

## **Children and Young People's Services Select Committee**

**23 October 2019**

### **Children First Improvement – Update Report**

#### **Report by the Director of Children's Services**

#### **Summary**

This report updates the Committee on developments in the Children First Programme since its last meeting on 11 September 2019. It notes that the Commissioner has completed his review, and that his report is now expected in mid-October; it also notes Ofsted's recent confirmation that the Children First Improvement Plan satisfactorily addresses the areas of concern arising during the Inspection.

In reviewing the latest achievements in service improvement, a refreshed approach has been taken in line with the discussion at the previous meeting of the Committee. The digest relating to the workforce now incorporates targets where feasible. Members also expressed a wish to examine different areas of the service in greater detail, and an indicative schedule of future topics is provided. A summary of risks and mitigations is also given. Notice is given of a future mechanism for receiving a digest of performance management information, which will in due course become an important aspect of the Committee's scrutiny role.

#### **The focus for scrutiny**

The Select Committee is requested to:

1. note the conclusion of the work of the Commissioner (1.1);
2. note that Ofsted has confirmed that the Practice Improvement Plan satisfies the requirement to suitably address all the matters of concern raised in the Inspection report of May 2019 (1.2);
3. note the Leadership and Workforce improvement narrative (2.1-2.10); agree an indicative scheme for receiving briefings into detailed areas of key service delivery (3.1-3.3); receive the current briefing on Quality of Life Story Work (3.4 & Appendix A); agree the principle of receiving future performance management reports, once a system has been established (3.5).
4. note the preparation work on a Children First Strategy, its scope and purpose, and the opportunity for this Committee to preview the adoption decision at its meeting on 04 December 2019 (3.6-3.9).

## **1. Introduction – Commissioner and Ofsted issues**

- 1.1 According to the timetable previously notified to this Committee, the Commissioner appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) has

completed his review and is preparing to submit his report to the Secretary of State and the DfE. The report is expected to make recommendations as to the most appropriate measures required to make and sustain the desired improvements within West Sussex children's services, following the adverse Ofsted judgement. It is understood that, due to the need for assessment by the stakeholders of this process, the report will not be made public before mid-October.

- 1.2 Ofsted has now confirmed that the Practice Improvement Plan, adopted and submitted by the County Council following scrutiny by this Committee, does suitably address the 12 points of concern raised in the inspection judgement. Ofsted inspectors will commence a series of approximately quarterly Monitoring Visits, commencing on 03/04 December. There are liable to be around 6 such visits, culminating in a full service re-inspection during 2020/21.

## **2. Update on Service Improvements**

### **Leadership and Management in Children's Services**

- 2.1 The new Senior Leadership Team is now fully established under Director of Children's Services, John Readman:

- Deputy Director of Children's Services (Sally Allen)
- Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting (Jackie Wood)
- Assistant Director, Early Help (Ann Marie Dodds)
- Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Quality and Practice (Allison Parkinson)
- Strategic Children's Commissioner (Susan Tanner)
- Senior Improvement Leads (Garath Symonds, Lisa Reid, Louise Warren)

### **Staffing - Vacancy Gap**

- 2.2 The service comprises approximately 507 FTE (full-time equivalent) social worker posts. The vacancy gap describes posts where permanent staff are absent, as well as other posts without an agency worker cover. For this purpose measurement shows a steady decline from a baseline at February 2019, as follows:

February 2019	18.5%
May 2019	14.9%
June 2019	8.8%
July 2019	6.9%
August 2019	5.2%
<b>September 2019</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Vacancy gap predictions depend on a number of variables, and for this purpose it has been assumed (a) there are no more leavers than currently known (including those yet to opt into the Retention package); and (b) that all those starters in the pipeline actually commence work. This calculation currently predicts staffing (including agency cover) at 0.1% over-establishment at the end of February 2020. It is intended to continue with more workers than posts until caseload levels and the provision to release staff for training and development is at a satisfactory level.

## Agency Workers

- 2.3 The vacancy gap has been closed in part through the engagement of additional agency resource: this means that the agency proportion is likely to fluctuate between given months due to specific demand; however the longer-term trend should be downwards. The agency social worker contingent covering unfilled vacancies or undertaking additional work to help reduce caseloads, currently equates to just under 15% of the total qualified social worker establishment (507 FTE approx.); the recent detailed trend in terms of full-time agency workers, is as follows:

May 2019	62.0 FTE
June 2019	72.0 FTE
July 2019	75.0 FTE
August 2019	76.5 FTE
<b>September 2019</b>	<b>73.7 FTE</b>

- 2.4 The use of high quality agency workers remains a key element of policy for the time being, and agency workers are being deployed as whole teams for maximum effectiveness. The long-term intention is to progressively reduce use of agency staff through increasing the proportion of full-time staff.

## Recruitment & Retention Offer

- 2.5 The take-up rate on the revised recruitment and retention offer refers to eligible social workers, (including some social workers within Early Help and Safeguarding, as well as Children's Social Care) committing to stay with WSCC for the next 18 months. The data excludes the ASYEs (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, for newly qualified social workers) that became eligible for the provisions in September, many of whom have indicated a wish to be included. The current scheme was launched in June 2019, and the trend in rate of take-up is as follows:

July 2019	85%
August 2019	88.5%
<b>September 2019</b>	<b>90.9%</b>

The current position reflects a positive response from the equivalent of 447 FTE.

