

Children First Improvement Fund - December 2020

	Full Amount Estimated	Latest Full Amount Estimated	Actual spend in 2019/20	Planned spend for 2020/21	Projected spend for 2020/21	Variation to planned spend 2020/21	Planned spend for 2021/22	Planned spend for 2022/23
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Temporary investment in targeted improvement								
Senior Improvement Leads	1,160	1,163	446	580	315	(265)	402	0
Programme Management and support	1,500	1,286	571	537	715	178	0	0
Practice Improvement/Behaviour Change Programme	3,600	1,251	571	3,016	680	(2,336)	0	0
Leadership Development & Training Programmes	500	750	0	500	234	(266)	516	0
Specific Project Consultancy	1,000	309	31	802	85	(717)	193	0
Communications Lead	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Complaints Officer	75	22	22	0	0	0	0	0
Neglect Strategy work	64	155	78	0	77	77	0	0
Casework Audits	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Improvement Leads	194	700	196	0	359	359	145	0
Additional Corporate Posts	0	155	0	50	79	29	76	0
Transition to Children's Trust	0	29	0	0	29	29	0	0
Extension to PMO supporting improvement work (new)	0	520	0	0	0	0	260	260
Young People's Voice & Participation (new)	0	78	0	0	78	78	0	0
	8,148	6,418	1,915	5,485	2,651	(2,834)	1,592	260
Temporary additional capacity (service & corporate); retention offer								
Retention Payments	2,150	2,152	2,152	0	0	0	0	0
Additional Service Posts	611	4,745	479	130	2,699	2,569	1,537	30
HR Support	188	140	140	0	0	0	0	0
Commissioning Support	106	94	94	46	0	(46)	0	0
Additional Corporate Posts	248	302	161	13	57	44	84	0
Admin/Business Support for Social Work Teams	150	120	0	120	120	0	0	0
Leadership Team redesign	386	285	157	128	128	0	0	0
Mosaic Improvement		285	0	53	141	88	144	0
	3,839	8,123	3,183	490	3,145	2,655	1,765	30
Contingency	579	91	0	898	68	(830)	23	0
Temporary funding requirement	12,567	14,633	5,098	6,873	5,864	(1,009)	3,380	290
Permanent increase in base budget								
Cover for ASYE lower caseloads	1,000	1,000	1,220	1,000	1,000	0	1,000	0
Review of Social Work Remuneration/Retention Contingency	2,000	2,000		2,000	2,100	100	2,000	3,000
Admin/Business Support for Social Work Teams Estimate	700	700	30	700	150	(550)	700	700
Backfill for Social Work Apprentices	600	600		30	30	0	30	30
Workforce Retention Initiatives (staff parking; pool cars etc)	350	350	23	350	300	(50)	350	350
Additional Service Posts	337	337	215	309	363	54	472	472
Leadership Team redesign	151	151	204	204	204	0	204	204
Transfer of work to Customer Services			0	0	0	0	145	145
Additional Corporate Posts			0	32	0	(32)	0	0
SLT central support team		235	0	0	0	0	235	235
	5,138	5,373	1,692	4,625	4,147	(478)	5,136	5,136
Contingency	0	0	0	513	0	(513)	237	237
Permanent funding requirement	5,138	5,373	1,692	5,138	4,147	(991)	5,373	5,373
Totals	17,705	20,006	6,790	12,011	10,011	(2,000)	8,753	5,663
Available funding				12,011	12,011	0	5,138	5,373
Additional funding required				0	(2,000)	(2,000)	3,615	290
Funding allocations assumed (as per current MTFS)								
Temporary - (includes £2.0m to be allocated to Improvement Reserve)							3,380	260
Permanent							235	
Totals							3,615	260
Additional funding required							0	30

Notes:

1. The original Children First Improvement Plan detailed £12.567m of temporary funding and £5.138m of permanent funding. The latest Improvement Plan shows a further £3.380m of **additional temporary** and £0.235m of **additional permanent** funding will be required to fund the project to 2022/23.

2. The current MTFS assumes additional temporary funding of £2.880m (including £1.5m from the Children's Improvement Reserve) and permanent funding of £0.235m in 2021/22, followed by £0.260m of temporary funding in 2022/23. These figures were based upon projected requirements at the end of November 2020. Since that date, there have been two key changes which have affected the improvement fund requirements - firstly a 12 month delay in creating a Children's Trust for West Sussex; and secondly the introduction of a third national lockdown in response to the pandemic and the new variant of Covid-19. These two changes have had the impact of slipping planned activities from 2020/21 and increasing the projected expenditure in 2021/22. This is particularly in relation to positions that were intended to be funded by the DfE grant to enable Children's Services to transition to a Trust - funding which won't now be available in 2021/22.

