

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Children and young people scrutiny committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Monday 16 March 2020</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Review of performance and progress against the Safeguarding and Family Support improvement plan 2019/20</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Assistant director for Safeguarding and Family Support</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

To review progress against the Safeguarding and Family Support division improvement plan 2019 / 2020 (appendix a) 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.

To provide an update on work with West Mercia Police regarding referrals to the Multi-agency safeguarding hub.

## **Recommendation(s)**

That:

- (a) **The committee review progress and determine any recommendations it wished 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 their meeting on 25 November 2019 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 13 remaining 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 have published their report (appendix b) and further information has been provided to all councillors. There are 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” (appendix c) 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.
8. The individual service plans continue to be monitored on a regular basis and they have been further enhanced following the focused visit in December 2019 to ensure that they are consistent in approach.
9. 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).
10. 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 now 1266 EHAs 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.
11. Performance data for MASH indicates that 89% of all contacts were completed within 1 day. We will be moving toward all contacts being completed within 24 hours. To achieve this the Head of Services for MASH and Assessments and Early Help visited Redbridge Local Authority in December 2019. Redbridge Local Authority are OFSTED rated “outstanding” and have a highly effective and well-functioning MASH. From this visit the Head of Services of MASH and Early Help will present improvement options to the Senior Management Team with an aim to ensure children and families receive the most appropriate and timely support they need to prevent Social Care involvement.
12. During 2019 we have seen a significant shift in the recognition and understanding of child exploitation within children’s services and across the multi-agency workforce. A revised exploitation risk assessment was implemented in August 2019; this has been embedded throughout Q3 and has led to a reduction in the number of young people and care leavers assessed at moderate, significant risk or subject to actual exploitation. This is because the revised tool is more appropriate for assessing risks of exploitation in all its forms. All new exploitation assessments continue to include oversight from an Exploitation Coordinator prior to being authorised by the relevant team manager.
13. Both Essex in their work in Herefordshire in November 2019, and Ofsted in their focused visit of December 2019, identified too many children’s cases escalated to child protection too quickly, and could have lower level of intervention, such as early help or child in need plan.
14. The focused visit by Ofsted identified that there is limited evidence of case management oversight and direction given to social workers and inconsistent quality of case supervision, which is impeding the progress of improving outcomes for children. Issues were also identified with the adequacy of family support provision despite this service being well resourced and social workers cited waiting lists of 4 months for families to access vital support. There are plans to re-align the family support service so that families identified as

requiring intervention can access family support either during the course of an assessment, or if a CIN plan is required, at the conclusion of an assessment.

15. The local authority continues to have a high number of looked after children. At the end of December 2019 there were 358 children in care which equates to 99 per 10,000, which is 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 increased from 334 at the end of March 2019. At the end of quarter 3; 87 of the children looked after have been looked after for less than 12 months. 78 children are long term matched with their foster carer. 22 children are placed with parents. 12 children are placed with prospective adopters. 48 children have potential care plans of special guardianship orders, decisions regarding these are taken on a case by case basis. Work is continuing to reflect on the most appropriate long term plan for other children within the overall number of 358, including reunification with families; this work is being reviewed on a monthly basis.
16. An Alternatives to Care panel which is chaired by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding was introduced in September 2018. This panel decides whether care proceedings should be initiated, whether children should be admitted to care under Section 20, and reviews decisions to admit children to care in an unplanned way. The number of children admitted to care during quarter 3 was at rate of 27 per 10,000 which is in line the average rate in the West Midlands region.
17. The local authority has had a lower rate of children leaving care than statistical neighbours and the focus is upon identifying children who could safely return to their parents' care or who could be cared for under a Special Guardianship Order. Initially, many foster carers were reluctant to consider applying for SGO's as they were concerned about the financial impact and in some cases supervising contact for children with their birth families. Both of these issues have been resolved as Cabinet agreed an increased financial support offer which is equivalent to that received by foster carers and increased resource for our LAC support service to enable them to supervise contact for children subject to SGOs where this is necessary. Progress has not been made at the pace that was expected, and this is now being challenged and tracked by the assistant director safeguarding and family support, with the expectation that the numbers of children leaving care will increase during the remainder of 2019/20 and onwards. At the end of December 2019 applications for discharge of care orders had been made for 16 children.
18. The agreement of funding for an Edge of Care service (ECHO) will assist with the reunification of children home from the care system.
19. At the end of December 2019 only 42% of care leavers were reported as engaged in education, employment or training. This is very low and is a priority for improvement. Training options in Herefordshire are fairly limited and this impacts on the choices available for young people especially if they are excluded from attending a provider. The 16+ team have just started working with Landau a supported employment and training charity; who are funded to reduce the number of young people who are NEET in the County. Landau are now providing a weekly drop-in based at the 16+ office and it is hoped that this will help to increase the number of our care leavers engaged in education, training or employment. During the last year the Council has employed 3 care leavers as apprentices which is positive, however this needs to develop into a rolling programme and commitment.
20. Within the Children with Disabilities team the recent focussed visit confirmed that CIN plans are tailored and responsive to children's needs. Packages of support are appropriate to