- 2.6 At the 'baseline' date of February 2019, there were typically around 7FTE leavers per month; this has now reduced by three quarters, to 1-2 FTE per month, some of whom have moved internally and been retained within the wider children's workforce. A new recruitment campaign for permanent staff is in design for launch this Autumn. These positive effects, together with continuing low levels of permanent staff absence are indicative of a workforce that is becoming more stable; however, the situation requires continued consolidation.
- 2.7 In terms of internal development and the growth of new staff, 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 just completed their newly-qualified 2018/19 ASYE year successfully.

### **Caseloads**

- 2.8 One of the key operational outcomes sought from the recruitment and retention programme is to reduce caseloads to agreed target levels. This will both improve the quality and timeliness of service to the children and families we work with, and ameliorate working conditions for social workers – leading in turn to better outcomes for recruitment and retention. A further benefit is that staff have more time for professional development, crucial to the delivery of a better service.
- 2.9 Caseload targets were set in 2018 and were determined by comparing with other authorities rated as 'requiring improvement'. Targets will vary between different staff cohorts: experienced social workers have a target of up to 18 cases, while newly qualified social workers (NQSWS) have a reduced target of around 15 cases. However, where very complex cases are being worked (for instance, with adolescents with challenging behaviours), caseload targets may be as low as 10 cases per experienced social worker. In terms of the development of baselines, it should be noted that the trend of performance on caseloads can only be meaningfully measured from May 2019, due to changes from the previous methodology at that time.
- 2.10 Further to the discussion at the previous meeting, it is proposed that a more detailed analysis of caseloads across different teams be brought to the Business Planning Group of this Committee. To summarise the current position, 4 of the 8 teams have achieved or improved upon the caseload target; for the remainder, pressure of demand is currently keeping caseload rates above target. Broadly speaking, the current position is acceptable in the context of a journey of improvement, and remains under close management review. It is important to continue to monitor over a longer time sequence in order to establish that full control over caseloads has been achieved.

## **3. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee**

### **Detailed examination of key service areas**

- 3.1 Through this sequence of regular updates the Select Committee will wish to assure itself that the service Improvement Plan delivery is gathering momentum, and to understand a clear trajectory for positive change. Members have quite rightly expressed the wish to examine different aspects of the service in more detail, and receive tangible evidence that children and young people are progressively receiving a better and stronger service. Accordingly it is proposed that individual topics are subject to regular scrutiny. In following this course, the Committee would be undertaking a similar journey to the Children First Improvement Board, and would be able to engage directly with the different Assistant Directorates within the service, hearing from staff, the children and families we work with, and partners as the occasion arose.
- 3.2 The indicative forward schedule of topics coming before the Improvement Board is given below. They are all specific issues raised by Ofsted, and are

each a key focus for change, addressed in the Practice Improvement Plan. It is suggested that this Committee and/or its Business Planning Group schedule an equivalent sequence of presentations and discussions, subject to suitable timings:

<b>Programme Board indicative date</b>	<b>Practice Improvement Plan (PIP) topic</b>
September 2019	PIP ref 7 <b>Life Story Work</b>
October 2019	PIP ref 3 - Privately Fostered and Homeless Young People
November 2019	PIP ref 11- Corporate Parenting
December 2019	PIP ref 5 - Technology / Processes to improve recording
January 2020	PIP ref 6 - Permanency Planning
February 2020	PIP ref 10 – Recruitment and Retention PIP ref 8 - Supervision and performance management
March 2020	PIP ref 2 - Neglect
April 2020	PIP ref 4 – Care Plans
May 2020	PIP ref 9 - QA arrangements
June 2020	PIP ref 12 – Partner engagement / Children First Strategy

- 3.3 This proposal would allow the Committee to conduct a detailed examination of these topics in a structured manner. It would enable members to hear supporting testimony, as appropriate, through the scheduled attendance of children and families, staff, partners and other stakeholders, and would assist the Committee to strengthen its scrutiny role and engage with the service in a more tangible way.

### **Improving the Quality of Life Story Work**

- 3.4 High quality Life Story Work, and the ability of practitioners to acquire and deploy the relevant skills, is an important aspect of effective practice in social care. It supports children in care to reflect upon and contextualise their own lives, giving them a secure base to explore their past, present and future, and so to move forward purposefully as they develop. Ofsted specifically cited Life Story Work as an area that needed to improve, and this is being responded to through the Practice Improvement Plan. The report to the Children’s Improvement Board at Appendix A explains the arrangements in hand to embed these skills into the workforce, including the necessary training and delivery targets.

### **Proposed Approach to Performance Management**

- 3.5 It is critical that, especially in areas identified by Ofsted as needing to improve, a robust and transparent measurement of performance trajectory is in place. Accordingly, a suite of Performance Measures is being developed. This will be reported in future to the Children First Improvement Board, and

it is proposed that they are also brought to this Committee, as a tangible part of its scrutiny function.