In addition, some of the planned leadership development and staff "soft skills" training has now slipped to 2021/22 to enable face-to-face delivery. The financial implications of this lead to a greater underspend being projected for 2020/21 along with a forecast of higher expenditure in 2021/22 than previously reported.

3. The Council's budget plan for 2021/22 currently assumes that a £1.500m underspend on the improvement fund (which was the forecast at the end of November) is transferred to the Children's First Improvement Reserve at the end of the financial year and then used to part-fund the temporary funding requirement in 2021/22.

The temporary expenditure now forecast for 2021/22 is £0.500m higher than the budget plan. However, given that the projected underspend in 2020/21 is £0.500m greater than the November projection, there is the option to increase the transfer to the Children's First Improvement reserve to £2.000m.

Children First Service Improvement Programme: Progress Report - December 2020

Introduction

1. This report updates on the transformation progress made since the last QPM update at the end of September 2020.
2. The programme of improvement has reached its milestones for this year in that objective external evidence has now been received from Ofsted, the Department for Education and the Commissioner for Children's Services, confirming that the service is making progress and is on a trajectory of improvement. Also, having broadly stabilised the service, a new phase of Service Redesign is commencing. This will build, during 2021, the new service which is intended to deliver on the expectation of 'what good looks like'

Ofsted Focused Visit - October 2020

3. Ofsted conducted a Focused Visit between 12-22 October 2020. Inspectors formed a view of the whole service, but in particular they examined the quality and impact of key decision-making across help and protection, children in care and services for care leavers, together with the impact of leadership on service development, including the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. The following is a summary of the Ofsted findings on this occasion:
 - Social workers report a shift in culture and express tentative optimism; there is a sense of ownership and direction. They felt well-supported during the pandemic.
 - Ofsted acknowledged that the service response during the pandemic has been effective and this ensured that children were kept safe.
 - The pace of change and improvement needs to increase; at times, the impact on children has not been sufficient.
 - Ofsted saw an improving picture with regards to practice in some areas; however, there are still too many areas of variable practice in:
 - Children with Disabilities
 - Management and decision-making,
 - Quality of assessments and care planning,
 - Quality of records,
 - Permanence and pre-proceedings,
 - Exploitation and Missing.
 - Ofsted could see some progress against the recommendations from the last inspection.

- There was strength from the corporate approach and multi-agency partnerships during the pandemic, but there is still more to do around key areas of practice.
- Strengths were highlighted with regards to:
 - School attendance during the pandemic,
 - The Virtual School,
 - The Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Service,
 - Strong relationships with young people in the Leaving Care Service

Management Response and Next Steps

5. The outcome of the Focused Visit is broadly satisfactory, especially in regard to the alignment of the Ofsted view with that of the senior leadership team. The areas of 'variable practice' identified above are receiving very close attention and each has a dedicated improvement plan. Actions being prioritised with immediate effect include:
 - Improvement managers are working in key Ofsted priority areas for maximum impact.
 - Priority is being given to support managers and social workers to embed improved quality of practice so that there is accountability and oversight.
 - Active support is being provided in the Children with Disabilities (CWD) service to respond on the improvements needed. This has included ensuring that all the outstanding assessments for CWD were completed by mid-December 2020.
 - Carrying out a refresh of the Practice Improvement Plan and improvement approach in liaison with Hampshire County Council, the Partner in Practice.
 - Ensuring all practice areas have action plans so that progress can be monitored in a rigorous and timely manner.
6. The future programme of Ofsted scrutiny is now expected to revert to Monitoring Visits on a roughly quarterly basis, with the next visit sometime in early 2021. It is hoped that a regular cycle of visits will provide continuity of Ofsted scrutiny and a clear understanding of the pace of improvement during a very intensive period of service development in 2021.

The Children's Trust

New Statutory Direction

7. On 10 December 2020 the Department for Education (DfE) on behalf of the Secretary of State issued a new Statutory Direction stating Children's Services should remain with the Council for at least a further year, with the move to a Children's Trust 'paused'. The new Direction was published

alongside a second report by the Commissioner (October 2020) which states that there are 'compelling reasons why a company to deliver children's services functions on behalf of the Council is no longer required'.

