

SUMMARY

Areas of strength

- Strong staff knowledge of children and their families
- Committed and dedicated staff who feel supported by their managers
- Ability to follow through on action plans, e.g. decrease in children on CP plans, response to children accommodated under Section 20.
- Progress at KS2 in both reading & maths saw dramatic improvement in 2018 for LAC in the virtual school; KS4 attainment and progress in 2017 in the virtual school better than for LAC national
- Consistently high performance in timeliness of care proceedings.
- Positive feedback on 16+ service from Mark Riddell, National 16+ advisor
- Strong performance for children placed for adoption
- Use of new technology to increase children's participation
- Leaders are open to external scrutiny and act on it including Ofsted inspection, LGA peer reviews and additional investment of £1.6m in social care and legal services for children by council leaders

Areas for improvement and update on actions

1. Senior leadership urgency in implementing a robust and timely action plan to deliver improvements and to address deficits in social work practice

Herefordshire Ofsted improvement plan in place and submitted 25 October 2018. Ofsted responded:

"I would like to confirm that I find your plan to be appropriate, focussed on the right areas of practice and management and that it addresses areas for improvement identified at your last inspection. It is reassuring to note the extra investment the council has made in children's services to support improvements and increase workforce capacity. Evidence of actions are clearly identified and I note the nine extra social workers already in place in your CP/court teams.

I look forward to receiving your updated plan and seeing what progress has been made at the end of this review period." (Lynn Radley, Senior HMI Social Care West Midlands)

Every social work service area in the improvement plan has its own clear action plan to drive forward improvement. This is reviewed on a monthly basis by the directorate leadership team, alongside performance information. This will then be reviewed by the council's management board, cabinet and the children and young people scrutiny committee. The improvement plan will be updated after each review period, focusing on what more needs to be done and how to embed improvement into sustained change.

2. The sufficiency of social workers and managers with capacity to cope with the need for services and the volume of social worker caseloads;

We have successfully recruited 20 staff, a combination of agency and substantive staff, including managers, to provide additional social workers and managers across the service, including:

- An additional Head of Service to concentrate on MASH/Assessment, with another head of service for CP/Court (previously we had one head of fieldwork covering the two areas).
- Increased team and team manager capacity, having moved from two to three teams in the children protection court teams.
- Additional family support workers to provide additional capacity and strengthen our support and intervention for children and young people.
- Additional social workers. We worked within a regional West Midlands approach to recruit agency social workers, and have secured 11 social workers. We have had some movement

of social workers who have not left the authority but moved to other teams such as LAC, adoption and fostering;

- business support capacity to increase the scope of business support services, to include convening and minuting of meetings, to release social worker's time from these tasks;
- Additional contact workers to clear the back log of life story book work and maintain completion of life story book work, particularly for children who are going to be adopted;
- Appointed a principle IRO to strengthen IRO management.

Our caseloads are now of a range of 16 to 23, compared to many workers having caseloads of high 20s to 30s in June 2018.

We have put in place a long term strategy for permanent recruitment, growing and keeping our own, as well as pursuing an urban to rural recruitment and international recruitment approach during 2019.

We are starting to implement software in Jan 2019, to record voice notes of visits that can then be uploaded directly into MOSAIC, cutting down the amount of time that socials workers will have to spend on data input.

We identified that some cases were in the wrong teams, we have updated our transfer process and increased our management capacity in our CP/Court services as well as recruiting social workers to fill vacant posts. Case transfers are reviewed and the assistant director follows up case transfers with heads of service and team managers and has recently introduced a weekly report.

3. Senior managers' interaction with social workers to enable staff to feel listened to;

The Director has regular meetings with each operational team. The Assistant Director holds regular drop-in sessions for staff to raise any issues. Both the Director and Assistant Director regularly work in different social care offices. The Director also holds regular drop in sessions for all staff. The Director has a programme of shadowing with social workers. Actions to support the retention of social workers has been informed by staff feedback, including a market forces supplement and the introduction of individual learning budgets (£250 for each worker), following suggestions from staff.

Recent feedback from Doncaster Children's Trust work carried out in January 2019 noted:

"Finally, when I asked TM's what one thing would help create the right environment for good social work to flourish? Answers were:

- Continue to listen more and more of "you said, we did" – there have been recent encouraging signs of this.
- Help to raise morale, particularly through continued involvement - again, this was reported as happening more
- Clarity of the Training and Development offer to practitioners, to ensure access is fair and equitable.
- Strengthen partner buy-in, particularly for larger practice improvement projects – eg Graded Care Profile and Signs of Safety."

4. The pace of progressing child protection and child in need plans and the quality of practice with children in need;

We established a specific work programme to address our weaknesses regarding our approach to Child in Need (CIN). A dedicated senior manager led the work for a 3 month period and has produced a clear CIN policy and procedure, which has recently been implemented. During this process and the establishment of CIN panels, we reviewed 181 Child in Need (CIN) cases. We are monitoring child in need visits as part of our weekly performance management approach, which has shown some improvement, but still needs to improve further. Strategy meeting guidance has also been reviewed and implemented. S47 guidance is in the process of being produced to improve the practice in this area.

