

Meeting:	Children and young people scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	Tuesday 2 June 2020
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

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

To provide an update on work with West Mercia Police regarding referrals to the Multi-agency safeguarding hub.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) The committee review progress and determine any recommendation 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 the meeting on 16 March 2020 that provided an update on the progress against the overall improvement plan for Safeguarding and Family Support 2019 / 2020 that was 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.
3. The Ofsted focused visit of January 2019 looked at the local authority's arrangements for receiving referrals about children who may be in need or at risk of significant harm, children transferring to and from Early Help services, the effectiveness of child protection enquiries and the quality of assessments and interventions for children in need of help and protection. The conclusions were that from a very low base action taken by senior leaders had improved the overall stability of the social care workforce and that this had been achieved over a relatively short period of time. Plans for improvement were appropriately focused and there was a realistic view of quality of practice which was too variable and not yet good.
4. Revised performance management and quality assurance approaches were starting to show some early impact. The pace of progress was hampered by staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting to key management posts including the lead officer for quality assurance. There continued to be strong political and corporate support for children's services.
5. On 18 and 19 December 2019 Ofsted carried out a focused visit. The focus of the visit looked at our arrangements for children in need and children subject to a child protection plan. This included elements of contextual safeguarding, particularly peer on peer abuse. The conclusion regarding work in the Child Protection/ Court area of the organisation was that little progress had been made in improving the quality of practice, including the quality of management supervision and guidance, and timely recording. A major factor impacting on the ability to bring about improvement was difficulty to recruit experienced and skilled social workers into the service.
6. Ofsted published their report and further information was provided to all councillors. There were some positive elements to the feedback received from Ofsted. No children seen were identified at risk of significant harm and all were receiving interventions. There was positive recognition of the work of the children with disabilities team, the work on contextual safeguarding, peer on peer abuse, the stabilisation of the workforce through the recruitment and retention strategy and the planned investment. However, as the council recognises, little progress has been made in improving the quality of practice for child in need and child protection and the challenge in this area is heightened by difficulties in recruitment and staff turnover. Further work to address these issues is contained in the safeguarding improvement plan that is reviewed on a quarterly basis by children and young people's scrutiny committee.

7. Ofsted were provided with our “self – evaluation” and there was recognition that we know ourselves well, that the quality assurance framework provides appropriate and in depth knowledge, that there is senior leadership commitment to the service including resourcing and further plans for development. We review and update this on a quarterly basis (appendix b) to ensure that we continue to reflect and understand the progress we are making and the areas that require our attention.
8. Improvements continue to be made around performance information being provided to the services areas and a process has been developed to ensure that the information is received and reviewed and is being used across the division; this includes the monthly performance scorecard, (appendix c).
9. Early Help has developed considerably over the past two years since the introduction of Herefordshire’s Early Help Assessment (EHA) which replaced the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). There are 1,287 EHAs compared with 500 CAFs in January 2018. Families with emerging or more complex needs below the threshold of requiring statutory intervention are identified and assessed using the EHA. The assessment is of the whole family and identifies their unmet needs then an outcome focused support plan is drawn up with the family to bring about sustainable change and leave the family stronger for the future. Each family has a ‘Key Worker’ who is the main link for the family and coordinates the agencies required to bring about the sustainable change.
10. The June 2018 OFSTED inspection identified that the “Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is responsive and ensures that good-quality information sharing results in strong decision-making”. The January 2019 OFSTED focused visit commented “effectiveness of responses in the MASH has been maintained and improved since the last inspection”.
11. Previously MASH were using data measuring contacts completed in a one day timescale. MASH are now reporting on contacts completed within 24 hours. Performance data for MASH indicates that an average of 44% of all contacts were completed within 24 hours. This is well below the target of 95%. To ensure all contacts are completed within 24 hours the MASH Team now receive a report 3 times a day which provides them with a red, amber, green rating determined by timing.
12. Child Exploitation/Contextual Safeguarding has been subject to a scrutiny committee task and finish group with three meetings taking place between 8th November 2019 – 6th December 2019; in addition a spotlight review was carried out in respect of peer on peer abuse on the 16th December 2019. The final report of the task and finish group is on the agenda of the current meeting; the spotlight review reported back to the executive in January 2020; the response of the executive is also on the agenda of the current meeting.
13. The local authority continues to have a very high number of looked after children. At the end of quarter 4 there were 352 children in care which equates to 98 per 10,000, which is significantly higher than the national average (64 per 10,000) and that of statistical neighbours (53 per 10,000). The number of looked after children has been fairly stable over recent months but has reduced slightly during the quarter.
14. An Alternatives to Care panel which is chaired by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding was introduced in September 2018. This panel decides whether care proceedings should be initiated, whether children should be admitted to care under Section 20, and reviews decisions to admit children to care in an unplanned way.

