

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

24 September 2020

Children First Improvement – Service Update

Report by the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Summary

This report updates the Committee on service developments since its last meeting on 4 June 2020 and explains a proposed new phase in the Children First Improvement Programme to take place during the Autumn.

The report details new senior leadership arrangements and other recent developments in Children's Services (Section 2); proposals for a redesign of the service (Section 3); activity that has occurred or is planned to put the redesign into effect, together with other improvement projects which contribute to the overall programme (Section 4); a proposal for regular reporting of examples of positive impacts for children and young people (Section 5).

The focus for Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the progress made on the Children First Improvement Programme and whether this demonstrates sufficient progress on the improvement journey and outcomes for children and young people.

With this in mind the key areas for scrutiny include whether:

- a) the initial service redesign proposals, as set out in sections 3 & 4 of the report, give sufficient assurance that the Council can deliver its vision and principles (section 1.2 and 3.3).
- b) the mitigating actions to the identified risks as set out in Section 8 of the report are sufficient and if any areas should be considered for the focus of future scrutiny.
- c) the proposal for regular reporting of examples of the experiences of children and young people, as set out in section 5 of the report, will provide an assurance that positive outcomes are being achieved as a result of the improvement work to date.
- d) the Committee supports the continued availability of the Transformation Fund to resource the Improvement Programme (section 6.3).

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report reviews recent developments and sets the scene for a period of major change in Children's Services. The challenges posed by Covid-19 have

been successfully managed, with the service maintaining three key principles:

- a) ensuring effective safeguarding of children and young people;
- b) staff are properly supported and protected during this period;
- c) the planned service improvement work has continued.

This report therefore summarises recent developments and goes on to explain how a comprehensive service redesign will be progressed during the Autumn. This is fundamental to delivering the changes necessary to address issues identified by Ofsted and further analysed in the report by the Commissioner for Children's Services in West Sussex, and to sustain these changes going forward.

The Vision

- 1.2 The entire Children First agenda is predicated on principles which are summarised in the agreed Vision for Children, Young People and Learning, and how this is embedded throughout the service:

The West Sussex approach puts the child first. We work with children, families, communities, our partners and each other in a restorative, strength-based way. Strong Relationships are at the heart of what we do.

2. Current Developments

This section summarises current service developments.

Leadership and Management in Children's Services

- 2.1 Strong management is an essential pre-requisite to a sound change process. Lucy Butler, the Director of Children's Services and Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning has been consolidating a permanent management team. This will provide increased stability as the next phase of service transformation proceeds. New appointments that have been made are as follows:

Linda Steele, Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Quality and Practice
Daniel Ruaux, Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting
Jenny Boyd, Assistant Director, Social Care
Darlington Ihenacho, Principal Social Worker

These officers will be taking up their posts in West Sussex during October and November 2020. The Executive Director will maintain the services of a number of interim senior managers to provide the additional resource required to oversee the programme of improvement work, transformation programme and the delivery of the Trust.

Covid-19 Recovery

- 2.2 As previously reported, the service weathered the Covid-19 crisis in a robust manner. The vast majority of staff remained healthy, and very effective use was made of technological solutions for ensuring staff and children's continued safety. In the current recovery phase, face-to-face visits are now being re-introduced and are increasing. Staff have returned to the office where a 'business critical' need arises, in a safe and appropriate manner. As anticipated, increasing demand and pressure within the service is now being experienced, including upward pressure on caseloads. These circumstances, in the context of adjusting to a post-Covid world, make the service redesign work and the efficiencies and improved quality arising, all the more important to achieve.

The Improvement Agenda

- 2.3 The stakeholders of the improvement agenda (the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Commissioner for Children's Services in West Sussex together with staff at Hampshire County Council, our Partner in Practice), have continued to work effectively with the service throughout this period. The oversight and challenge provided by the Commissioner has been robust and through the Improvement Board has continued its constructive challenge of West Sussex performance and culture.

Ofsted

- 2.4 The particular areas identified by Ofsted for improvement have been prioritised within the context of the drive for quality within the service. The Ofsted Annual Conversation, which is a forum for taking stock of the service's overall position, has recently been held and resulted in positive feedback from Ofsted. It is expected that the regular Ofsted Visits to examine aspects of service improvement will recommence in the Autumn, although we do not have a definite date for the next visit at this stage. The service is preparing strenuously for these visits, for example through a very clear analysis of the state of development in each part of the service, supported by performance information; by ensuring that all audit actions and records are complete, as part of a relentless focus on quality; and by providing all staff with thorough briefings on expectations and developments within the improvement programme.