needs identified and social workers are quick to ensure these are adapted if children's needs change or in response to crisis. Children's and carer's views are consistently recorded and these views influence planning decisions. Social workers know the children well and are skilled at communication with children using a variety of different methods and applying observational skills to ascertain children's wellbeing. Supervision is of a high quality in this team, it is well recorded and includes elements of reflection helping to ensure timely progress.

21. A Quality assurance framework commenced in July 2019, and has established a timetable of audits of social work cases, undertaken through a formalised audit programme which includes combined audit activity such as deep dive audits, thematic audits and moderated audits. Monthly audit feedback reports are produced following the collation of the details captured in the audits. These are reported into the Assistant Director/ Head of Service meetings on a monthly basis, and workshops to provide learning from audit activity, plus bi monthly learning sessions are now taking place to close the learning loop following audit activity and findings.
22. 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.
23. At the end of quarter 3 a number of performance indicators for safeguarding and family support had shown some improvement. However, a number of key indicators including visits and supervision remain overall below targets; there has however been an overall improvement since the start of the financial year with some teams making more improvement than others. Performance information is subject to weekly and monthly review by managers. Performance challenge sessions, to be held quarterly and chaired by the Director of Children's Services are to be introduced at the start of Q4, January 2020.
24. There were 1790 contacts received in quarter 3; which is a reduction against the number of contacts received in quarter 2 which was 1853. The conversion rate of contacts to referrals has also seen a slight decrease from 24% in quarter 2 to 21% in quarter 3. Contacts completed within a 1 day timescale (year to date) at the end of quarter 2 was 89% and at the end of quarter 3 was 88%. However, we are moving to contacts being dealt within a 24 hour period; this is required under the 'Working Together statutory guidance. As we move forward on improving the service provision. We have seen a drop in the number of assessments being completed in timescales from 79% in quarter 2 to 73% in quarter 3; with the year to date outturn decreasing from 84% to 80%; this is against a target of 95%
25. 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. The vacant posts in the social work academy have been recruited to, and the Principal Social Worker post has been filled. 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 will be improved with the recruitment into the social work academy.

26. The Multi Agency Safeguarding hub continues to receive the highest number of contacts from West Mercia Police. Work has been undertaken by the Safeguarding Partnership, Assistant director safeguarding and family support and the Director for children and families to address this. In addition, the chair of Children and young people's scrutiny committee has also written to West Mercia Police and there continues to be no reduction in the number of contacts received into the MASH.
27. To provide an update on the work with West Mercia Police in summary, over quarter three there were 874 contacts received from West Mercia Police; this was 48.82% of all contacts received for this period and only 9.26% of these progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention; this can be broken down as follows:
- In October 2019 295 contacts were received; this was 44.43% of all contacts received; only 9.49% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.
  - In November 2019 262 contacts were received; this was 45.49% of all contacts received; only 9.16% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.
  - In December 2019 317 contacts were received; this was 57.64% of all contacts received only 9.15% of these contacts progressed to a referral requiring social work intervention.

## Community impact

28. 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.
29. 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 and those contained within priority two of the health and wellbeing strategy.
30. 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

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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**

34. 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.

35. 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**

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

## **Risk management**

37. 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 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.

38. 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**

39. 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.

40. 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 apps 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 2019/2020

Appendix B – Ofsted Focused Visit Letter January 2020

Appendix C - Herefordshire Children’s Safeguarding Social Work Self - Assessment to end of quarter 3 2019/2020

Appendix D – Safeguarding and Family Support monthly scorecard December 2019

## **Background papers**

None identified