordable model of service delivery.

Standards/Statutory Requirements

15 The improvement plan is based on an assessed level of demand and need which has been benchmarked against statistical neighbours and national averages.

- Referral and assessment have a maximum of 45 days to conclude their assessment. The current staffing levels have improved performance in this area with the Assessment Teams currently achieving 30 day average.
- The volume assumptions have been tested against benchmarking with other local authorities to ensure that the whole service is comfortably within the range expected for good outcomes.
- The service has achieved the need to maintain caseloads at an average of no more than 18 cases per qualified social worker. There will be a differential within this average figure across the different service teams to take into account the variances in work patterns. For example social workers in assessment teams will have an average of 15 whilst those in Children in Need teams will have 18.

Stability in the workforce to achieve the desired outcomes

16 A critical element of the improvement plan will be successful permanent recruitment coupled with the implementation of a flatter management structure. This will provide better staffing stability and effective leadership at a practice level. The proposal will deliver a social work structure built around a model of one team manager with a maximum of 6 social workers to supervise. This will strengthen accountability for good practice within the teams and will maintain the pod business support system. This model will also invest in the advanced practitioner role to work with the QA service to improve practice quality and offer practice leadership. The Children's Service Improvement Plan includes a workforce strategy to deliver effective recruitment into the social work teams.

Quality Assurance to Evidence Embedded Change

17 All practice will be regularly monitored through the implementation of the Social Care Quality Assurance Framework (Appendix 3). This will deliver regular auditing by managers within the service of case work across all teams. The audits will be collated on a monthly basis and reported to the Service Management Team within Children's Social Care. Action will be taken at a practice and service level to learn from audit activity and to inform further service improvements and staff training and development.

Further Review and Report Back to Children, Young People & Learning (CYPL) Policy Overview Committee (POC)

18 It is proposed that the Children's Services Improvement Plan be subject to regular reports to the CYPL POC and that the next progress report will be submitted in September 2015.

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Attachments included with this report

- **Appendix 1 - "London Borough of Hillingdon - Action Plan in Response to Ofsted Inspection of Services to Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers" Update as at 29 September 2014**
- **Appendix 2 London Borough of Hillingdon - Children's Services Improvement plan 2014/16**
- **Appendix 3 London Borough of Hillingdon - Social Care Quality Assurance Framework**