Commissioner's Briefing to Councillors

- 2.5 On 3 September 2020, the Commissioner, John Coughlan provided an on-line briefing to which all county councillors were invited. This was followed by an opportunity for councillors to ask questions. The Commissioner, who reports to the Department for Education (DfE), has broadly speaking formed a favourable view of the Council's commitment to change, and the energy it has shown in taking the Children's Services improvement agenda forward so far, and he endorses the direction of travel.

Children's Trust

- 2.6 In regard to the Children's Trust, the next stage of the process is for the County Council to agree the detail of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the DfE. The MoU will define the scope of the Trust that would subsequently take responsibility for the delivery of Children's Services in West Sussex and set out the process for creating such a Trust. The MoU is supported by an outline business case which includes the cost of the Trust set-up arrangements; these costs will be met by the DfE.
- 2.7 This matter will be considered by Cabinet on 20 October 2020. However, in advance of this, in early October a Cross-cutting Scrutiny Task and Finish Group of councillors drawn jointly from this Committee and the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee will preview the decision. The MoU and business case documents will be made available to the Task and Finish Group nearer the time.

3. Service Review

Introduction

- 3.1 In his [October 2019 report](#) to the DfE (Department for Education) following the Ofsted judgement of May 2019, the Commissioner for Children's Services in West Sussex, John Coughlan, drew attention to shortcomings in the quality of practice in the delivery of social care, which had led to unsatisfactory outcomes for children in West Sussex. He presented an analysis of the organisational and professional factors underlying this situation. One of the key issues identified was a very broad-based concern with the manner in which the staffing within Children's Services was organised.
- 3.2 In the light of this analysis, it is important for the Committee to hold in mind the magnitude of the challenge facing the service, the obstacles to be removed, and the comprehensive approach required to achieve a genuinely 'Good' service. Taking its cue from the *Vision* at 1.2, this requires the realisation of a suitably skilled, organised, motivated and rewarded workforce, one that has adopted an agreed culture, a commitment to high quality and common working principles; service demand is addressed and managed in the most advantageous way, with an agreed Service Model that incorporates the best principles and practice; partners are fully engaged, their role is valued, and mutual benefits arising within a close operational network are fully recognised. It is in this light that attention is drawn to the continuing need for resources to achieve this vision, whose realisation will necessarily continue into 2020/21.

Key principles supporting the Vision

- 3.3 Outlined below are the principles which illustrate the values that must underpin the creation of a new service over the next two years:
- We work as one department;
 - We show that we care;

- We take responsibility - when we make a commitment, we deliver;
- Everything we do needs to add value to children and families: only actions that pass this test will be accomplished;
- Diversity matters - we recognise the value diversity brings to our department;
- We use positive and clear language;
- We are a learning organisation;
- As staff we are empowered, and we act in this way;
- We celebrate our successes, both internally and externally;
- Staff are encouraged to ask for support and clarification, and support mechanisms are fully in place for them;
- There are no shortcuts or workarounds – ‘we do things properly’.

A Model for Change: Whole Service Redesign

3.4 The most important task now before us is to create the conditions deliver a ‘Good’ service. This is demonstrated by three ‘pillars’, which are summarised below:

- **Pillar 1 - ‘What good looks like’:** it is essential for us to set standards of expectation that everyone in the service understands and measures themselves against.
- **Pillar 2 - Creating the right Environment:** this includes developing ‘the Social Work Offer’ – comprising competitive remuneration, the best working environment, a balanced workload, the right equipment, professional techniques and support for staff – in other words making West Sussex a place that naturally attracts and retains the best social work talent.
- **Pillar 3 - Improved Service Model:** this is how we frame our entire service offer, recognising the need to manage demand and reduce escalation through a preventive approach - always with children and families at the heart of everything we do. This will be a model that recognises the needs of local areas, and in which we will invite our partners to take their full share.

Pillar 1 – ‘What Good Looks Like’

3.5 Being able to recognise and articulate a common view of what a good quality standard of service looks and feels like is fundamental to service improvement at every level. In an exercise undertaken throughout the service this summer, staff teams have been asked to set out their shared view of ‘Good’ as it would apply in their respective work areas. This will act as a springboard for further work in developing quality and practice and serve to promote a striving for excellence and pride in a job well done. Alongside this the service has begun to significantly improve the quality assurance framework which will evidence the changes and improvements made in practice across all areas of the service. More work is required here to demonstrate a real and sustainable shift in the quality and effectiveness of our social work practice.

