

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Scrutiny and Overview committee 12 December 2017</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Update on Children's Improvement Activity</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Barbara Peacock Executive Director (People)</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning</b>

<b>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</b>	<b>This item follows the recent OFSTED inspection of the council's children's services.</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	Members are invited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) To note the completion of the final Children's Improvement Plan</li> <li>ii) To note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan in November</li> <li>iii) To note the priority performance indicators for October and development of the workforce data dashboard</li> </ul>

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** On 4th September 2017, Ofsted published its report providing an overall judgement that Children's Services in Croydon are inadequate. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was also judged inadequate, as inspectors found that the LSCB had not fully established effective arrangements to discharge its statutory functions. The Council fully accepts the findings of the report.
- 1.2** On 4th September 2017, the Minister for Children and Families at the Department for Education (DfE) issued Croydon Council with a Direction which requires the council to co-operate with a commissioner. The Secretary of State has appointed Eleanor Brazil as commissioner for Children's Services in Croydon for an initial three-month period, who will make recommendations to the Minister on the best course of action for the service going forward. The Commissioners Report was submitted to the Minister on 4 December. It will not be a public document at this point and the decision when to publish the Commissioners Report and the Ministers response sits with the Minister. There is no standard agreed timeframe for publication.
- 1.3** At its meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were

provided with an update on the action the council has taken since the inspection and an update on all key performance and practice issues. In addition to this the the committee were given the opportunity to comment on the draft improvement plan and priority performance indicators.

- 1.4** Since the meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> October amendments from the committee on specific actions in the Children’s Improvement Plan have been made. The Children’s Improvement Plan (November 2017) was signed off by the Children’s Improvement Board on the 7<sup>th</sup> November and approved at Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> November. The plan was submitted to Ofsted on 8<sup>th</sup> December, ahead of the submission deadline (11<sup>th</sup> December). All previous improvement plans, including the Transitional Action Plan and Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) plan have now been closed down and ongoing actions brought forward into this single improvement plan.
- 1.5** This report provides the final version of the Children’s Improvement Plan (November 17) see Appendix 1 and seeks to provide an overview of children’s improvement activity in November, including the delivery of the actions outlined in the plan and the overall status of the four key work streams; Practice, People and Performance, Partnerships and Platforms.
- 1.6** On the 31<sup>st</sup> October the Scrutiny and Overview committee commented that the performance indicators were too process focused and suggested that more information about the workforce be made available to understand the staff pressures staff face and how they are feeling. In response to this a workforce dashboard of key information has been developed (see Appendix 3).

## **2. PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN’S IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

### **2.1 Overview of progress in November**

**2.1.1** The table below provides a high level overview of performance across the different work streams of the children’s improvement programme. The overall status of the programme is ‘on track’. The RAG methodology used to monitor progress is outlined on page 5 of the Children’s Improvement Plan (see Appendix 1).

<b>Work stream</b>	<b>SRO</b>	<b>Progress RAG</b>
Practice	Philip Segurola	On track
People and Performance	Barbara Peacock	On track
Partnerships	Barbara Peacock	On track
Platforms	Richard Simpson	On track

**2.1.2** There has been activity across all four work streams of the plan in November, and key achievements for the month are outlined below;

- A new social work practice model has been agreed and a mobilisation plan developed to roll it out across the workforce
- The Lead Member for Children and Families and Executive Director of People visited Dudley to learn from their improvement journey
- Croydon hosted a stand at the Compass Jobs Fair on 13th November and a recruitment microsite for children's services is now live
- A 'takeover day' took place on 24th November where 68 young people shadowed senior managers and Elected Members across the Council. Young people had a focused task to provide input on how to better support young people who go missing, or those at risk of CSE, serious youth violence and criminal exploitation (see priority 5 of the Children's Improvement Plan)
- Corporate Parenting Panel has met and agreed a re-launch with revised membership including Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative, a care leaver and a foster carer, alongside new terms of reference, more frequent meetings and a clear data set that will form a 'score card' to ensure the focus remains strongly on driving outcomes for children.

