

**Children's Wellbeing Directorate**  
**The Journey to Good – Progress Report**  
**September 2012 to December 2014**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The Council and its partners have the ambition to secure good safeguarding services by 2016/17. This document sets out the journey that the council and its partners have made since the Ofsted inspection which judged the Council to be inadequate; current performance features and the future plan to get to good.
- 1.2. The Council and its partners were clear in 2012 that the Ofsted judgement was fair and that the previous ten year profile of adequate/inadequate performance was unacceptable. The improvements to date have been staged to ensure there is sustainable change which establishes the right culture and environment within which staff can give of their best.
- 1.3. At the end of the day, we all work together in order to make a positive impact on the experiences of children and families and their outcomes. Good outcomes for children within the resources we have available is at the core of our vision for safeguarding in Herefordshire, and our plan to achieve this rests on the development of:
  - Effective child protection practice
  - Direct work with children and families using evidence based theoretical models of intervention
- 1.4. Our strategy development focusses on the belief that families and communities bring up children best. Through effective strategies we will:

- Understand our communities and target our resources as early as possible through effective use of data and intelligence
- Use the assets in our communities to support families, including volunteers
- Give families independence, choice and control where possible, building on strengths
- Where families cannot look after their own children, we will use family based models of care
- Over time, move resources from expensive, institutionalised forms of support to community based approaches
- Establish integrated pathways of support so that children and families experience seamless approaches, wherever support and intervention comes from

## **2. HOW WE WERE: SEPTEMBER 2012 – SEPTEMBER 2013**

- 2.1. In September 2012, Ofsted found an inadequate safeguarding system. This was typified by a system which did not know itself well, did not understand what effective child protection practice was, and which had fragmented understanding of the regulations. Children and young people were not a priority and, despite investment, some child protection services were in the bottom quartile of funding nationally despite having demand which outstripped statistical neighbours.
- 2.2. In contrast, early help services were well organised and reasonably well resourced; there were effective multi-agency groups which evidenced a strong focus on improving outcomes for children and working together as agencies.
- 2.3. Leadership was weak overall, and whilst people were working extremely hard, services had become complacent, against a backdrop of ten years of performance which had been judged as adequate or inadequate at various stages.
- 2.4. Following the Ofsted judgement, the Council and its partners focussed on four things:
  - The judgement was fair and the priority had to be on addressing the findings, not defending the indefensible

- This was a system wide responsibility, not just a social care one to put right
- Improvement needed to be rapid, but also sustainable. This meant getting underneath all the performance issues and building up from the basics again.
- The culture had to change - to be an honest, learning culture, challenging and learning from each other, focussed on children's outcomes and building on strengths

2.5. The improvement trajectory was set – adequate/requires improvement by 2014/15 and good by 2016/17.

2.6. Things we did well:

- Taking rapid steps to set up an independently chaired improvement board and an improvement plan
- Not wasting time on denial
- Securing additional council resourcing for child protection services
- Establishing children as the top priority for the Council
- Changing the political and officer structure to disaggregate the People Directorate and member role and establish dedicated Lead Member and senior officer structure
- Establishing the start of the learning culture through the auditing of over 1000 cases, drawing out the learning from that and the establishment of a small quality assurance function
- Establishing the Multi-agency safeguarding hub
- Establishing the Social Work Academy
- Unpicking the data
- Establishing the early stages of a performance culture
- Securing effective support and external challenge, with externally monitored staging points to make sure we were moving forward and not slipping back

2.7. Things which didn't go so well:

- The significant destabilisation of social work staffing – 4% agency to 40% agency staff in 9 months
- Not establishing the practice standards and expectations clearly enough with staff
- Slow progress with establishing effective leadership at every level

- Difficult start to the MASH evidencing weaknesses in project planning, implementation and oversight
- An overambitious and under prioritised improvement plan – on reflection, people were too focussed on the future and insufficiently focussed on making the changes to the day to day practice
- Slow progress with improving the case management system which also caused significant difficulties with the accuracy of performance data

2.8. The end result of this was practice improvement and impact which was too slow.

2.9. The Council and partners, through the Safeguarding Children Board and the Improvement Board, were clear at the outset that for improvement to be effective, we needed external monitoring and challenge at set points. As we were changing a decade of underperformance, we knew that the most difficult things to change are old habits; and that sound judgement takes practice to get right.

2.10. Therefore, twelve months after this inspection in October 2013 a Peer Review took place, commissioned by the Council in partnership with the HSCB via the Local Government Association in order to evaluate progress. This highlighted that progress had started on the improvement journey but that the pace had been slow. The review recognised that these were early days.

