

Meeting:	Children and young people scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	Monday 25 November 2019
Title of report:	Review of performance and progress against the Safeguarding and Family Support improvement plan 2019 / 2020
Report by:	Assistant director for Safeguarding and Family Support

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To review progress against the improvement plan produced in response to the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection judgement of June 2018 and the subsequent Safeguarding and Family Support division improvement plan 2019 / 2020.

The Ofsted improvement plan 2018 / 2019 was updated to the end of March 2019 at which time the process was reviewed in order to move improvement planning into the service areas for 2019-2020; the individual service plans are being reviewed and monitored through a monthly cycle with a clear indication of progress and areas of challenge.

An overall improvement plan for Safeguarding and Family Support 2019 / 2020 is attached at appendix a, to ensure that the continued focus on improvement is driven forward.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) **the committee review progress and determine any recommendations it wishes to make to the executive to secure further improvement.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options to the above recommendation; it is a function of the committee to review action taken in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive and make reports or recommendations to the executive

Key considerations

2. The Children and young people scrutiny committee received a report at their meeting on 11 March 2019 that provide an update on the progress against the Ofsted improvement plan 2018/2020.
3. The Ofsted improvement plan 2018 / 2019 (appendix b) was updated to the end of March 2019; when it was agreed that improvement planning would move into the service areas for 2019-2020 within Safeguarding and Family Support; the individual service plans are being reviewed and monitored through a monthly cycle with a clear indication of progress and areas of challenge.
4. An overall improvement plan for Safeguarding and Family Support 2019 / 2020 has been developed to ensure that the continued focus on improvement is driven forward. This includes further actions to improve the service and moves beyond the initial actions from the 2018 Ofsted inspection. The 13 remaining actions from the Ofsted improvement plan have been incorporated into the individual services plans. This is to ensure that the continued focus on improvement is driven forward and that this is embedded to take account of the cross cutting actions that all services are required to deliver against. For example the timeliness of visits and completion of both case and personal supervision.
5. The plans have been reviewed for each service area and further refinements have been made that has enhanced them; in addition further work has been undertaken to ensure that they are consistent in approach.
6. Improvements continue to be made around performance information being provided to the service areas and a process has been developed to ensure that the information is reviewed monthly and is being used across the division.
7. There has been a number of key achievements including a continued increase in the number of Early Help assessments undertaken, a reduction in the number of assessments commenced in the MASH and Assessment Teams and a further reduction in the number of re-referrals received to 16.0% against a target of not exceeding 20%.
8. Children continue to be able to participate in their looked after children reviews; this enables the child to be part of the review process that considers how things are going, whether their care plan meets their needs and whether there needs to be any changes for the future; performance in this area remains consistently good at 94%.

9. Work has been undertaken across the division in respect of ensuring that risk assessments are completed within timescales where risk of exploitation has been identified to ensure that young people receive an effective response and support to prevent them from being exploited or further exploited; it was identified that there had been a delay in completing these assessments. This is being addressed and work is being undertaken to ensure that all are completed and brought up to date.
10. Extra resource has been made available with the appointment of an additional child exploitation co-ordinator, this has been made on a 12 month basis, and will be reviewed at the 9 month point.
11. The key issues for Herefordshire children and families still remain as timeliness and quality of assessments, planning for children, timeliness and recording of visits and permanent recruitment. Recruitment to the service has experienced an improvement; we have appointed two new Heads of Service for MASH and Assessment and CP and Court who commenced in post at the end of April 2019 who will continue to drive the improvement in these areas.
12. In addition, we have recently appointed to the post of principal social worker and they will be driving the implementation of Signs of Safety over the coming months. They come into post on September 9th 2019.
13. Key operational indicators are challenging; as shown below. Some indicators have shown an improvement but others have seen a decline which we are monitoring closely. The timeliness of visits continues to be a challenge against a target of 95% compliance.
14. Up to the end of September 2019 CP visits were at 86% (this is an increase from 71% in May 2019), CIN visits were at 72% (a further improvement of 1% on May 2019) and LAC visits were at 85% (a slight improvement compared to 81% in May 2019). Supervision is a challenge across a number of services and in particular this has been a significant issue within the children with disabilities team (reported 23% at end of September); this has been addressed by the head of service who has been assured that there should be an improvement in October 2019.
15. We have seen improvement in the Independent Reviewing Officers being effective in ensuring that care plans are appropriate to meet needs and ensuring that they do not drift; current year to date data is reporting at 80% against a target of 90% having at least 2 IRO oversights recorded within a 12 month period.
16. We were inspected by Ofsted in June 2018 and had a focused visit in January 2019. The findings have been reflected in Herefordshire's self-assessment that has been reviewed and revised (appendix c).
17. There has been improvement in the interaction of senior managers with staff; the assistant director and director regularly work in different social care offices and hold regular drop in sessions for staff; in addition heads of service work regularly in team areas to provide a more informal way for enabling staff to raise any issues.
18. The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making has improved with revised panel arrangements now in place and embedded. This provides a robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system, to commencing pre proceedings and issuing care proceedings, and looks at appropriate solutions and alternatives.

