

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Date: 17th September 2019
SUBJECT:	Update on the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement Programme
LEAD OFFICER:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON: Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022 The plans and recommendations in this report focus on ensuring that all Croydon's children live a happy, healthy life, free from harm and that they have every opportunity to thrive and become fulfilled adults.
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ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item is contained in the Sub-Committee's work programme
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	To receive an update on the children's improvement programme

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the children's improvement programme, including:

- Feedback on the sixth monitoring visit on 10th and 11th July 2019
- A progress update on the Improvement Plan as at August 2019
- An overview of the children's transformation programme, 'Destination 2021-22'

2. Feedback on the sixth Ofsted monitoring visit

2.1 The monitoring visit took place on 10th and 11th July focused on:

- The front door for children's services, the single point of contact (SPOC) and the assessment service
- The children with disabilities service
- Children who are privately fostered

2.2 The letter following the visit was published on 2nd August and is attached at appendix 1.

2.3 Overall inspectors concluded that sustained progress is now being made under the rigorous drive and direction of the current senior leaders, with some clear indicators of improvement. Pace has accelerated, practice for children is becoming consistently better and staff feel appreciated and supported.

2.4 Inspectors acknowledged the progress made since the first monitoring visit to the 'front door' for services in December 2017, and concluded that the single point of contact is now safe, solid and ensures that children receive a timely and appropriate response when their needs first become known. They also found that the quality of work in the assessment service has significantly improved since the 2017 visit, and that the majority of disabled children now receive an appropriate and well-informed social work service.

2.5 The evidence of accelerated progress is encouraging; however, there is still much to do. Inspectors agreed with the department's self-assessment that private fostering arrangements are not good enough. A full-scale review of all children known to be in these arrangements had been completed prior to the visit and inspectors accepted that there are now clear plans in place to ensure that individual children's needs are met, and to significantly strengthen this area of practice.

2.6 Variability in the quality of practice remains, with drift and delay seen in some cases and some assessments taking too long. The high proportion of referrals to SPOC and completed assessments that lead to no further action has been identified as an area for action by senior managers; inspectors agreed with this view.

2.7 The need for improved direct work with children to ensure their views and wishes are at the heart of work with them was also highlighted. A direct work week is taking place in early September that will include practitioner-led workshops and 'try out' sessions to build staff confidence and extend their knowledge and expertise in the use of a wider range of techniques and tools.

2.8 Permanent recruitment into the assessment and social work with families services remains a vulnerability. A number of permanent team and service managers from good and outstanding authorities have been appointed and are taking up post over the next few months, but recruiting front line social workers into these areas remains challenging and is the focus of targeted recruitment campaigns that need to be continually refreshed.

2.9 Having reflected on the improvement journey over the past six months, with accelerated pace but still a lot to do to ensure all children and families receive the services they deserve a request was made for a seventh monitoring visit. This would be prior to a full standard inspection which is required to overturn and inadequate judgement. This would give the service more time to secure improved practice and better services for children across all areas. Ofsted have agreed and will be carrying out a final visit on 16th and 17th October. The precise focus is under discussion but is likely to be social work with families, and adoption.

3. Progress as at August 2019

3.1 Close monitoring against the Improvement Plan confirms the recent feedback from Ofsted that the service is improving, with evidence of progress in several areas. Performance against key indicators as well as the quality of practice are both reported to the Improvement Board each month. These are reviewed and challenged on a weekly basis by the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, and changes agreed as necessary to tackle issues quickly as they arise.

3.2 In August improvement was noted in the following areas:

- Reduced care proceeding and 100 fewer children on child protection plans compared to May 2019, as more families are supported to make the changes needed to keep their children safe
- Improved supervision rates in most areas of the service
- Improved offer for children in out care, including the percentage with up to date personal education and care plans, and living in stable placements
- Number of children supported by early help has doubled since February 2019 (over 800 as at 31st July)
- Improved engagement and follow-up with children in our care who go missing
- July bi-monthly case audits, a larger sample of 64 cases, had fewer cases graded inadequate and a greater proportion solidly requires improvement
- Recruitment to senior and middle management posts; and to social work posts in some areas

3.3 Challenges remain in addition to those identified in the monitoring visit to SPOC and the assessment and children with disabilities services include:

