

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	23 July 2015
Title of report:	Children's safeguarding update
Report by:	Head of safeguarding and quality

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

The purpose of the report is to:

1. To inform Cabinet of the letter dated 24 March 2015 from the Department for Education (DfE) lifting the intervention notice
2. To update Cabinet on the progress to date on the Ofsted improvement plan

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) the lifting of the intervention notice by DfE (Appendix A) be noted; and
- (b) progress to date on the Ofsted improvement plan (Appendix B) be considered.

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options as the purpose of the report is to provide an update on children's safeguarding.

Reasons for recommendations

2. To enable Cabinet to consider whether there is adequate progress in improvements in safeguarding services.

Key considerations

Lifting of intervention notice by DfE

3. Following the Ofsted inspection of children's safeguarding in May 2014 and a DfE review on 15 and 16 December 2014, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families wrote to the Leader of the Council confirming that the intervention notice issued in February 2012 had been lifted.
4. The DfE acknowledged the hard work of staff, leadership and partner organisations in the work involved in lifting the intervention.
5. The DfE noted:
 - The political interest and commitment to continue to prioritise children's safeguarding and to protect spending on children's services, alongside supporting members to fulfil their corporate parenting role.
 - That Ofsted had identified areas for improvement but that these had been captured within the Ofsted Improvement plan.
 - That the workforce position remains fragile and will be a major challenge in maintaining improvement but that there was a continued commitment to invest in this area.

Ofsted Improvement plan

6. Work on the actions within the plan is a key priority and the plan is updated on a quarterly basis in the context of the children's wellbeing directorate's continuous improvement framework. The delivery of the plan, where there is synergy between the two, is driven within the children's wellbeing transformation programme, Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (CHIPP).
7. Within the Ofsted improvement plan report, it is worth noting:
 - A recruitment campaign has been undertaken in order to reduce the reliance on agency staff. This combined with the newly qualified social workers programme means that 17 new permanent social workers will commence work by October.

As reported in the performance report however, the turnover of agency staff remains significant. This is having an impact on quality and performance in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the two Children in Need teams, which is of significant concern. It is also proving difficult to access high quality agency staff. Currently plans are in place to recruit some Social Work Assistant posts and some additional business support staff, to stabilise the situation.
 - The corporate parenting strategy has been refreshed and will be presented to Cabinet for approval in due course.

- The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board has appointed both a highly experienced independent chair and interim business unit manager.
- Following the local elections mandatory training is underway for all members in connection with corporate parenting.

Community impact

8. The successful implementation of the improvement plan will bring about further improvement towards achieving the council's priorities of keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life and enabling residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives; improving access to learning opportunities at all levels and improved outcomes for children and young people.

Equality duty

9. As the improvement plan continues to be implemented, equality impact assessments will be carried out where relevant to ensure that due regard is paid to the public sector equality duty as set out below:
 - A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to-
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct ... prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Financial implications

10. The actions included in the plan in appendix B are within the current year's budget. As reported to Cabinet, the budget is currently forecasting an overspend, reasons for which are set out in the report. Each of the areas for improvement is being progressed within the context of the directorate's transformation programme. As the transformation programme develops, detailed financial planning will be taking place with regard to the actions and where appropriate further reports will be presented to cabinet or the cabinet member.

Legal implications

11. There are no legal implications. The information requires sharing with members so as to maintain links with the relevant local partnerships in order to embed safeguarding procedure and principles within their constitution, policies and delivery plans.

Risk management

12. Risks associated with the failure to implement the action plan are:

- The council aspires to be operating at an Ofsted 'Good' standard with respect to its safeguarding arrangements by 2016/17, and whilst it is not possible to predict when a further inspection will take place, there would be significant reputational damage to the authority of a poor inspection outcome, with consequent impact on our ability to recruit and retain staff.
- Improving outcomes for our most vulnerable children is contingent on delivering against the recommendations contained within the improvement plan, and achieve our stated corporate objective.

Consultees

13. Health and social care overview and scrutiny committee monitor the progress of the improvement plan. The next report is due in November 2015

Appendices

Appendix A DfE letter

Appendix B Ofsted improvement plan

Background papers

None identified.