19. Operational managers receive weekly activity reports and a monthly information booklet that contains significant amounts of data that enable the HOS and their managers to track performance of their teams (appendix d). These reports have been developed and put in place since September 2018, they provide a range of detailed weekly reports and monthly scorecards. These are regularly reviewed to improve the accuracy and usefulness of reports to aid improvement in social work practice and outcomes for children and young people. This is also reviewed at the AD/HOS meeting so that senior leaders are able to challenge each other. This information is then used to inform service improvement plans
20. Because of our improved approach to performance, children are receiving more timely visits. Child Protection visits are at 86% in time in September 2019, compared to 69% in September 2018. Looked after Children visits are 85% compared to 65%. Child in Need visits are recorded as 72% compared to 41%. Our timeliness of visits is still not as good as it should be, despite an improving picture. An aspirational target of 95% from 2019/20 has been set and teams are working towards meeting this.
21. We welcomed the visit of the DfE National Advisor for care leavers who gave positive feedback on Herefordshire's approach as well as providing valuable comment on what we could improve. The areas for improvement have been reviewed by a senior management group, chaired by the Chief Executive and by the council's management board and an operational action plan has been endorsed, which is incorporated into our improvement work and plans. Within this our Corporate parenting board will be strengthened. It currently meets bi-monthly to understand the experience of our looked after children and care leavers, to scrutinise performance data and to oversee the implementation of our corporate parenting strategy.
22. The council has introduced revised decision making in all council reports, requiring the impact of corporate parenting to be considered as a result and is also in the process of agreeing council tax support for care leavers. Training for members to reflect on their corporate parenting role is ongoing.
23. We have established a new approach within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to address how contacts and referrals are being processed has been put in place from the beginning of October 2018.
24. We now have an Early Help Coordinator in MASH to ensure that children are managed in the correct part of the system and stepped up and down appropriately according to their identified needs.
25. We have increased management capacity and have an additional Head of Service to concentrate on MASH/Assessment. We have increased team manager capacity and have an additional team manager in both the looked after children and child protection court teams, and have established additional management capacity in the 16+ service.
26. We have recruited additional family support workers to provide capacity and take some tasks from social workers. We have a number of initiatives to attract, recruit and retain social workers into Herefordshire. We continue to encourage newly qualified social workers into Herefordshire to complete their first year of social work practice (ASYE). A social work apprentice scheme is currently receiving applications and is due to commence in February 2019. A one off payment to agency social workers wishing to join Herefordshire as a permanent worker is in place, as is a payment to Herefordshire social workers should they recommend a permanent worker to apply for a post who is then appointable. We have commissioned the services of an agency to progress an urban to rural scheme, targeting

social workers who may want to relocate to a more rural area. There is agreed market forces supplement payments for social workers, and an annual training allowance.