2.11. *“You are addressing failings in social work practice highlighted in previous inspections however, despite action on this; the review team found that social care practice and supervision across all teams is not yet achieving the required levels of quality and consistency.”* – Peer review feedback letter 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013

2.12. Equally, the peer review feedback also reinforced that the fundamental issue for Herefordshire to resolve lies in the recruitment, development and retention of high quality staff, now and for the foreseeable future.

### **3. SEPTEMBER 2013 - MAY 2014**

3.1. The Peer Review was an important staging post for us to enable a re-focussing of the Improvement Programme and the overall approach being adopted for the next stage of improvement. Whilst building on what was beginning to work well, it was appreciated that a different approach was required if the goal of achieving our aspirations of a good safeguarding service by 2016 is to be realised.

### 3.2. The approach taken since October 2013 comprised::

- A reconfigured management team with new personnel leading:
  - A streamlined and refocused Improvement Plan used as a key driver for change within new Business Planning and Transformation Management Programmes
  - Enhanced emphasis on achieving good performance in key social work tasks with clear expectations developed with staff and based on effective social work practice.
  - Embedding a performance culture throughout the department, with the emphasis on self-responsibility, reliability of information and honest analysis.
  - Increasing the social care resources available within the MASH and throughout the Social Care teams to take a much stronger leadership role, reasserting the Council's responsibilities as lead agency for child protection.
- The ongoing strategic prioritisation of Children's Wellbeing by the Council. Resources have been both protected and enhanced for safeguarding services as far as possible within the austerity measures.
- Investment has been prioritised in the areas of:
  - MASH, 16+, Children with Disabilities, Fostering, Adoption and Children in Need services
  - Quality Assurance, IRO and CPC service and Performance Management
  - A completely new Transformation Programme for the computer system Frameworki
  - Child Sexual Exploitation
  - The development of a Programme Management Office (PMO) to oversee the broader transformation of the directorate through programme and project management approaches, This transformation programme has been branded as the Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme (**CHIPP**).
- The development of:

- Local family based services as a direct alternative to using costly and ineffective institutional forms of care. This will achieve better outcomes for young people and also free resources to invest in preventative direct work services
- A suite of direct work services to work alongside fieldwork services using evidenced based therapeutic approaches in order to improve long term outcomes for children and families and reduce the need for statutory interventions.
- The development, over time, of 7 day per week integrated service models in MASH, Vulnerable Young People and CWD.

#### **4. SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY**

4.1. Underpinning all these developments is a revamped Social Care Workforce Strategy. Staff need the right environment to perform their best. The focus has been on:

- Practice expectations and development programmes
- managing poor performance,
- enhanced incentives to join Herefordshire and to stay here,
- more NQSWs so that we grow our own high calibre staff over the longer term
- Social work academy development to support the first three years of a social workers career
- enhanced management capacity and effective supervision
- reduced caseloads – now averaging 16 from the previous 30
- improved working environment.

4.2. This approach has shown some encouraging signs as evidenced in the feedback from a Peer Review Follow-up Exercise which was commissioned in February 2014 to assess progress in the MASH and related activities. This reported “Clear effort has been made by the senior management team and whilst very early days the new systems and structures look promising. There is evidence that Herefordshire have taken positive steps to address the significant issues in the *MASH*; *new systems have been introduced, the direction looks right although it is early days*”

4.3. In March 2014, the DfE carried out a 12-month follow up review. This review confirmed that Children's Wellbeing Services were progressing their improvement journey and highlighted the following:

- Positive progress identified
- Performance in MASH highlighted
- Lower Caseloads
- Improving morale
- Stability in management
- Good recruitment strategy
- Partnership work needs more attention

## **5. OFSTED SINGLE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK INSPECTION 29 APRIL – 21 MAY 2014**

5.1. The work undertaken above placed the local authority in a positive position to rise to the challenge of demonstrating to Ofsted the progress made since the previous inspection, and the difference being made specifically to vulnerable children and families. The outcome of the inspection was that Herefordshire both in terms of the Council and its partners and the HSCB were judged as 'requiring improvement' overall..

5.2. The inspection recognised the significant progress made in the preceding 18 months, in particular with respect to the improvements in MASH, the quality of direct work undertaken and the evidence of the child's voice on a case by case basis. During the course of the inspection, no children were found to be unsafe.

5.3. However, they also commented on the relative infancy of some of the changes and improvements, and that more time was needed to evidence their sustainability.