The Minister's Letter

8. At the same time, Children's Minister Vicky Ford wrote to the Leader of the County Council outlining details of the decision. The Minister said: 'I am encouraged that there is now a new political leadership in respect of Children's Services, supported by strong senior executive appointments, including a new Director of Children's Services. This has undoubtedly been strengthened by the wider work the Council is undertaking to reform the corporate Council, with the support of its corporate improvement partner, East Sussex County Council. The strength of this partnership will evidently be important in creating the conditions in which Children's Services can continue to improve.' The Minister's letter goes on to refer in positive terms to the Ofsted findings during the Focused Visit as evidence of 'a shift in culture and that the building blocks for improvement are being put in place' and to the effective handling of service delivery throughout the pandemic.
9. The new Direction requires the County Council to continue to work under the oversight of the Children's Services Commissioner, John Coughlan who has been confirmed in this role for the next year. Hampshire County Council will continue as the Partner in Practice, supporting further service improvement.

Commentary on the Current Situation

10. These developments demonstrate categorically that the Department for Education, which acts as the legal arbiter on behalf of the Secretary of State for determining the governance of Children's Services, has decided that the County Council has made sufficient progress to justify suspending the enactment of a Children's Trust. The Council has achieved this result in two key areas: first, it has made the necessary constitutional changes and adopted appropriate corporate practice to give assurance of sound and compliant governance; and second, based on the opinions of Ofsted and the Commissioner, it has made enough progress against a trajectory of improvement, together with its declared forward intentions to transform its Children's Services, to justify retaining direct control of them.
11. These events mark a change from normal Department for Education practice of imposing an alternative delivery model on inadequate authorities, although it should be noted that this new situation formally marks only a suspension of the Trust process. Despite the positive indications, the Minister states: 'it is clear that there is still much work to do to address the weaknesses identified in 2019 and bring the standard of service up to the quality that children and families in West Sussex deserve.' This means that the imperative to make continuous positive change, as set out within the Children First Programme is as strong as ever. The Minister's letter concludes: 'There therefore needs to be, over the next twelve months, real determination, effort and energy put into achieving the Council's

improvement plan and demonstrating a tangible and lasting impact on social work practice and outcomes.'

12. The suspension of the Trust process is welcomed from a corporate perspective. In operational terms, it means that senior management and other resources will not now be diverted from the primary task of improving the service over the next twelve months.

Service Improvement Update

13. The following is a summary of recent and forthcoming developments within the service improvement agenda:

Management Assessment and Development Programme

14. Good quality management at all levels is a prerequisite of any effective service. A management assessment and development programme has been formulated to deliver the support and improvements necessary within the service. The assessment element of the programme will start in January 2021 with all managers attending the programme by the end of April 2021, although this may now be impacted by the current national lockdown. Managers will then have access to a bespoke management training and development programme throughout the Spring and Summer. Its main features are:
 - It invests in the staff through an inspirational, high impact development programme.
 - It aligns with the findings of the Ofsted inspection and Commissioner's report, thereby contributing to the necessary process of delayering and simplifying managerial levels.
 - It will support the cultural and practice improvements that managers need to make to bring sustainable, long-lasting change as service leaders.

Hearing and Responding to the Voice of the Child

15. Putting children and young people at the centre of all undertakings is central to the new service vision. The proper integration of the voice of the child into the service model now needs to move to a more comprehensive level. In order to take this agenda forward, an external provider, 'The Care Leaders Fellowship' has been commissioned to provide coaching and training to practitioners, so that understanding and responding to the views of young people is embedded in the fabric of the new service, in ways that are clearly demonstrable.
16. The Care Leaders Fellowship works with local authorities and other agencies to establish the voices and influence of the children they care for and care-experienced children at the heart of their business. The programme which

will run during 2021, will involve developing a strong offer for care-experienced children, with bespoke digital platforms and training forums to develop practice, so that all involved in a corporate parenting role better understand how to build and sustain relationships with children.

Integrated Front Door

17. It is important that an effective and efficient 'front door' to all services is developed and maintained. This includes ensuring that early help provision is properly aligned with the statutory social work activity and these services are therefore joined to provide an integrated front door.
18. The Integrated Front Door will launch at the end of January 2020, with the following features:
 - Creating one pathway within Children's Services for referrals relating to children and young people.
 - Enabling a joined-up approach, with one combined Early Help and Social Care team at the Front Door.
 - Children will receive a service proportionate to their needs, in a timely way.
 - A reduction in the number of transfer points on the child's journey.
 - A reduction in the time from initial contact to outcome.
 - Providing a simplified process for the public and professionals.
 - Potentially reduce unnecessary social work interventions.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy

19. The new Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Strategy 2020-2024 was agreed by the Cabinet Member for adoption on 17 December 2020.