**2.1.3** Despite the overall good progress against actions in November there are also a number of key challenges that should be noted, set out below. Areas of underperformance, in line with the key priority performance indicators, are set out in section 3 of this report

- High caseloads: Increased demand and complexity of work means that high caseloads in assessment and care planning remain, despite additional capacity. This is being mitigated through the agreement of a further team in care planning and the redeployment of best start social workers into the assessment service.
- Staffing: creating a stable workforce remains a major challenge with high levels of agency staff and difficulties getting a strong enough supply of good agency staff when needed.
- Serious youth violence: There were 38 incidents of serious youth violence (Defined as a count of victims of any offences of Most Serious Violence or Gun Crime or Knife Crime, where the victim is aged 1-19) since 1 November and this has added to the pressure on the front door and assessments as referrals relating to youth violence, gang associated activity, County Lines and risks of CSE have been significant. There

is not as yet a strong enough preventative approach to address these very serious challenges for our young people in Croydon.

- Care proceedings: The numbers of care proceedings, including emergency proceedings are increasing, with numbers now standing at 95. This is approximately 24% higher than the average taken over the 12 months prior to the Ofsted inspection. This increase means that we are addressing issues of drift and delay and ensuring our children are kept safe with secure legal protection when necessary. However, the number of emergency proceedings illustrates that we have not yet got a strong enough system in place to deal with issues in a preventative way.

## **2.2 Practice actions**

**2.2.2** In relation the first priority outlined the Children's Improvement Plan; 'Ensuring consistent, high quality social work', a new social work practice model, Strengthening Families as been developed with staff and agreed. A plan has also been developed to roll it out across the service, and was presented to the Children's Improvement Board on 5<sup>th</sup> December. A tool for assessing neglect (the Graded Care Profile) has also been agreed and a partner briefing on this took place in the week commencing 27<sup>th</sup> November.

**2.2.3** Actions to improve the quality of practice for children who need early help and protection (priority 2 of the Children's Improvement Plan) included holding focus groups with staff on developing a single front door across Early Help and MASH, and reducing the work loads of staff in the assessment service, in light of rising demand, by transferring some of their responsibilities to other teams and creating an additional assessment team through redeployment of the Best Start social work team.

**2.2.4** Steps have also been taken to start improving outcomes for looked after children (priority 3), including a holding a regular panel to agree permanent matches of children with long term foster carers. In November, 7 young people attended the panel in person with their carers, to celebrate their permanent placements [see action 3.1. The Director also met with foster carers to explore with them ways in which they can be more actively engaged in service development and ensure their support needs are identified and responded to. These meetings will be scheduled through the year.

**2.2.5** With regards to improving outcomes for care leavers (priority 4) a task and finish group has been established to improve accommodation options for care leavers, to ensure that more young people can live independently if they wish to do so and they have the right support in place. The Council has also agreed to open a consultation on giving care leavers nomination rights to social housing. This sits alongside an earlier agreement to exempt care leavers from Council Tax.

**2.2.6** In order to better protect vulnerable adolescents, including those who go missing and those at risk of CSE, serious youth violence or criminal exploitation (priority 5) a new

team to support children missing from home or care is now in place. Processes for undertaking Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for children who go missing are under review, with additional capacity in place to carry out interviews.

## **2.3 People and performance actions**

**2.3.1** With regards to strengthening leadership and governance (priority 6) three new Heads of Service are now in post (Early Help and MASH, Targeted Services including work with vulnerable adolescents and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance). This has increased the management capacity and will support focused work on these areas of practice. In addition to this a 'Line of Sight' document has been written, outlining what the DCS and Lead Member for Children and Families will do to ensure they have a clear understanding of the quality of frontline practice for children and young people.

**2.3.2** Staff engagement is taking place through a variety of mechanisms including staff reference group, practice development group, ongoing 'sprint sessions' and publication of a monthly programme newsletter which is disseminated to all staff. A copy of the Improvement Plan will also be provided to each member of staff in the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> December.

