

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	14 MARCH 2013
TITLE OF REPORT:	CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING - IMPROVEMENT NOTICE AND PROGRESS ON THE OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR FOR PEOPLE'S SERVICES

1. Classification

Open

2. Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

3. Wards Affected

County-wide

4. Purpose

To report on the receipt of the Improvement Notice from the Department for Education (DfE) and progress to date on the Ofsted recommendations and next steps.

5. Recommendation(s)

THAT Cabinet:

- a) receives the Improvement Notice from the Department of Education.
- b) confirms the statement of expectation for children's safeguarding in Herefordshire and for further discussion and potential endorsement by partners.
- c) delegates to the Director for People's Services the finalisation of the statement as set out in the report.
- d) notes the progress to date in addressing the recommendations from Ofsted.

6. Key Points Summary

- As reported in the Autumn, following the Ofsted Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children, Herefordshire is placed under an Improvement Notice by the DfE.

- This notice has now been received. This gives the Council the opportunity to accept the notice, confirm its expectation for safeguarding services and endorse the improvement plan which is in place.

7. Alternative Options

7.1 There are no viable alternative options.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 The Council is under a duty to accept the Improvement Notice from the DfE and address the requirement to improve the quality of services and impact on children's outcomes.

9. Introduction and Background

Improvement Notice

9.1 Following the Ofsted inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children in the Autumn, the Council was graded inadequate. As part of the response to this, the DfE has set out an Improvement Notice. The Council received the Final Improvement Notice on Thursday 14 February (Appendix 1).

9.2 The Notice has been developed with the Council and Improvement Board and the DfE and sets out the key areas of action which we have agreed are essential to secure good child protection services within the next two years.

9.3 One of the requirements of the Improvement Notice is a statement of expectation by the Council for safeguarding services in exercise of its lead role for Safeguarding (Appendix 2) and a plan of action (Appendix 3).

10. Key Considerations

The Statement of Expectation

10.1 The Council has not previously confirmed its expectation for safeguarding, but has placed its ambitions within its vision for children and young people in Herefordshire. The Council has a clear leadership role for Herefordshire in setting these expectations. Partners have indicated they would welcome such a statement and would wish to consider this and that there is a set of expectations within Herefordshire by all organisations.

10.2 Cabinet are asked to endorse the statement at Appendix 2. The statement is wholly in line with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Corporate Plan. Once endorsed, the statement will be taken to the Boards of the relevant partners agencies for consideration. This may mean some changes are suggested, and it is proposed it is delegated to the Director for People's Services to finalise the statement by the end of June, should there be any changes

10.3 It is also suggested that the Director for People's Services be asked to work with Children in Care and the Shadow Children's Board to ensure that the statement is easily understood by and communicated to children and young people.

The Improvement Plan

10.4 The Improvement Plan has been developed since November. The executive summary is

attached at Appendix 3. The Full Improvement Plan can be accessed as a background paper from a link attached to this agenda item on the Council's website. The Plan is a live document as the learning from implementing the plan is built into it.

- 10.5 There has been very active engagement by staff from a number of organisations in this first phase of improvement and credit should be given to them for the intensive work which has been done.
- 10.6 Monitoring of the plan and challenging of progress is undertaken at workstream meetings which happen at least monthly at present and the Improvement Board which also meets monthly. As it improves, the Safeguarding Board will gradually take over the role of the Improvement Board. The Council activities and performance are monitored on a weekly basis by managers, and then monthly through the senior management and cabinet arrangements, culminating in the quarterly performance report. This frequency alters if there are significant performance concerns. The quality assurance and performance monitoring arrangements are themselves under review to ensure that staff and managers have access to performance and quality information on a much more developed basis.

Progress to Date

- 10.7 The Ofsted report contained a number of recommendations for immediate three and six month actions. A progress report is attached at Appendix 4.
- 10.8 It has been well rehearsed that whilst it is possible to action all the recommendations, they cannot be considered completed until the actions are clearly embedded as evidenced through day to day practice, systematic implementation and confirmed through audit. Furthermore, the ultimate test will be considering the impact these actions are having on the experience of children and families and their outcomes. Whilst it is pleasing therefore to be able to report that all the recommendations have been actioned, there is still a significant way to go until there can be confidence that there has been a corresponding improvement in practice and outcomes.
- 10.9 Staff and managers have worked exceptionally hard over the past three months. The priorities have been:
- undertaking an audit of 1,440 cases and responding to findings
 - investing in more staff and supporting our teams
 - addressing performance issues and identifying good and outstanding practice
 - refreshing and developing approaches to practices

At the same time as this, the child protection teams have seen a rise in activity so have been dealing with an increase in workload and addressing performance issues. This has placed a strain on those teams.