- Children clearly key priority for Council
- Becoming good is a golden thread
- Elected Members are diligent and well engaged
- Performance Management & collection and use of good reliable data needs much improvement
- Strategic use of data and evaluation to inform developments needs improving

5.4. Pleasingly, Ofsted noted that there was an early growing confidence amongst the social care workforce.

## **6. MAY 2014 - PRESENT**

6.1. There is a new found confidence within services, which is giving added impetus to the progress being made. Whilst there is still significant work to do to reach a secure quality of good services – for example, improvements are not yet fully embedded and the staffing situation is still relatively fragile - the foundations have been laid on which we can continue to build and improve the overall effectiveness of the child protection services, and radically improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in Herefordshire.

6.2. The Improvement Plan has been further refreshed to build in the new Ofsted recommendations and continue to focus on the outstanding improvements required. Since May, the following developments have taken place:

- Permanent staffing has stabilised further, with only one permanent social worker leaving since April 2014
- Agency social worker profile has reduced to 31% of the staffing establishment
- Caseloads have remained at an average of 16
- The first cohort of NQSWs have completed their AYSE
- The Frameworki case management system is 75% through the reconfiguration programme, saving significant time for social workers and improving significantly the accuracy of performance information and quality of casework recorded
- The Council and partners have commissioned a new Intensive placement support service which goes live in spring 2015 and provides multi-disciplinary 7 day per week therapeutic support for children and their carers which will begin the move from institutional forms of care to family and community based provision
- The MASH has continued to develop well and has expanded to provide its first specialism in the area of child sexual exploitation
- Performance has continued to improve and stabilise across all key measures.



## **7. LGA PEER DIAGNOSTIC**

7.1. The continuous improvement framework which is now in place, places value on specific external scrutiny. The HSCB was one of five local authorities to pilot the new Local Government Peer Diagnostic for Safeguarding Children Boards in November 2015, This was planned specifically in Herefordshire, to assist in planning for the Board to taking on from the Improvement Board the full responsibility for ensuring effective multi agency safeguarding practice.

7.2. Themes which were reinforced by the review were:

- Evidence that the authority and its partners know ourselves well
- sustained progress made since the May inspection
- the continuing strength of the MASH and our CSE arrangements.

7.3. The peer review also urged us to trust our own judgement

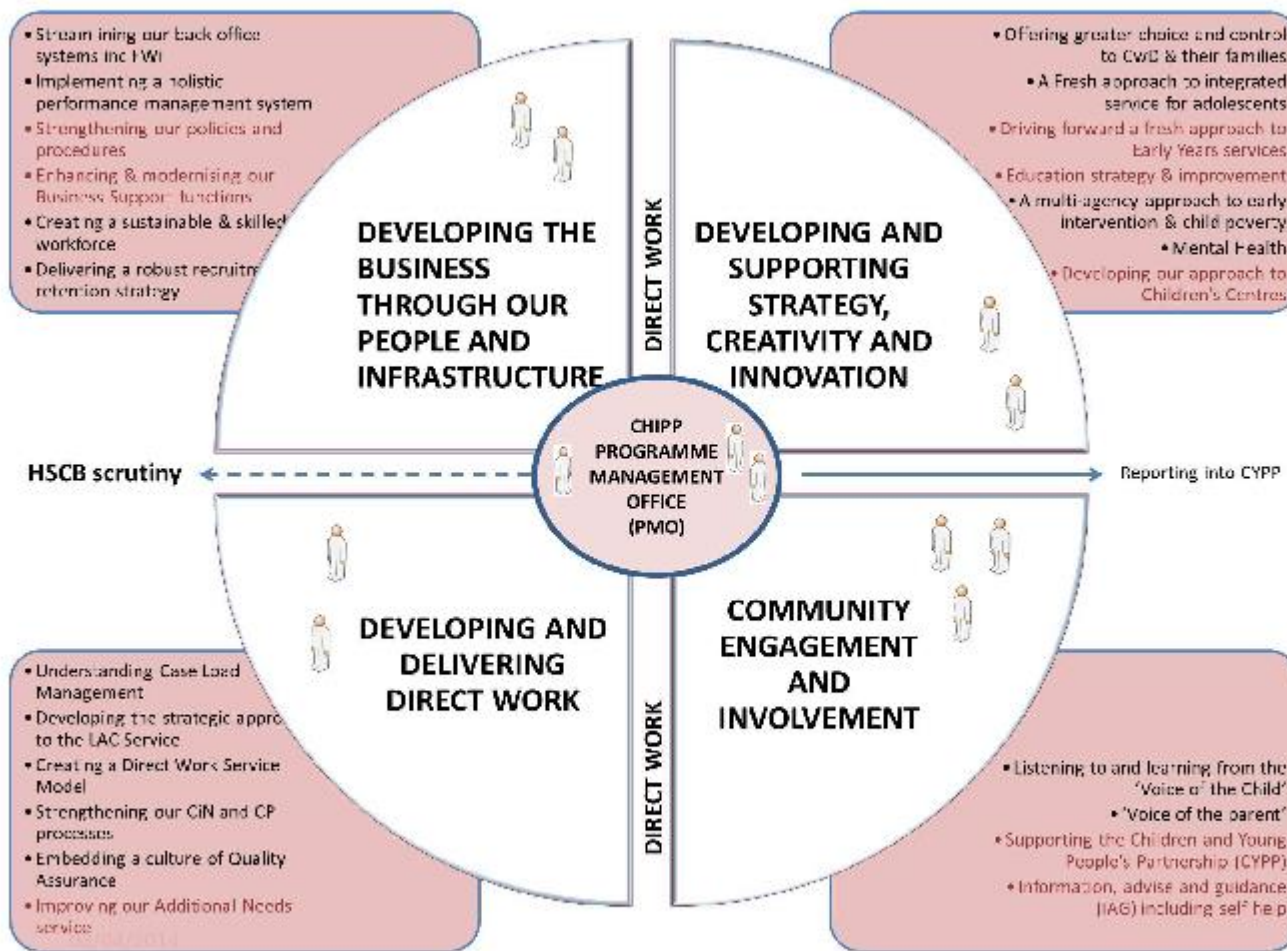
7.4. Recommendations to support the further development of the board in undertaking its full responsibilities, include;