**2.3.3** As set out above, additional capacity has been brought in to reduce workloads in the assessment and care planning teams, however a rise in demand and more complex cases (e.g. an increase in court work) means that this action is not yet having an impact to reduce caseloads. Despite this there has been good progress on actions to develop a more stable and skilled workforce in November, including;

- A recruitment microsite managed by Jobs Go Public has gone live with a rolling recruitment campaign underway and strong branding
- Croydon hosted a stand at the Compass Jobs Fair, which generated in excess of 70 interested contacts
- All agency staff have been offered an interview to explore the possibility of converting to a permanent position. There has been success in converting staff from CWD and Permanence
- Work is underway to review the process of career progression and clarify roles and responsibilities of different grades of social worker to link to the Professional Capabilities Framework and maximise retention of staff
- Workforce data, including caseload levels, is being collated and analysed monthly and headline data is being incorporated into the key performance indicator data suite
- Arrangements for the training and support programme for the new cohort of NQSWs has been reviewed and strengthened. A detailed implementation plan for rolling out the social work practice model is in place which includes a section on training requirements [see action 7.8]

- Consultant Practitioners are facilitating 'bite size' workshops on practice themes and Unit Manager training is taking place monthly with additional lunchtime sessions to embed learning

**2.3.4** In order to strengthen management oversight and ensure robust quality assurance and performance management (priority 8) a set of priority indicators has been agreed aligned to practice priorities (see Appendix 2), service based meetings are held with unit managers and service leaders to review performance and the Children's Leadership Team has a monthly agenda item to scrutinise and comment on performance indicators across the whole service. The Quality Assurance Framework has also been reviewed and updated, and was taken to the Children's Improvement Board on the 5<sup>th</sup> December for endorsement.

## **2.4 Partnerships actions**

**2.4.1** The Interim Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) presented an update the Board's activity in November, highlighting partnership work around the neglect and supporting vulnerable adolescents as the areas they are focusing on.

**2.4.2** With regards to the actions outlined in the Children's Improvement Plan, the first meeting of the CSCB Executive Group was held on 19<sup>th</sup> October. The remit, role and responsibilities are under review in light of proposed changes to statutory guidance.

## **2.5 Platforms actions**

**2.5.1** The 'Platforms' work stream of the Children's Improvement Plan is about establishing sufficient organisational (corporate) support and fit for purpose systems that enable high quality social work, including sufficient resource, administrative support and recording systems.

**2.5.2** Since the Ofsted inspection a corporate support team, chaired by the Chief Executive has met regularly (typically weekly) to provide support and oversight, and additional capacity has been brought into the Children's Improvement Team in order to support the board infrastructure and improvement work, including specific projects.

**2.5.3** £2.9m investment has been agreed on a range of measures to support improvement and the council has asked Impower to support work around developing a sound financial baseline for Children's Services.

**2.5.4** Activity to improve the level of administrative (business) support to the service has included; 14 temporary business support posts, a scanning amnesty (with a total of 39,622 pages scanned to date) and a visit to Achieving for Children to inform a new business support model, with further visits to Sutton and Lambeth planned.

**2.5.5** In order to improve the children's recording system (CRS) a new document management function went live on 1 December to remove barriers to good recording practice identified by staff, automatic alerts to social workers have been expanded (e.g. visits) and a Legal workspace in CRS is now live to improve oversight around care proceedings.

### **3. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE PRIORITY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

**3.1** The priority performance indicators for October have been included as an Appendix to this report (see Appendix 2). This document includes a summary from the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help, Philip Segurolo, on key areas and strength and underperformance in October (see page 2).

**3.2** It should be noted that the council continues to see a significant increase in the volume of contacts and referrals into Children's Services, which is having a detrimental impact on some performance indicators, including caseload figures in the assessment service.