27. The area where there is still a reliance, above that which we would want to have, on agency workers, is the Court/CP service. Agency workers can leave with giving only a week's notice. This is disruptive to children and families, and impacts hugely on the consistency of practice in this area of the service.
28. We have increased business support capacity to increase the availability of business support for convening and minuting of meetings therefore releasing social work time from these tasks.
29. We have recruited additional contact workers to clear the back log of life story book work and maintain completion of life story book work, particularly for children who are going to be adopted; the quality of life story work has improved following the recruitment of additional contact workers to clear the backlog and to maintain the completion of the life story book work. We have also appointed a case progression officer to add additional capacity to ensuring improvement in care planning, timeliness and outcomes for children.
30. Alternatives to care panel commenced on the 25th September 2018 which provides a much more robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system and looks at appropriate solutions for cases. These are chaired by the Assistant Director, with Heads of Service also being directly involved in individual case discussions and decisions. Legal services attend this panel to enable clear, consistent approaches.
31. We have revised our quality assurance approach to enable greater learning and improvement in practice, focusing on specific audit work. We have revised our audit tool, and established a framework which will close the loop of learning, and will be reviewing its implementation on a monthly basis. We have established bi-monthly learning workshops which all social workers and family support workers are encouraged to attend.
32. We undertake a monthly programme of case file audits. On a quarterly basis we analyse findings to identify themes and priorities for learning and improvement. In addition we regularly undertake a range of thematic audit work informed by agreed priorities and findings are considered by our senior management team to inform our development plan. These have included an audit of practice of cases in PLO, supervision, effectiveness of our audit programme, and admissions to care.

Community impact

33. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, Herefordshire Council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development and review. To support effective accountability the council is committed to reporting the progress on actions completed and outcomes achieved.
34. The successful implementation of the action plan will continue to 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 all children and young people; and those contained in priority two of the health and wellbeing strategy.

35. Vulnerable children and young people; their families and carers, are experiencing different and improved approaches to services delivery as we continue our implementation of the actions set out in our plan and in the context of the plan's status within the wider children's development plan. This includes looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25.

Equality duty

36. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
37. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. We continue to make sure that as the action plan is implemented that we pay due regard to equality legislation.
38. The Safeguarding and Support improvement plan supports the council in its overall duty to promote equality. In particular, the implementation of the plan continues to improve the outcomes of children and young people, by ensuring their diversity factors are assessed and assisting children and young people and their families to access services that meet their needs.

Resource implications

39. There are no resource implications arising from the recommendation. The resource implications of any recommendations made by the committee will inform the executive's response to those recommendations.
40. The implementation of the improvement plans required additional resources, these were considered as part of the council's budget setting process; including what could be done in terms of prevention and edge of care and an amount of £1.6m was agreed for this area of work.

Legal implications

41. There are no specific legal implications of the recommendations in the report.

Risk management

42. The risks associated with the failure to implement the improvement plan are:

- a. The council does not deliver sustained improvement. Too many children and young people receive a poor service, there is drift and delay, children, and young people receive high threshold services that are reactive. There is not sufficient capacity for good social work to flourish and there are not a range of effective preventative and edge of care services to support children and young people safely in families. The council then runs the risk of being judged as inadequate by Ofsted under the ILAC's framework.
 - b. Reputational. The council does not make progress quickly enough and diversely affects the recruitment and retention of social work staff. This can have a knock on effect of increasing caseloads, which in turn has the potential to negatively impact on performance and quality of services for children and families. Consequently, the council would have to invest significant resources to then rectify the situation
43. The risks to successful delivery of the plan are:
- a. Insufficient resource is identified in the 2019/20 budget to implement the action plan in full. If this occurs there is a risk that the council will not deliver sustained improvement.
 - b. Change in culture and practice does not take place quickly or robustly enough and is not sustained. Accurate performance management information that is used at least weekly to manage and improve service delivery is a critical part of culture change, alongside capacity, training and development, audit work and changing practice as a result.

Consultees

- 44. The safeguarding and family support services regularly engage our children about the performance and delivery of our services to ensure that the voice of the child is heard within the feedback on our children and families within Herefordshire young people have been actively involved in safeguarding briefings to all newly and re-elected councillors.
- 45. We are working towards implementing a system called Mind Of My Own that will enable young people and children to provide feedback on the services that they are receiving from children and families; the apps enable young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions about their lives. This is due to be relaunched again in the Autumn of 2019 following some reconfiguration by the supplier and will then provide us with rich qualitative data that will be used to enable us to continue our journey of improvement and influence our plans.

Appendices

Appendix A – Safeguarding and Family Support Improvement Plan 2019/2020

Appendix B – Ofsted Improvement Plan to end of 2018 / 2019

Appendix C – Children and families self-evaluation (June 2019)

Appendix D - Safeguarding and Family Support monthly scorecard (September 2019)

Background papers

None identified