Pillar 2 – The ‘Social Work Offer’

- 3.6 Our ability to recruit and retain good social work staff is fundamental to delivering the service improvement required within West Sussex. To that end we acknowledged that social care staff should be suitably recognised and rewarded, and we are therefore developing a comprehensive ‘Social Work Offer’ which goes above and beyond the current simplistic approach of providing a retention bonus for these hard-to-fill posts. To replace the current Recruitment and Retention scheme, a new remuneration package is currently being designed, which will consolidate permanent benefits rather than simply adding them to an existing offer, and thereby give West Sussex a structured and competitive place in the social work employment market. Staff will have balanced caseloads; good and reflective supervision and support will be in place; staff will have the right resources to hand and make the best use of technology to maximise their own effectiveness. In order to ensure we retain all of our current staff we are planning to extend the retention scheme until details of the new social work offer are finalised.
- 3.7 Beyond this, it is well understood that social care staff need and deserve other forms of recognition and support as a cultural standard within the department. Therefore, the redesign includes consideration for the ‘softer’ skills and modelling behaviours associated with an inclusive, mutually supportive environment, in which all aspire to give of their best and respect their colleagues at every level. A management development programme will focus on key skills such as supervision, communication, and managing the performance of others effectively; the programme will also support transitioning between roles as part of career progression – e.g. moving to first-line management.

Staffing Structures

- 3.8 Hand-in-hand with this approach, there will be a much-needed redesign of the staffing structures and management layers. The Commissioner commented in his report (October 2019) that among the underlying issues facing the service was a confusing and incoherent range of managerial and staffing roles, one that has built up through the accretions of time, but is no longer fit for purpose and does not allow the authority to deploy its resources to best effect. Particular features of this have been an unstable and frequently changing senior management team, and the proliferation of different managerial tiers and grades in excessive layers that have frequently failed to add value.
- 3.9 The first of these is being addressed, as described in Section 2.1 above by permanent recruitment. It now remains to redesign a ‘delayed’ staffing structure along straightforward and transparent lines, with a clear basis for managerial and professional progression, and in line with best practice. This is already underway and will complement the new Social Work Offer and provide a firm foundation for the revised service. We will implement a simplified management structure that will be facilitated by clear levels of accountability and be in line with our revised scheme of delegation and improved practice policies. Staff and unions will be consulted on the proposals during the Autumn.

Pillar 3 – A new Practice Model: ‘Family Safeguarding’

3.10 The third key component of a good service is to have a sound Social Work Practice Model in place, one that takes the journey of the child as its starting point and puts children, young people and their families right at the heart of all decisions. The preferred model for adoption is called Family Safeguarding, which is regarded as a national best practice standard, and has been used to great effect in Hertfordshire and elsewhere. The key features of this model can be summarised as follows:

- It gives primacy to the importance of the child’s relationships;
- It takes full account of the wider context of the child;
- It incorporates a consideration of the child’s community, education, parents’ wellbeing, and wider ‘family focus’;
- It promotes an improved partnership approach to achieve the best outcomes;
- Its stance is preventative and pre-emptive – meeting families’ needs proactively, rather than responding reactively to abuse and family breakdown; it therefore reduces trauma and costly interventions after breakdown has occurred;
- As a strengths-based model, it values and works with what is good in the family situation;
- It builds efficiencies and stability through reducing the numbers of transfers between workers;
- It is delivered through multi-professional teams, thereby reducing a tendency for individual disciplines to work in silos, and improving outcomes through a holistic approach.
- Interventions are evidence-based, with a strong system of recording;
- Through reducing administrative time, staff are freed up to do more direct, productive work.

It is intended that this model be adopted comprehensively throughout the service, becoming fully embedded over the next year, and with appropriate staff development and support measures in place to ensure its full understanding and implementation.

Benefits of the Proposed Model

3.11 Based primarily on the Hertfordshire experience, but also other nationally recognised pilot models, a very wide range of benefits have been seen to accrue, both for children and families, and for the partner services. Evaluation of these models has resulted in the following benefits being delivered:

Children and Families

- Significant reductions in repeat police call-outs to domestic abuse incidents between the parents of the families in the model;
- Significant reductions in emergency hospital admissions for adults of the parents of the families in the model;
- Up to a 50% reduction in use of 'care' by the County Council (in Hertfordshire there were 200 fewer under 12s in care compared with the previous year without the model);
- Significant improvement in school attendance;
- A reduction in children subject to child protection plans;
- A reduction in care proceedings.

The Services

- Reductions in A&E and Police expenditure;
- Staff across all disciplines feel more confident and less stressed;
- Improved recruitment and retention of staff with 7% vacancies in hard-to-recruit posts (December 2017);
- Cashable efficiency savings on Council expenditure in first full year after implementation of the model.