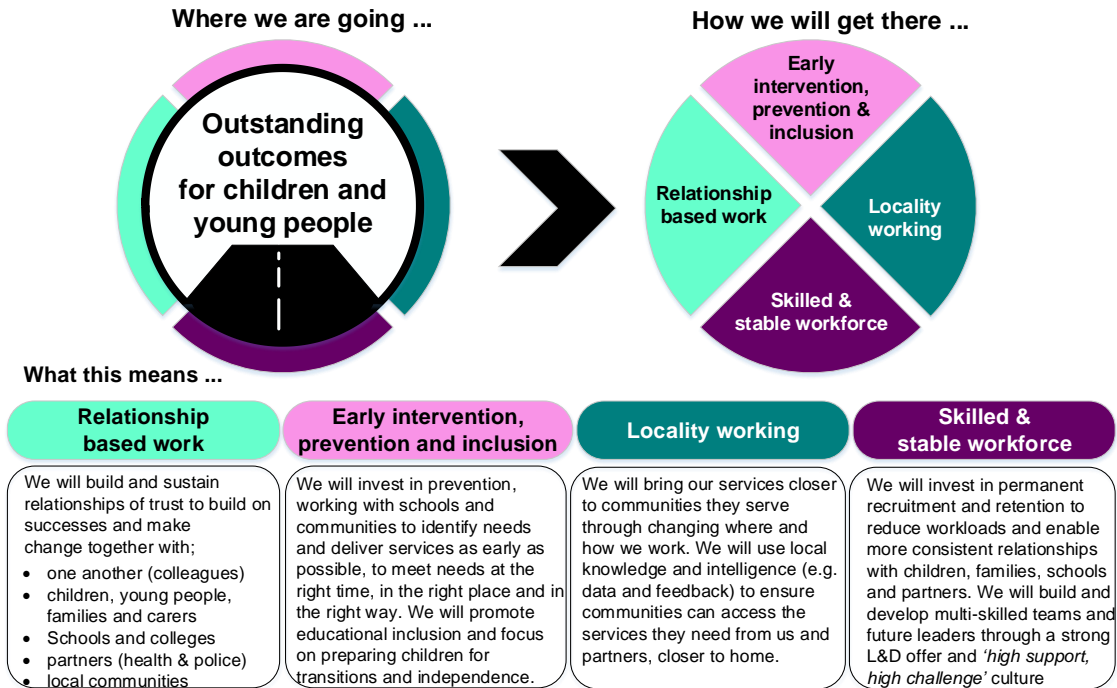
- Recruitment of social workers in the adolescent, assessment and social work with families services
- Rising numbers of children in our care
- Improved working by the fostering panel, as well as in foster care services
- Further increase the use of early help, understanding why families sometimes disengage earlier than we would like
- More consistently good work with children and families, across all service areas

- 3.4 A number of actions are in planning or underway to drive forward improvements, with a particular partnership focus. These include:
- Bringing the CAMHS contact line into the SPOC, creating an expanded single front door for services for children and families
 - Co-locating a multi-agency team including CAMHS in to the social work for children looked after service
 - Developing the capacity for specialist child and parent assessments in-house to make better use of internal expertise and reduce the number of high cost external assessments
 - Delivering a refreshed sufficiency strategy for children and young people in our care, including unaccompanied asylum seeking young people

4. Destination 2021-22: children's transformation programme

- 4.1 Following the 2017 inspection demand for services increased significantly year on year, and substantial transformation funding and base budget growth was been made available to Children's Services to meet the new demand.
- 4.2 Our ambition now is to move from reacting to these changes to a much more proactive approach, developing sustainable high quality services that shift the emphasis to earlier intervention and prevention, and puts into place a refreshed practice model across the service to secure excellent outcomes for children and families. Through a combination of higher quality systemic day to day practice, targeted interventions and a continued drive for sustained improvements, services for children and families will become more efficient and effective, enabling resources that are currently deployed to meet higher end needs to be refocused on working earlier with children and their families to prevent problems escalating.
- 4.3 The transformation proposals embrace the Council's new delivery model based on localities and wrap around services in the community. They also align with the violence reduction network's public health approach to reducing youth violence, and reflect the learning and recommendations arising from the Children's safeguarding Board's Vulnerable Adolescent Review.
- 4.4 The transformation plans and how these will be achieved can be described in the vision on a page:

