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## **Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services and the County Council's Children First Service Improvement Programme: Progress Report**

### **Introduction**

- 1** This update report is one of a regular sequence being made by the Cabinet Member to all members of the County Council. Its purpose is to keep members informed about developments arising from the Ofsted judgement of Children's Services (May 2019) and to set out the progress being made in enacting the necessary service improvements.

### **The Children First Practice Improvement Plan**

- 2** The Improvement Plan was agreed for adoption on 6 August. It was subsequently submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE). Ofsted has now confirmed that it satisfactorily addresses the 12 areas for improvement identified in its inspection report. The Plan now forms the basis for the continuing service developments described below.

### **The work of the Commissioner**

- 3** The Commissioner appointed by the DfE, John Coughlan has now finished his review of whether he considers the Council has the capability and capacity to improve its children's services to a satisfactory standard; his report is awaited. He and his team have been in dialogue with all the stakeholders of the service over the past three to four months. If he is not satisfied with the Council's 'capacity and capability to improve itself', it is open to him to recommend to the Secretary of State for Education that an alternative delivery model, such as a Children's Trust is used to secure the best outcomes for children in West Sussex in the future.

### **Children's Services Leadership**

- 4** A new Leadership Team is now fully in place under Director of Children's Services, John Readman. This comprises:
  - Deputy Director and Head of Children's Social Care (Sally Allen);
  - Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting (Jackie Wood);
  - Assistant Director, Early Help (Ann Marie Dodds);
  - Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Quality and Assurance (Allison Parkinson);
  - Strategic Children's Commissioner (Susan Tanner);
  - Improvement Leads (Garath Symonds, Lisa Reid and Louise Warren).

### **Strengthening the Workforce**

- 5** Significant activity is continuing to build a resilient workforce, fully motivated and resourced to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people and their families. I am pleased to be able to report sustained progress in the following areas:
  - The vacancy gap has reduced from 18.5% in February 2019, to 1.8% in September; the intention is to maintain this position;
  - This outcome is supported by a Recruitment and Retention offer, which has currently been taken up by over 90% of eligible staff;

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- Around 75 FTE Agency Social Workers are in post to cover establishment vacancies and support the reduction of caseloads; reliance on this contingent will reduce as staffing and workloads are stabilized in the longer term;
  - The above measures are having a positive impact on reducing high caseloads: so far, 4 out of the 8 social work teams have achieved or improved upon their agreed maximum caseload targets: we are intent upon sustaining this improvement, while ensuring that social workers have the necessary technical, administrative and pastoral support;
  - The initiative in place for Newly Qualified Social Workers is demonstrating effectiveness, with the fresh intake of 38 NQSWs for 2019/20 coming on-stream; 24 Social Workers have completed their newly-qualified (2018/19) year successfully;
  - The incidence of qualified staff leaving the service has reduced by three quarters since February, while sickness and other long-term absence is stable.

**Other recent service improvements can be summarised as follows:**

- **Children Looked After** – Health Assessments are compliant with delivery targets;
- **Fostering** – visits and assessments are within timescale; promotion of Foster to Adopt – early identification of children for whom this form of care is suitable;
- **Assessment & Intervention** – process efficiencies have been identified to ensure children can be better assessed according to individual need and risk;
- **Neglect** – Stronger processes and techniques are being used to identify and respond to Neglect;
- **MASH** (Safeguarding Hub) – now working more closely with Adults’ Services and improving procedures;
- **Children’s In-house Residential Service Strategy** – adoption imminent.

**Children First Strategy**

- 6 An overarching, multi-agency strategy is in preparation. It will describe the overall ambitions of the County Council and its partners for all children across West Sussex and will be co-produced with partners. It is due to be adopted in December following scrutiny by the Children and Young People’s Services Select Committee.

**Summary**

- 7 While I am pleased with the progress made in delivering improvements so far, there is no room for complacency. Our task remains to transform the outlook for vulnerable children and young people throughout West Sussex in a comprehensive way, and we must continue to give this the foremost priority.

**For information**

**Paul Marshall**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People