

Meeting:	Children and young people scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	Tuesday 15 September 2020
Title of report:	Review of performance and progress against the Safeguarding and Family Support improvement plan 2020/2021
Report by:	Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding Quality and Improvement

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 2020 / 2021 (appendix a) and Our priorities definitions (appendix b) 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.

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 2 June 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 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 c) 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 d).
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 1324 EHAs (June 2020) 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 link between Early Help and the Multiagency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to develop and the plan to have an Early Help Hub (EHH) linked to MASH is moving forward. The EHH will be located beside MASH and take all level 1, 2 & 3 contacts and level 3 MARF’s (Multi-Agency Referral Form) thereby ensuring families are offered the ‘Right Support at the Right Time’ and releasing MASH to spend more time on investigating level 4 cases. Any cases deemed to be level 4 by the EHH will go directly into MASH and vice versa those cases on further investigation by MASH which don’t meet threshold will go to the EHH for signposting, advice and guidance or support through an EHA being offered as appropriate.
11. The June 2018 Ofsted inspection identified that the “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”.
12. Ofsted noted that a significant number of contacts are signposted away from children’s social care, which would indicate that too many children were being referred that did not reach threshold for intervention. 1938 contacts were received in Q1, 366, 18.9% contacts progressed to referral. This is below the target of 20%. Contact completed with 24 hours is 68.1%, this is an increase in contacts being completed within timescales but not at the target of 95%. Q1 has seen consistency in contacts converting to referrals. 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.
13. The restrictions arising from Covid-19 meant that since the end of March, in line with many other local authorities, all looked after children reviews and child protection conferences have been conducted via video conferencing. Every effort has been made to ensure children and parents can be fully involved within Webex video based child protection conferences and looked after children reviews, with invitations sent via email and phone to participants who can access meetings by laptop, tablet and smart phones. Although there have been some technical issues due to broadband capacity, getting used to the

new technology has been relatively straightforward for many parents, children and partner agencies.

14. The local authority continues to have a very high number of looked after children. At the end of quarter 1 there were 345 children in care which equates to 96 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.
15. Care orders have been discharged for 7 children in the LAC teams in this quarter - 2 children were reunified and 5 children became subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) At the end of the quarter a further 31 applications are filed either with court or with legal services to achieve children's exit from the LAC system.
16. There are 18 SGO applications and 7 care order discharge applications filed with court. There are 3 SGO and 3 care order discharge applications with legal services to be prepared for issue. 19 children have been formally long-term matched with more assessments completed ready for formal decisions in quarter 2.
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 had 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 2020/2021.
18. At the end of quarter 1 2020/21 a number of performance indicators for safeguarding and family support had shown some improvement. In particular, there has been an overall improvement in direction of travel in the percentage of visits being undertaken in quarter 1 with looked after children (96%) exceeding the target of 95%; and child protection visits (91%) just below target; child in need visits are at 88% at the end of quarter 4 but have improved from quarter 4 when they were at 82%.
19. Supervision within the quarter has also seen an improved outturn in quarter 1 with 83% of supervisions being completed in June 2020; compared to 82% in March 2020. Performance information is subject to weekly and monthly review by managers. Performance challenge sessions, are being held on a regular basis with the Heads of Service and their team managers commencing in May 2020; these provide an opportunity for managers to share their performance; and challenge and support improvement across the services.
20. There were 1938 contacts received in quarter 1 (2020/21); which is a decrease against the number of contacts received in quarter 4 (2019/20) which was 2017. The conversion rate of contacts to referrals has also seen a slight decrease from 21% in quarter 4 to 18.9% in quarter 1 (2020/21) Contacts managed in 24hrs increased in June to 80% (from 60% in May). Referrals managed in 24hrs increased to 78% (from 62% in May). The year to date % for contacts is 68% and for referrals is 70%.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; with the year to date 2020/21 outturn being 90% compared to 80% in 2019/20; 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. A refreshed Workforce Strategy is under development to address recruitment and retention challenges.

Community impact

22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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

28. 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.
29. 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

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

Risk management

31. 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.
32. The risks to successful delivery of the plan are:
 - a. 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.
 - 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

33. 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.
34. 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 2020/21

Appendix B – Our Priority definitions 2020/21

Appendix C - Herefordshire Children’s Safeguarding Social Work Self - Assessment to end of quarter 1 2020/2021

Appendix D – Safeguarding and Family Support monthly scorecard June 2020

Background papers

None identified