15. The local authority has had a lower rate of children leaving care than statistical neighbours and our focus is upon identifying children who could safely return to their parents care or who could be cared for under a Special Guardianship Order. Progress was slow with continued drift and delay in the progression of assessments and applications to Court which is further impacted by a risk averse culture. This is now being robustly challenged and care orders were discharged for 8 children during quarter 4 with applications for a further 17 children with legal services or already issued.
16. A Quality assurance framework commenced in July 2019, and has established a timetable of audits of social work cases, undertaken through a formalised audit programme which includes combined audit activity such as deep dive audits, thematic audits and moderated audits. Monthly audit feedback reports are produced following the collation of the details captured in the audits. These are reported into the Assistant Director/ Head of Service meetings on a monthly basis, and workshops to provide learning from audit activity, plus bi monthly learning sessions are now taking place to close the learning loop following audit activity and findings.
17. The first "Signs of Safety" workshop took place in December 2019 and work is progressing towards implementation of Signs of Safety, an approach to underpin practice with a strengths based model working with families. This is an approach that will focus on building relationships with families, and identifying their strengths and support networks. To be successful, partners across the safeguarding and family support network need to adopt this approach to achieve a whole partnership change to working with children and families. The progress on this has been delayed due to the COVID 19 pandemic; however the implementation is being taken forward through the arrangement of virtual workshops to progress this work during quarter one of 2020/2021.
18. At the end of quarter 4 a number of performance indicators for safeguarding and family support had shown some improvement. In particular, there has been an overall improvement in the percentage of visits being undertaken in quarter 4 with both looked after children (98% and child protection visits (96%) exceeding the target of 95%; child in need visits are at 82% at the end of quarter 4 but have improved from quarter 3 when they were at 69%.
19. Supervision within the quarter has also seen an improved outturn in quarter 4 with 84% of supervisions being completed in March 2020; compared to 62% in December 2019. Performance information is subject to weekly and monthly review by managers. Performance challenge sessions, are to be held on a regular basis with the Heads of Service and their team managers and are due to commence in May 2020.
20. There were 2,017 contacts received in quarter 4; which is an increase against the number of contacts received in quarter 3 which was 1,790. The conversion rate of contacts to referrals has also seen a slight decrease from 21% in quarter 3 to 16.39% in quarter 4. Contacts completed within a 1 day timescale (year to date) at the end of quarter 3 was 88% and at the end of quarter 4 was 88% remaining at a similar level. However, we are moving to contacts being dealt with in a 24 hour period; this is required under the 'Working Together' statutory guidance. As we move forward on improving the service provision, we have seen an increase in the number of assessments being completed in timescales from 73% in quarter 3 to 87% in quarter 4; with the year to date outturn being 80% compared to 65% in 2018/19; this is against a target of 95%.
21. Recruitment continues to be supported by taking on an agency specifically tasked with recruiting social workers for Herefordshire and a bespoke microsite has been developed. Retention has been supported through a variety of enhancements, but filling vacant posts, keeping caseloads down and managing the work across the service remains a challenge.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) recruitment continues for newly qualified social workers and the ability to offer ASYEs good learning and development opportunities has been improved within the social work academy.

22. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub continues to receive the highest number of contacts from West Mercia Police. Work has been undertaken by the Safeguarding Partnership, Assistant director safeguarding and family support and the Director for children and families to address this. In addition, the chair of Children and young people's scrutiny committee has also written to West Mercia Police and there continues to be no reduction in the number of contacts received into the MASH.
23. To provide an update on the work with West Mercia Police in summary, over quarter four there were 1,098 contacts received from West Mercia Police; this was 54.43% of all contacts received for this period and only 5.90% of these progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention; this can be broken down as follows:
 - In January 2020, 356 contacts were received; this was 53.45% of all contacts received; only 8.99% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.
 - In February 2020, 324 contacts were received; this was 51.92% of all contacts received only 7.72% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.
 - In March 2020, 418 contacts were received; this was 57.50% of all contacts received; only 6.94% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.

Community impact

24. 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 action completed and outcomes achieved.
25. The successful implementation of the improvement plan will continue to bring about further progress towards achieving the council's priorities of keeping young people safe and giving them a great start in life, contributing to Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2024 priorities. Furthermore, 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 within priority two of the health and wellbeing strategy.
26. The families and carers of vulnerable children and young people are experiencing different and improved approaches to service 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

27. 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 -

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is 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.

28. 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 our improvement plan is implemented that we pay due regard to equality legislation.

29. The Safeguarding and Family 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 to meet their needs.

Resource implications

30. There are no resource implications arising from the recommendation. The resource implication of any recommendations made by the committee will inform the executive's response to those recommendations.

31. The implementation of the improvement plans required additional resources; these have been considered as part of the council's budget setting process; including what could be done in terms of prevention and edge of care services which are being implemented.

Legal implications

32. There are no specific legal implications of the recommendation in this report.

Risk management

33. 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 adversely 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.

34. The risks to successful delivery of the plan are:

- i. If insufficient resource is identified to implement the action plan in full. If this occurs there is a risk that the council will not deliver sustained improvement.
- ii. 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

35. 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.
36. We have implemented 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 app enable young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions about their lives. This will 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 - Herefordshire Children’s Safeguarding Social Work Self - Assessment to end of quarter 4 2019/2020

Appendix C – Safeguarding and Family Support monthly scorecard March 2020

Background papers

None identified