

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Children and young people scrutiny committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Monday 11 March 2019</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Quarterly review of performance against the Ofsted action plan</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Director of Children and Families</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

All Wards

## **Purpose and summary**

To review the progress against the action plan produced in response to the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection judgement of June 2018.

There have been a number of key achievements across the service; these include a reduction in the number of children referred inappropriately into Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); a reduction in social worker caseloads, and increase in the timeliness of visits to children. There continues to be a focus on a number of areas; including ensuring a robust application of thresholds to make referrals for statutory social work intervention across all partner agencies; improving the quality and timeliness of assessments and the level of frequency of visits to children. There are signs of improvement in management oversight and social work supervision that is being closely monitored.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

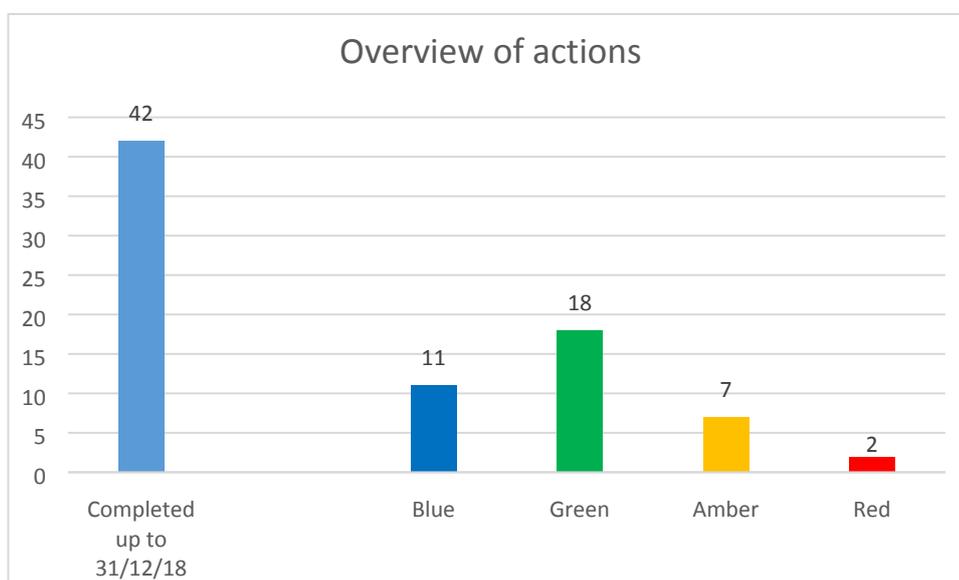
- (a) the committee review progress and determine any recommendations it wishes to make to the executive to secure further improvement.**

## 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's scrutiny committee received the action plan on 1 October 2018 and endorsed the plan. The committee agreed that they would receive a quarterly update to assess the progress against the action plan. An overview of the actions is shown in the chart below.



3. Every safeguarding and early help service area in the improvement plan has a clear action plan to drive forward improvement in the specific areas; they are reviewed on a monthly basis by the directorate leadership team, alongside performance information. Attached at appendix a is the overall highlight report that covers all of the action plans and provides an overview of the progress made and any issues that may have arisen as the actions are implemented or progressed.
4. A number of key operational indicators have improved during the first three months of the improvement plan; these include the reduction in social worker caseloads, and increase in the timeliness of visits to children who have a child protection plan and an increase in levels of supervision taking place.
5. Specifically there has been a number of key achievements across the service; there has been a reduction in the number of children referred inappropriately into Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as a result of the reintroduction of the MASH Partnership forum and multi-agency audit activity in MASH.
6. There has been an improvement in the completion of assessments within timescales; as at the end of December 2018, 100% of assessments were carried out within timescale, an improvement from 39% in September 2018.