- Identify and align priorities and stick with them throughout every element of the Board structure and functions
- Fund and implement a reinvigorated and fit for purpose business unit
- Make sure all members of the strategic board are fully engaged and understand their relationship between being on the board and improving frontline practice and impact on outcomes
- Make all agencies accountable for what they have committed to
- Use formal challenge and evidence its impact on the achievement of better outcomes
- Develop a project management approach to the business of the board

## **8. GETTING TO GOOD BY 2016**

8.1. In 2012, the Council and its partners had no clear or confident vision about the quality and type of services it wished to secure to improve safeguarding services and improve outcomes for children.

- 8.2. One of the most significant changes is the absolute intent to be good by 2016/17. The road ahead will not all be plain sailing, and there are still issues which may knock things off course. However, the evidence is there that planning and preparation for change is improved, the knowledge and expectation about effective safeguarding practice is better and when things do not progress as planned, we know that for ourselves and can put it right.
- 8.3. Getting to good will rely on a unified, more strategic approach to service change, which tackles the underlying causes of harm, as well as a relentless focus on basic effective practice. Our approach for this is encapsulated in our transformation programme, CHIPP (Children of Herefordshire's Improvement and Partnership Programme) which is represented the following diagram:



8.4. A refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a new Children's Plan are under development, drawing from the JSNA and the bespoke Children's Needs Assessment commissioned by the Children's Partnership. These plans will secure the longer term system wide transformation changes necessary to ensure children grow up in caring families and communities. The Boards charged with making these changes are much clearer about their role and responsibility, and the governance requirements will continue to be the subject of our focus.

8.5. The risks to these plans relate predominantly to:

- Recruiting, retaining and developing the right staff – not just social workers, but key staff in other professions
- Delay in making service change in line with national budget reductions, which create further financial challenges which require urgent and unplanned budget cuts
- A lack of confidence or belief in the ability of Herefordshire to drive forward change.

8.6. For each of these risks we have plans in place:

- Our social care workforce plan is robust and we are well on course for further recruitment of new and experienced social workers during this year. We are also one of the few local authority areas nationally which is revising its children's workforce strategy to ensure we have robust workforce plans for the system as a whole.
- We have introduced a strong programme and project management approach, initially through CHIPP, and now extending into the HSCB and Children's Partnership, which is bringing the resilience and momentum behind actual delivery of service change and delivery of resource change also.
- Confidence is growing, and is backed up by the successful development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, the quality assurance culture and the impact of the social work academy on newly qualified social workers. This will be further enhanced by the implementation of HIPSS and TISS. These developments have created an environment where people can be honest about what they want to see, can have difficult conversations and reach difficult decisions and can predict and mitigate problems before they occur.

9. Most importantly though, the work we are doing and continue to do, is done through a strengthening learning culture. We do not get things right all the time, but we learn by doing. We become stronger as a system as a result of that learning.

10. Finally, our role is to ensure that families and communities are able to bring up children well, and that those children have good outcomes. We know from direct feedback from children and families, that when we work with them, build on their strengths and create consistent honest relationships with them, that we create the right environment for those families and children to put right their issues, and move on. Ensuring that at every level of the system we know what things are like for those children and families is fundamental to our next step of getting to good.