**3.3** Areas of strength or improvement for the month of October include;

- A reduction in re-referral rates (-5%), although there is continued volatility with this indicator [indicator FD8]
- An improvement in the percentage of children subject to a CIN plan who were visited within timescales (+12%) [indicator CIN 4]
- Placement stability figures for looked after children remain strong [indicator LAC 20]
- Good progress in respect of foster carer annual reviews with a +13% improvement on completion month on month [indicator F3]
- Performance outcomes for care leavers are continuing to hold up with some further improvement in NEET figures [indicator CL1, CL1a and CL2].

**3.4** Areas of underperformance include:

- Significant workload pressures, particularly across the assessment and care planning teams [indicators W1a and W1b]
- Vacancy levels stand at 43% against an outer London average of 25% [indicator P1]
- A decrease in the % of assessments completed within 45 working days has decreased (-11%). [indicator AMT 2]
- A significant reduction in the percentage of initial child protection conferences (ICPC) held within 15 days of strategy discussion, and this is now a high risk indicator [indicator CP5]
- Inconsistencies in the regularity with which children are being seen across the service areas

#### 4. OVERVIEW OF THE WORKFORCE DASHBOARD

- 4.1 Following comments at the 31<sup>st</sup> October Scrutiny and Overview Committee a workforce dashboard has been attached to this report (see Appendix 3). The dashboard provides an overview of the Children's Services workforce, including the number of permanent and agency staff.
- 4.2 The table below sets out the indicators contained in the workforce dashboard and explains what they mean, this information is also included on page 2 of the dashboard.

Indicator	Description
Total No of Social Workers in Nov	Count of ALL Social Workers within CSC that are case holding
Establishment Staff (Gr11+)	All Social Workers employed directly by LBC
Establishment Staff (Gr11+) (12m+)	All Social Workers employed directly by LBC for more than 12 months
Staff (Gr11+) Non Case Holding	Social Workers employed directly by LBC who are currently not holding cases e.g. Maternity Leave/Long term sick
Agency Staff	Count of all Agency staff
% Social Workers with Personal Supervision in the month	% of Social Workers who have received Personal supervision in the last 30 days.
Management Establishment to Agency Ratio (also includes vacant posts)	Proportion of Managers who are direct LBC employees compared to agency staff
Agency Staff (12m+)	Count of all Agency Staff employed for more than 12 months
NQSW	Count of Newly Qualified Social Workers
Leavers	Count of SW who have left LBC within the month.
Starters	Count of SW who have started at LBC within the month
Unfilled Posts	Posts where no one is currently working
Vacant Posts	Posts where there are no directly employed staff. This is used to calculate the Service's vacancy rate.

- 4.3 The workforce dashboard shows that Croydon has a high number of agency social workers (41%) and creating a more permanent workforce will be a key priority, going forward (as set out under of priority 7 of the Children's Improvement) in order to provide better continuity of relationships for children and young. Actions to tackle this are already well underway, as set out in section 2.3.3 above, and a workforce strategy setting out a clear employee value proposition for working in Croydon is due to be completed in December.



## 5. NEXT STEPS

### 5.1 Key priorities and actions for December include;

- Preparing for and coordinating the first Ofsted monitoring visit on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of December, which will be focused on the Front Door and assessment
- Recruiting an additional care planning team to ensure workloads are increasingly manageable and monitor the impact of the additional capacity in the assessment service
- Continuing to drive improvements in performance to ensure more children are seen and that assessments are increasingly timely

Actions timetabled for December include;

- Strengthen oversight of the quality of social work for children with disabilities through representation at CSMT and performance meetings [action ref 2.10]
- Review the systems and processes for undertaking return home interviews (RHIs) when children go missing from home, and identify and implement improvements to ensure that all young people are offered an RHI and that appropriate support can be put in place [action ref 5.5]
- Create a Workforce Strategy with timely and measurable targets [action ref 7.3]

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 The Sub-Committee is asked:

- i) To note the completion of the final Children's Improvement Plan
- ii) To note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan in November
- iii) To note the priority performance indicators for October and development of the workforce data dashboard

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Sarah Warman, Programme Director

**Appendices:** Appendix 1. Final Children's Improvement Plan  
Appendix 2. Priority performance indicators  
Appendix 3. Workforce dashboard