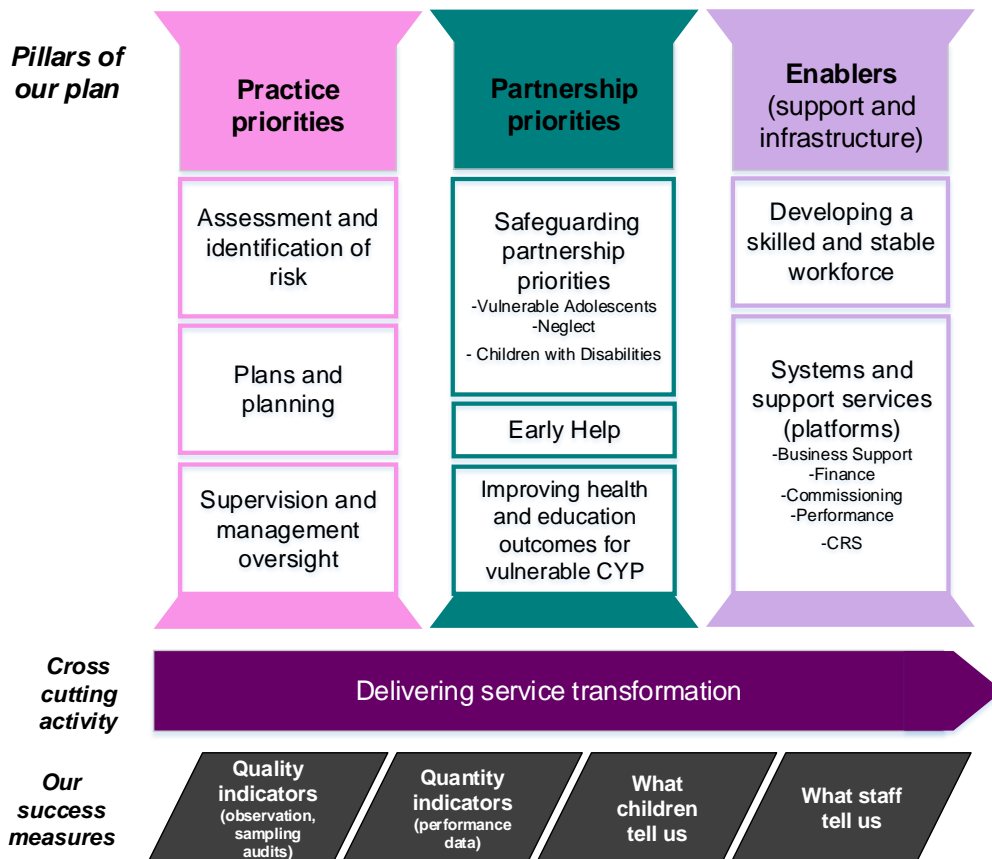
OUR VISION ON A PAGE 2019-2021



- 4.5 To realise these ambitions early help and children's social care will offer high quality interventions that make sustained changes in families' lives. Children and families to be able to access the right services in the right place at the right time, with the aim of keeping families together wherever possible.
- 4.6 Our services will range from time-limited early help support to prevent or delay the need for statutory services, through to intensive and purposeful interventions that support children in need of help and protection to remain safely with their families, only bringing children into our care where this is not possible.
- 4.7 The core elements of the transformation programme are:
- Increased capacity in the early help service, establishing a social work spine so the service is able to work confidently with risk as cases step down from social care, and as a consequence more are referred direct from SPOC.
 - Increase management capacity in front line teams to continue to improve case oversight, supporting social workers to consistently deliver high quality, timely work with families that leads to sustained change and reduces drift and delay in casework.
 - Establish an edge of care service including targeted youth workers, additional adolescents support workers and specialist social workers, to work with vulnerable adolescents and their families to prevent family breakdown and reduce the numbers coming into care.
 - Develop a Systemic Practice team that works alongside services, teams and individual staff, building relationships to support and challenge our staff to work systemically with families in line with our practice model and principles.

- Strengthen quality assurance arrangements to ensure quality of practice is regularly tested and the learning is embedded in a robust cycle of service improvement.

4.8 Each Head of Service has developed a service improvement plan to take the programme forward. These service plans form the basis for the 2019 refresh of the children’s plan for improvement. The key elements of the refreshed plan are set out in the diagram below.



4.9 The refreshed plan will be ratified at the September Improvement Board.

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Background Documents: None

Appendices: Appendix 1: Sixth Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter
Appendix 2: KPI Performance report August Improvement Board
Appendix 3: Quality Assurance report August Improvement Board