4. Preparation for Service Redesign

This section describes the preparatory work that has been undertaken during Summer 2020, and the further proposed implementation agenda during the Autumn.

Preparatory Work

4.1 Work that has been taking place over the Summer has included the following:

- To develop and promote the service design concepts, staff engagement workshops with managers, staff & stakeholders have been held. These have introduced the change principles and their rationale, and allowed a two-way exchange of information. Workshops have been scheduled for groups of staff in person, under safe conditions. As noted above (3.6), staff teams have been encouraged to examine the characteristics of a 'Good' service as these apply in their areas.
- A new draft 'Social Work Offer' as described in Section 3.6-3.7 above is being constructed.
- An exercise has been undertaken to draft new staffing structures, including the proposed removal of superfluous layers of management.
- A proposal has been drafted for the assessment of managers against the new service roles, and opportunities for them to develop their skills in accordance with these standards.

The Programme for the Autumn

4.2 The proposed next stage of the process to be embarked upon now can be summarised as follows:

- The details of the Whole Service Redesign will be finalised as a proposal for political approval; further dialogue will be held with staff, partners and other stakeholders.
- The consolidation of the permanent Senior Leadership Team will continue to full operational capacity.
- The existing service improvement activity will be maintained under the oversight of the Improvement Board.

Consolidating other change initiatives within a single programme

4.3 With the goal of comprehensive change before us, other strands of service development will continue as assimilated elements of the overall design. This applies to initiatives such as the following:

i) The Children First Strategic Approach

This is a high level, partnership-orientated statement of our values and principles, and aligns very closely with the *Vision* given at the head of this report (1.2). The Committee has previously been briefed on how partners are articulating a shared vision for children and young people, placing children at the heart of all we do. The Strategic Approach work will now be consulted on and developed by the Children's Sub Group which has been set up to sit under the Health and Wellbeing Board. It is likely that this work will be incorporated into a wider Children and Young People's Plan rather than being a separate strategy. The timetable will be clarified in due course.

ii) Early Help

A need to refashion the Early Help service, while retaining and enhancing its ability to work in a preventative manner with children and families, has been identified. In accordance with the principles of the new practice model set out at 3.10, one of the key considerations will be to achieve multi-disciplinary teams that include social care, early help, health and other professional disciplines, to address the broad spectrum of need in the most effective and efficient way. Further work will therefore be undertaken as part of the Early Help service model to ensure it properly assimilates and dovetails into the wider transformation approach.

iii) Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy 2020-2024

This Strategy represents a key aspect of improving the County Council's services to children and young people. An update of the current Strategy (2018-21) is necessary, following the Ofsted inspection, to ensure a strategic approach and evidence the commitment to ensuring that children who are looked after by the authority are happy, healthy and safe, and have the

opportunity to achieve their full potential. Following consultation lasting until 16 September, the new Strategy is intended for adoption in September 2020. The Corporate Parenting Panel, at its meetings on 12 March 2020 and 25 June 2020 has examined the Strategy document prior to the decision by the Cabinet Member. Scrutiny Committee members received an invitation to be part of the consultation process.

iv) Children's In-house Residential Care

A review of service provision is being implemented which includes the reopening of three previously closed homes (Cissbury Lodge and May House in Worthing, and Seaside at Shoreham) in the Spring of 20/21.

v) Fostering Service Review

Proposed improvements to the in-house Fostering Service are expected to be considered by this Committee at its 5 November 2020 meeting, which will also review the results of consultation taking place during October.

5. Positive Change to Children's Lives - Impact

- 5.1 As frequently reiterated, the service has firmly committed to put children, young people and families at the centre of all we do, with particular emphasis on making positive change in the lived experience of the child. The Scrutiny Committee has expressed a wish to be kept in closer touch with the working out of this commitment in terms of practical impacts for children and young people and their families.
- 5.2 With this in mind it is proposed to inaugurate a programme of regular reporting based on actual engagement with children and young people through the service's Voice and Participation Team. Items proposed for consideration in a programme of future topics would include:
- 'Mind of My Own' app (MOMO)
 - Children in Care Council (CiCC)
 - Leaving Care Executive Group

'Mind of My Own' (MOMO)

- 5.3 MOMO is a digital App designed to cater innovatively for the needs of looked after children. It is used by care professionals in West Sussex to stay in touch with children in care and young people aged 10-17 that they are working with. It is appreciated by young people as a tool enabling them to express their feelings and wishes, and for their voice to be heard in making plans for their care. It is proposed that a separate report on the effectiveness of this as a tool for supporting young people, together with their own testimony, be brought to the next meeting of this Committee.

