



## **Health and Wellbeing Board**

**20 June 2019**

### **Ofsted Inspection Judgement of Children's Services and the County Council's Improvement Plan**

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

##### **Executive Summary**

Following the Ofsted inspection of the County Council's Children's Social Care Services in February-March 2019, an 'inadequate' judgement was given in Ofsted's report published on 8 May 2019. The current report explains the context for the creation of a Children First Practice Improvement Plan ('the Improvement Plan'). The purpose of the Plan will be to demonstrate to the Department for Education that the Council has an effective and deliverable plan to address the areas that need to improve. A presentation on the preparation of the Improvement Plan will be made to the Board.

##### **The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:**

- 1) Note the process for the production and delivery of the Children First Practice Improvement Plan, the progress to date and the further actions in hand.
- 2) Consider how the Health and Wellbeing Board and partnership could contribute to the Children First Improvement Programme.

##### **Background and Context**

- 1 In February-March 2019, Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) undertook an inspection of the County Council's children's services. Ofsted's subsequent report published on 8 May gave an 'inadequate' judgement. A link to the Ofsted Judgement is [here](#).
- 2 The judgement listed 12 aspects of the service requiring improvement. The relevant issues can be summarised as: social worker recruitment and caseload

volumes; the quality and consistency of social work practice; management oversight; systems and processes; the timely provision of services; permanency for children looked after; care planning and recording; the involvement of partners; the corporate parenting function.

### **Responding to the Ofsted Judgement**

- 3 Arising from the judgement, a Statutory Direction from the Department of Education (DfE), dated 4 June 2019, requires the County Council to prepare an improvement plan. The purpose of the plan is to demonstrate to the Department of Education that the Council has an effective and deliverable action plan to address the areas that 'need to improve' as identified in the inspection report, and to demonstrate its ability and capacity to improve children's services to a satisfactory standard. The Improvement Plan is therefore the mechanism to describe the Council's action for recovery.
- 4 The Council's Children First Practice Improvement Plan will be submitted to the DfE and Ofsted in July. Ofsted will initially advise whether the Plan suitably reflects the findings of the inspection report.
- 5 The Secretary of State for Education has appointed, from 4 June 2019, a Commissioner for Children's Services in West Sussex to oversee the Council's response to the Statutory Direction. The Commissioner is John Coughlan, the Chief Executive of Hampshire County Council, and its former Director of Children's Services.
- 6 The Commissioner will, over the course of three months following appointment, determine whether the Council's Improvement Plan and the actions to be taken to deliver it are likely to be effective. The outcome of this process will inform the Commissioner's recommendation to the Secretary of State in relation to whether or not the County Council should retain responsibility for the direct provision of children's social care services. The Commissioner is expected to report his formal recommendations to the Secretary of State by 30 September 2019.
- 7 Should the outcome be that the County Council retains operational service control and formal adoption of the Improvement Plan can be confirmed, the service improvements will be monitored through a sequence of roughly quarterly Ofsted monitoring visits that are expected to commence in Autumn 2019, as agreed between Ofsted and the Director of Children's Services. These will culminate in a re-inspection of the service, probably during 2020/21.

### **Delivering the Improvement Plan for Children's Services**

- 8 The Practice Improvement Plan to be submitted is intended to address all the issues identified in the inspection. The County Council commits itself to raising the standards of children's services as its top priority, and this will be backed with the necessary focus and resource. The voice of the child will be central to the Improvement Plan and the programme of service transformation it represents. It is intended that the Plan will fully engage and command the confidence of service users, staff and partners, and the public.
- 9 The delivery of service improvements has already commenced, with a range of measures put in hand. These include:

- Setting up a Children's Improvement Board, with an independent chair to review and challenge the Improvement Plan;
- The appointment of a new Director of Children's Services with experience of overseeing a local authority improvement process;
- The appointment of 5 senior improvement leads;
- Strengthening the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel;
- Investment of £5m to increase the number of social workers from November 2018, with a further £5m allocated to the Improvement Plan;
- A Recruitment and Retention programme for social workers – this has already resulted, since February 2019, in over 50 permanent social workers commencing employment, or with an agreed start date; retention levels for existing staff are improving;
- A continuing programme to address the quality of practice: already in hand are measures to improve the identification of Neglect; a review to improve quality in children's residential homes; and improvements to practice standards and data quality;
- Setting out a major training and development programme for staff, to improve social work practice;
- The development of a Children First Practice Improvement Plan, with a clear vision and measures of success, which puts the voice and experiences of the child at the heart of services.
- Accordingly, the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board and partnership is requested for this vital and continuing programme of service improvement.

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