### **Children First Strategy**

- 3.6 The Children First Strategy is to be a multi-agency Strategy sponsored by the Director of Children’s Services, the Director of Education and the Director of Public Health. The Strategy will set out the ambition, as a partnership of local public, community and voluntary sector services, and describe what it means to put children first in West Sussex (strategic intent); and how partners will all work together to ensure that children really do come first (culture or behaviours). The Strategy builds upon several strategies that exist across West Sussex (including for example Health and Well-Being Strategy; Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy; Children’s Services Performance Improvement Plan etc.)
- 3.7 The Children First Strategy is broad in scope – it is not about the Council or children’s services per se – although both play a key role. The Strategy will relate to all children. The complex issues that children, families and carers face cannot be tackled by any one organisation alone, and therefore the partnership members will work closely together.
- 3.8 The first step in developing the Strategy is to define the strategic intent and the behaviours that will help to deliver it. The expectation is that throughout the workshops scheduled in early October, the strategic intent and behaviours will be co-produced with partners. To date partners are engaging in and collaborating with the first phase of production of the strategic intent.
- 3.9 It is intended that this Committee is enabled to preview the Cabinet Member’s decision to adopt the Strategy, at its meeting on 04 December 2019.

### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 Not applicable – this is a report for information.

### **5. Risk Implications and Mitigations**

- 5.1 For an undertaking of this magnitude, it is natural that there will be a wide range of risks, both relating to the service improvement agenda and more widely. A summary of the risk areas identified in the current risk log, and the associated mitigating actions, is given in the table below:

<b>Risk Area</b>	<b>Examples of Mitigating Actions</b>
Knowing that the service is safer for children	Every aspect of the Improvement agenda is orientated towards this fundamental issue, from Workforce through Practice Improvement, to Performance Management, Governance, Scrutiny and use of Technology: it is a whole-system

	issue. Specific measures include having a new Quality Assurance process, with a new Head of QA in post to ensure effective management oversight
<b>Risk Area</b>	<b>Mitigating Actions</b>
Understanding and applying quality practice	Practice Improvement project to implement quality standards and assurance
Multi-agency capacity and capability	Partnership Engagement Project being delivered under Children First; Strategy in preparation with partner consultation in progress
Demonstrating to the Commissioner that WSCC has capability and capacity to improve	Investment Plan in place; Practice Improvement Plan agreed by Ofsted; Improvement Board/Programme Board active; new leadership team in place; Workforce issues being resolved; Children First Strategy in preparation
Leadership capacity and capability	New leadership team in place and fully engaged
Organisational morale	New leadership in place, with proactive staff engagement; events, weekly messages delivered; dedicated communications officer in place
Administrative support for social workers	Principle of freeing front-line staff agreed, and support plan in preparation
Data management supporting good practice	Using technology to improve service recognised as a priority; planning in hand to deliver project allied to quality improvement
Preparation for December Ofsted monitoring visit	Senior Improvement Lead planning and coordinating action streams; close liaison with Ofsted

## **6. Other Options Considered**

- 6.1 In view of the service's journey of improvement to date and the decision by the Commissioner expected in mid-October, the progress described in this report is considered the only course available. The creation of a Children First Strategy affords a fresh opportunity to deliberate service design options and agree future directions of travel.

## **7. Equality Duty**

- 7.1 The service recognises the primary importance of child safeguarding, sound family relationships, good parenting and the nurture of children to fulfil their potential. The provision of the service is based on need, as determined through formal assessment protocols. This need is not explicitly related to formally protected characteristics, but any such characteristic is and will continue (as now) to be respected in compliance with equality principles, and taken into account in the way in which the service is delivered.
- 7.2 In terms of those with a protected characteristic, the service will ensure enablement and support across all relevant categories, and this will both continue and be enhanced through the Children First agenda.

## **8. Social Value**

- 8.1 The Children First agenda and measures for service recovery discussed in this report will directly support improved delivery of the West Sussex Plan priority to give every child the Best Start in Life. Enhancing the protection of young lives and support for family life will continue to build resilience and social capital, and contribute towards stronger and more effective communities. The implementation of the service improvements will also respect sustainability principles in accordance with the County Council's strategic policies.

## **9. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 9.1 There are positive implications for Sections 17, 37 and 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in the prevention and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and in reducing offending and re-offending by young people, all of which are affected by the progress activity discussed in this report.

## **10. Human Rights Implications**

- 10.1 The County Council has an overriding duty to safeguard the Human Rights of children in need, and this has been recognised in the Children First agenda. The Council is mindful of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – The Right to Respect for Family and Private Life – and has taken relevant factors into consideration in preparing this report. The processing of personal and special category data is subject to the Council's Data Protection Act policies and procedures in relation to discharging the Council's and its partners' legal responsibilities.
- 10.2 The County Council is also mindful of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - which states that all children have the right to be consulted and to have their opinions heard on any decision that affects them. Hearing, understanding and acting upon the voice and experiences of the child is a key design principle of the Children First service improvements.

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## **Appendix A**

Quality of life story work