7. As highlighted in appendix b we have successfully recruited 20 staff, a combination of permanent and agency staff; and have in place a long term strategy for permanent recruitment, growing and keeping our own; as well as pursuing an urban to rural recruitment and an international recruitment approach during 2019.
8. We have also updated our transfer process to ensure that the cases are in the correct teams and increased our management capacity in our CP/Court services. Case transfers are now being reviewed on a regular basis and the assistant director follows up case transfers with heads of service and team managers to ensure that the cases are in the correct teams. Our caseloads are now of a range of 16 to 23; compared to having caseloads of high 20's to 30s in June 2018.
9. Senior managers interaction with staff has improved; the assistant director and director regularly work in different social care offices and hold regular drop in sessions for staff. We have taken action to support the retention of staff, which was informed by staff feedback. This is evidenced from recent feedback provided by our staff to Doncaster Children's Trust who have been working with us to assist us in our improvement work.
10. Team managers were asked what one thing would help create the right environment for children's social work to flourish. Answers were:
  - a. Continue to listen more and more of 'you said, we did' – there have been recent encouraging signs of this
  - b. Help to raise morale, particularly through continued involvements – again this was reported to be happening more
  - c. Clarity of the training and development offer to practitioners, to ensure access is fair and equitable.
11. The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making has improved with revised panel arrangements being established and embedded. This provides a robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system, and looks at appropriate solutions and alternatives.
12. Performance reports have been developed and put in place since September 2018, giving a range of detailed weekly reports and monthly scorecards. There is more to do to improve the accuracy and usefulness of reports to aid improvement in social work practice and outcomes for children and young people.
13. Because of our improved approach to performance, children are receiving more timely visits. Child Protection visits are at 85% in time in December 2018, compared to 69% in September. Looked after Children visits are 74% compared to 65%. Child in Need visits are recorded as 59% compared to 41%. Our timeliness of visits is still not as good as it should be, despite an improving picture.
14. Team managers reported to Doncaster Children's Trust a "considerable improvement in the quality of performance information, it is more accurate than it has been and that they can start to properly performance manage." Furthermore, they stated, "it is our problem to fix" and that it has helped that action has been taken that has "moved cases into the right place." This evidences the beginnings of a change in management culture and management grip since the ILAC in June 2018.

15. 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, established a framework, which will close the loop of learning by holding bi-monthly practice learning sessions.
16. 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.
17. We have run a comprehensive assessment improvement project in the assessment teams to improve the quality of children and family assessments. We are not delivering high quality assessments consistently and this is a continued area of focus. We are now reporting improvements in assessment completion timescales, and have continued to provide a focus on the quality of assessments, including the voice of the child and direct work with children. We have agreed to implement Signs of Safety and have agreed to work with Doncaster Children's Trust to support this.
18. The council has established its long-term strategy to secure good child protection services within an environment of reducing resources. The priorities for changes are to build independence and self-support within families and communities; to target support services proactively in areas of need; and to change the models of delivery.
19. There are seven actions that are amber as they have experienced some issues or there are delays forecasted; therefore the performance measure is unlikely to be achieved on time. These are reviewed on a monthly basis and kept under close review.
20. There are two actions that are rated as red; including the development of template documents by the LAC health team to provide our care leavers with their health records. Care leavers will then be consulted with to seek their opinion on these providing them with the information that they require; this has been delayed.
21. The quality of assessments and timeliness remains a challenge. The assessment timescales are not yet being met consistently. The timeliness of assessments and the performance information is being reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure that improvement in this area is carefully monitored until there is sustained improvement.
22. Council oversight and governance of the implementation of the action plan is to be completed through the performance framework; with final challenge and assurance taking place via cabinet and the children and young people's scrutiny committee. The Children and Young People's Partnership Plan will be an important vehicle to deliver multi-agency change, including providing a focal point for developing Herefordshire's approach to early help.
23. Ofsted carried out a focused visit during January 2019. The focus of the visit was to look into the 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 outcome of the visit is shown in the focussed visit outcome letter as attached at appendix D.

## **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 actions completed and outcomes achieved.
25. 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.
26. 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**

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 -

- (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.
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 the action plan is implemented that we pay due regard to equality legislation.
  29. The action 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**

30. 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.
31. The implementation of the action plan required additional resources, which 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.

32. Within the 2018/19 as reported cabinet agreed £1.6m of resource to support the increase in capacity of social workers, social work managers, and family support and business support to undertake work that reduces the demands on social workers themselves. In addition, some investment has been used to support further developments of performance management reports and systems and to address life story book work. There is also additional investment taking place for children's legal services which currently is fragile.

## **Legal implications**

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

## **Risk management**

34. The risks associated with the failure to implement the action 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.
35. 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**

36. None.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Children and Families executive highlight report – Dec 2018

Appendix B – Children and Families Self Evaluation Framework Oct to Dec 2018

Appendix C – Updated Ofsted Improvement Plan (to be uploaded 11/02/19)

## **Background papers**

None identified