Continued Scrutiny of Service Improvement Topics

- 5.4 The Committee has previously received regular updates on activity in specific areas of the service, where Ofsted had identified a need for improvement. It is intended that these reports will continue to be received as part of the scrutiny process of the journey of Improvement.

6. Issues for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee

- 6.1 In the light of the narrative above, it will be clear that service redesign must necessarily be conceived as an undertaking that embraces and assimilates all of its component parts, under the broad vision that we have set out for our children in West Sussex. Only at this comprehensive level will the full benefits – which include value for money and efficiencies for the County Council, as well as the prevention of trauma and suffering for young people and their families – be achieved.
- 6.2 The Committee is accordingly asked to consider the material set out in this report and confirm that it supports this view of how an outstanding service can be fashioned and delivered in the future. Committee members have quite rightly long paid special attention to the role and condition of staff, for example as exemplified by caseload numbers. While very significant improvements have been made in workload, skill levels and general morale over the past year, it is strongly believed that only the complete redesign of the workforce structure, based on modern principles and removing unnecessary tiers of management, will result in a workforce that is truly able to fulfil its potential. Above all, having a permanent, robust and competitive reward system, allied to a supportive culture, will enable skilled practitioners both to recognise their own value, and in turn to value West Sussex as a location in which their careers can flourish. The beneficiaries will be the children and families that we serve.
- 6.3 A scheme of this ambition necessarily requires sound investment. Accordingly, the Committee's support for the case for continued resources being made available under the Transformation Budget is requested.

Practice Week

- 6.4 At the meeting on 4 March, the Committee expressed a wish to be involved in Practice Week, an event then being planned. Due to the national situation, this particular event had to be postponed, but is now expected to take place during December 2020.

7. Consultation

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

8. Risk Implications and Mitigations

8.1 For an undertaking of the magnitude of Children's Services Improvement, it is natural that there will be a wide range of risks, both relating to the improvement agenda and more widely. A summary of the risk areas identified in the current risk log, and the associated mitigating factors, is given in the table below:

Risk Area	Examples of Mitigating Actions
The Covid-19 Pandemic may continue to impact the delivery of the service in various ways: safeguarding of children must be assured; staff need to be kept safe from infection; protective equipment must be sufficiently available to support face-to-face interaction with children and families, and in residential settings	The service has dealt well with the outbreak to date; much learning has resulted, and new ways of working have been developed. This risk is thought to be under control.
A surge in demand following the cessation of Covid-19 restrictions	The service has planned for this eventuality. Service Redesign will support greater efficiency for the management of future demand.
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.
Understanding and applying quality practice	A Practice Improvement project is in progress to implement quality standards and assurance and will increase in effectiveness in a redesigned workforce.
Multi-agency capacity and capability	Our joint undertakings with partners are very strongly stressed in the design principles of the proposed changes.
Demonstrating to the Commissioner, Ofsted and the DfE that the service can continue its improvement journey	The service has demonstrated to the Commissioner, to Ofsted and the DfE that it has the ambition and capacity for comprehensive change. All the issues raised in the Commissioner's original report (October 2019) have been addressed, although it is essential that impetus is maintained.

Leadership capacity and capability	New permanent leadership team now coming into place.
Organisational morale & retention of experienced social work staff, in the context of national market scarcity and competition from other authorities for their services	This risk will be comprehensively addressed in the new service redesign proposals.
Social workers encumbered with administrative burdens are less effective	Within the service redesign the need has been recognised to remove unnecessary administration and to maximise productive professional time with clients.
Data management not supporting good practice	Using technology to improve service is recognised as a priority; planning is in hand to deliver a project, allied to quality improvement. Much has been learned from managing Covid-19 about effective use of technology.
Preparedness for cycle of Ofsted monitoring visits	The December 2019 visit and outcomes were satisfactory. The service is considered to be in a good position to face further Ofsted scrutiny. The recent Ofsted Annual Conversation yielded good outcomes.

9. Other Options Considered

- 9.1 Not applicable – this is a report for information. The case for a comprehensive service review which is made throughout this report is summarised above at 6.1.

10. Equality Duty

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.

11. Social Value

- 11.1 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.

12. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 12.1 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.

13. Human Rights Implications

- 13.1 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.
- 13.2 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.

Lucy Butler,

Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Contact:

Vince Clark, Children First Transformation Director

Lance John, Business Manager – 03302 222511