- 10.10 The biggest risk to improvement is having a stable experienced workforce. Since Ofsted, the staffing position has changed, so that there are now more agency staff than there were when Ofsted inspected. This is a common experience in authorities in intervention, through a combination of increased number of cases being referred, leading to a growth in staff needed and staff turnover. Although we have many high quality agency staff, this creates a destabilising effect in its own right, on both permanent staff, partners and families. The Council has agreed a recruitment package and a national recruitment campaign started on 13 February. Competition between authorities for high calibre staff is very high.

- 10.11 Equally important are the retention arrangements; the Council has been developing its career structures and professional development and support arrangements. We have many excellent staff in Herefordshire and we want to ensure they are supported and challenged to perform their best. Although there is much the Council needs to do, staff also need to be able to establish effective and enduring professional relationships with staff throughout the safeguarding system. The Safeguarding Board will want to consider what the stability and effectiveness of staffing is in all organisations over the course of the next few months.
- 10.12 The influx of work combined with dealing with backlogs has seen a significant increase in assessments done. There is some pleasing evidence of improvements in the performance around visits and the speed with which assessments are undertaken although not yet at target. The revised team arrangements which have been put in place will improve the position in the next three month period; the teams are also focusing on the improvements in quality which has to go hand in hand with this.

Other Developments

- 10.13 The Council and its partners have also had an inspection of the Fostering Service. The outcomes are yet to be verified but are positive. There is some clear evidence of actions taken since the Ofsted inspection, beginning to take effect. What is equally clear is the collation of performance and quality data and analysis by managers to identify themes and take action is still requiring development work not just by the Council, but by other partners also.
- 10.14 Risk and Resilience training has been received very favourably, which bodes well for a more systematic collective understanding of risk and response to it, which is a key plank of the Improvement Plan.

Conclusion

- 10.15 Significant activity and investment has taken place since the inspection in September. Whilst we cannot be assured about systemic improvements until the staffing situation is more stable, the groundwork and preparation which is being undertaken enable us to improve practice meanwhile.

11. Community Impact

- 11.1 An effective approach to child protection ensures children are not placed at risk and are protected from harm. This plan is designed to secure this.

12. Equality and Human Rights

- 12.1 The improvement work will pay due regard to our public sector equality duty.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 For 2012/13 funds have been made available through the People's Services directorate contingency budget (£50k) and additional one off funding from the regional and national improvement boards which have covered the initial case audit and some interim staffing costs.
- 13.2 In setting the Children's Safeguarding budget for 2013/14 an estimate of the recurrent additional costs required to invest in and develop the social care workforce has been made and an additional £650k allowed within the FRM to cover the additional costs. The final

staffing structure is still under development and will require financial evaluation as part of the sign off process.

- 13.3 Critical to delivering the workforce improvement within the financial budget is the recruitment of a permanent experienced workforce quickly to minimise the additional costs incurred from the employment of agency / interim staff. Staffing has to be in place in service areas, including business support and the use of agency inevitably increases the costs to the Council. The Council is addressing this through a revised package for recruitment and retention.

14. Legal Implications

- 14.1 Currently there are no legal implications.

15. Risk Management

- 15.1 The risks are:

- Inability to secure stable experienced workforce leads to ineffective safeguarding services which leave children at risk of harm.
- The financial consequences mean early help services are not available leading to more costly arrangements.
- These are included in the directorate and corporate risk register. The Improvement Notice and Plan are mechanisms to mitigate the risk.
- There are reputational risks to the council if progress is not achieved. This is mitigated through the work of the Improvement Board and Improvement Plan.

16. Consultees

- 16.1 Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Improvement Board.

17. Appendices

- 17.1 Appendix 1 - Improvement Notice

Appendix 2 - Ambition Statement

Appendix 3 - Executive Summary of the Improvement Plan

Appendix 4 - Progress Report

18. Background Papers

- 18.1 Herefordshire's Ofsted Report.