Residential Homes

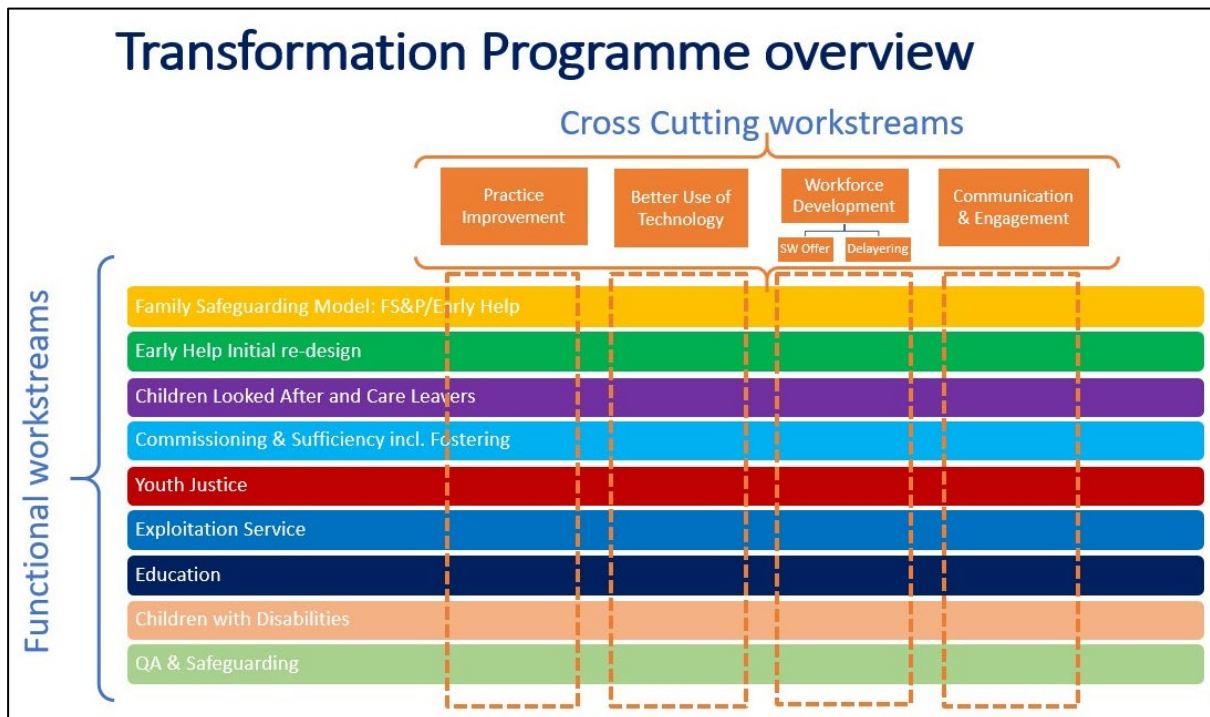
20. The new children's residential homes (Cissbury Lodge and May House in Worthing, and Seaside at Shoreham) remain on course to reopen in the Spring of 2021.

Staff Engagement in Service Redesign

21. In line with the agreed service vision and operational principles, the Departmental Leadership Team has adopted an open and transparent managerial style, with collaborative communication keeping staff informed and engaged within a rapidly changing environment: this benefits morale, with staff more able to take part in a dialogue and move towards a shared understanding of the improvement challenge; they are thereby enabled to contribute fully to the service redesign work.

22. The Update reports to the meetings of this Committee on 24 September and 5 November introduced members to the main elements of the Service Transformation programme. As previously indicated, the service is now in an intensive period of redesign activity. During December 2020 and January 2021, a series of transformation workshops is being run with staff representatives, covering the following service areas:
- Fostering Service
 - Children with Disabilities
 - Children Looked After and Leaving Care
 - Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
 - Family Safeguarding
 - Youth Justice & Exploitation
 - Commissioning
23. The purpose of these workshops is to engage with staff to move from the current service model, towards the new Family Safeguarding model: this represents a crucial phase of the service redesign. It is acknowledged that staff have the knowledge and experience to contribute to the design process, and it is essential that – in common with all stakeholders – they participate actively in the discussions. The programme of activity remains on track for the new service to go live in the Autumn of 2021.

Overview of Transformation Programme and High-Level Progress Update



Programme priorities: Three Key Stages