All IRO's attended CP Plan training on 7 November 2018, to promote the production of SMART, child centred plans, focused on outcomes for children.

5. The regularity and quality of social work supervision;

We have not been consistently completing supervision for social workers and have implemented a supervision tracker from week commencing 30, July 2018. Performance has improved but is still not where it needs to be (61% December vs 46% September 2018, for case supervision; maintaining c.75% for workers supervision). Supervision performance data is made available at mid-month point. The month's performance is included in performance report at monthly AD/HoS meeting. The current recorded levels in Assessment and CP/Court teams in particular are not up to our expected standards and have targets and a review approach to drive improvement. We are also reviewing how we record supervision through our MOSAIC system. We still have some supervision taking place that is not recorded on MOSAIC. Supervision has been audited for quality within the assessment teams and action taken to improve. Twice monthly group supervision has been introduced from November 18 in the assessment teams.

6. The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making and the existing quality assurance and performance management system;

We have revised panel arrangements and established an alternatives to care panel. This started on the 25 September 2018, and provides a much more robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system, and looks at appropriate solutions and alternatives. All cases where there is a recommendation to commence PLO, or issue proceedings are also presented to this panel. All Section 20 cases are reviewed weekly. This panel is regularly chaired by the Assistant Director, with Heads of Service also being directly involved in individual case discussions and decisions. Legal services also attend this panel to enable clear, consistent approaches.

Performance reports have been developed and put in place since September 2018, giving a range of detailed weekly reports and monthly scorecards. Quarterly scorecards are also produced and considered by the directorate and corporately. 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.

As a result of our improved approach to performance children are receiving more timely visits. CP visits are at 85% in time in December 2018, compared to 69% in September 2018; LAC visits are 74% compared to 65%; CIN visits are recorded as 59% compared to 41%. However, the accuracy of the reports need to improve particularly for LAC and CIN as they do not take into account different timescales for visiting a child/young person. Our timeliness of visits is still not as good as it should be, despite an improving picture.

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."

Team managers stated to the Doncaster review team that "it is "our problem to fix" and that its 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 also management grip since the ILAC in June 2018.

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, and will be reviewing its implementation on a monthly basis. We have established the publication of a monthly safeguarding learning brief, distributed to all staff within the Children and Families directorate.

We undertake a monthly programme of case file audits. We need to improve our compliance so that we have a consistent number of audits taking place. We have established baselines and targets for improvements. On a quarterly basis we analyse findings to identify themes and priorities for learning and improvement. In addition we regularly undertake a range of thematic audit work informed by agreed priorities and findings are considered by our senior management team to inform our development plan. These have included an audit of assessment practice, (September 2018, December 2018) CP system thresholds and second and subsequent CP plans (January 2019), and ICPC and RCPC attendance (December 2019).

A review of MASH arrangements was commissioned and carried out in November 2018 to inform our improvement work and reflect on the changes that had been implemented.

7. The quality of life-story work for all children.

We have recruited additional contact workers to clear the back log of life story book work and maintain completion of life story book work, particularly for children who are going to be adopted;

8. Permanency arrangements for LAC

We have appointed a Case Progression Officer to add additional capacity to ensuring improvement in care planning, timeliness and outcomes for children. Our panel now tracks PLO cases as well as the use of Section 20, and a six monthly review of children with placement plans. We now regularly audit the use of our delegated authority form and this has improved from 35% on file to 70% in October 2018.

9. Private Fostering

Private Fostering arrangements have recently been the subject of discussion and the need for a revision and re-emphasis of Herefordshire's approach to Private Fostering has been recognised and was noted during Ofsted's focused visit in January 2019. A new 'quick guide' to complement more detailed guidance in TriX has been completed and is being taken through the governance processes within the division; there have been some minor further revisions suggested. It will be taken into the MASH Partnership Forum meeting to raise awareness of private fostering amongst partners, and liaison with education colleagues will take place to raise the profile of private fostering within school settings. Within the service we will audit our private fostering cases to ensure we are delivering a good, compliant service.

10. The consistent application of thresholds within children's services and across the partnership

We have introduced a MASH Partnership Forum and multi-agency audit activity in MASH that has supported work reducing the number of children referred inappropriately into MASH. We also now have an Early Help Coordinator in MASH to ensure that children are managed in the correct part of the system and stepped up and down appropriately according to their identified needs. Early help training has been delivered to over 400 professionals to improve understanding of the approach, offer and thresholds. The number of referrals from the police are still too high without the necessary triaging. This has been raised with the police and they are currently recruiting to a post to assist with this. There has been a 22% reduction in the number of strategy meetings since July 2018, aligned to our revision and implementation of strategy meeting guidance.

11. Improving quality and consistency of practice;

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.

12. Serious case review

Herefordshire has recently undertaken a serious case review regarding a child who experienced sexual exploitation before and whilst in care. The learning from the case review is being finalised and actions within children's safeguarding and across partners are being put in place. These include understanding the experience of the child, understanding and assessment of risk across agencies including history and the work carried out across different police forces.