

For General Release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People's Sub-Committee 17th September 2018
SUBJECT:	Children's Services Improvement Arrangements
LEAD OFFICER:	Eleni Ioannides, Interim Executive Director, Children, Families and Education Department
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT Croydon Corporate plan 2015-18 The recommendations address the following Corporate Plan priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help families be healthy and resilient and able to maximise their life chances and independence• To create a place where people feel safe and are safe	
AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON & WHY ARE WE DOING THIS: The Independence and Liveability Strategies 2015-18 set out how the Council will achieve the commitments made in the administration's 'Ambitious for Croydon' election manifesto in respect of independence and liveability.	
FINANCIAL IMPACT £10.9m has been allocated to base budgets in 2018-19 to support the drive to improve children's services.	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO. This is not a key decision.	
1. RECOMMENDATIONS 1.1 Note the findings of the third Ofsted monitoring visit in July 2018. 1.2 Note the feedback from the quarterly partnership review with Camden Council in July 2018	

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This paper provides feedback on the third Ofsted monitoring visit which focused on progress made in areas of help and protection. The inspectors looked at plans and planning, with a focus on experiences for children when risks increase or are not reducing including:

1. Child in need cases moving to child protection
 2. Child protection cases reaching threshold for consideration under the Public Law Outline (PLO)
 3. PLO cases where proceedings were issued during the three months prior to the visit
- 2.2 Inspectors' feedback was that whilst there was some evidence of improving practice, overall the pace of change since the inspection in 2017 has been too slow, and some children are still being left for too long in neglectful situations. The inspectors found that, as in the last monitoring visit, the self-assessment prepared by senior managers correctly identified the priority actions that are necessary to ensure children receive services that meet their needs. However, they found that implementation of the actions has not been at the pace required to ensure that children's circumstances improve in a timely manner.
- 2.3 The letter following the visit was published on the Ofsted website on 2nd August, and is included at appendix 1.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 When a local authority's children's services are judged inadequate following an Ofsted inspection under the Single Inspection Framework the Secretary of State is able to use powers in accordance with section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 to direct the council to take certain actions in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.
- 3.2 An Improvement Board was established in September 2017 under the leadership of an independent chair to drive the substantial programme of work required to improve the quality of services for vulnerable children and young people. Croydon's improvement plan was agreed by cabinet on 20th November 2017.
- 3.3 A Commissioner was appointed by the Secretary of State to advise on the future of children's services in Croydon. Her report was submitted to the DFE on 4th December alongside the children's improvement plan. The Commissioner's recommendation that Croydon should retain responsibility for children's service with support from a Council rated by Ofsted as good was accepted by the Minister. A further revised statutory direction was published on 8th May 2018 setting out the requirement for Croydon to receive intensive peer support from Camden Council. The direction is included at appendix 2.

3.3 Ofsted evaluates the council's progress in addressing the recommendations made in the full inspection through quarterly monitoring visits. The third visit to Croydon was on 10th and 11st July 2018.

4. MONITORING VISIT FINDINGS

4.1 Inspectors identified some areas where senior managers had taken effective action as well as evidence of improved practice, including:

- Some evidence of more consistent management oversight since the last visit
- Sound case audit work. Managers have begun to take action to address the weak areas of practice identified, including improvements to the case transfer process, an updated supervision protocol and the implementation of an improved tracker for cases in pre-proceedings
- Improving use of the pre-proceedings phase of PLO to safeguard children. Some examples of timely escalation and actions to improve outcomes were seen
- Senior managers recognised that better oversight of child in need plans was required and had put processes in place to review long-term and complex cases; a small number had been appropriately escalated
- The Strengthening Families practice model is becoming more evident in supervision records; group supervision continues to be highly valued by social workers and inspectors saw good examples of its impact
- Some good examples of social workers using tools for direct work with children to understand their lived experience
- Several social workers told inspectors they enjoyed working in Croydon. Positive feedback on the training for Strengthening Families was also reported.

4.2 However, persistent weaknesses led the inspectors to conclude that the pace of change since the full inspection last July has been too slow. In summary these were:

- Too many areas where there is delay across the children's system, including in decisions to step up cases when children's needs change, or risks escalate; delays in taking and then implementing decisions; inconsistent management oversight of casework leading to gaps in visits to children and supervision for staff
- This drift and delay in case work is resulting in some children still being left for too long in neglectful situations
- Inconsistency in the understanding and application of thresholds for social care leading to delays in stepping cases up

- Delays and inconsistencies when cases transfer between teams. The new case transfer protocol has not yet had a consistent impact on children's experiences
- A lack of clear guidance on managers holding cases not allocated to social workers
- Caseloads for some staff are too high and the lack of capacity within the workforce means that when social workers are on leave, sick or leave the service managers struggle to ensure that children receive a satisfactory service

5. ACTIONS IN RESPONSE

- 5.1 A number of actions had been initiated as a result of senior managers' continuous self-assessment of progress against the improvement plan. Following the monitoring visit feedback two new action areas were identified and are now being implemented. Taken together these will add the traction and pace that is needed to achieve the changes required.

The improvement plan is being redrafted to focus on key improvement areas including:

1. Reduce caseloads in the assessments and care planning teams and create capacity for good quality social work

Three managed social work teams were commissioned in June and started on site on 30th July. Two teams in assessment will take on duty and work cases through the assessment stage, with one team in place for the summer period and one for six months. The third team in care planning will work for six months on the large number of Child in Need cases held in the service, providing interventions and either closing cases, stepping up or stepping down as appropriate.

Additional newly-qualified social workers will be recruited in October and provided with a dedicated programme of training, mentoring and development to both add capacity and continue to grow our own practitioners.

2. Reset the bar for all managers in early help and children's social care

This is a new action area. All team and service managers are required to attend one of three seminars over August led by the Executive Director and Director. These will provide a face to face opportunity to reaffirm the expectations of all managers, as set out in the managers' standards published earlier in the year, and include time for direct and honest conversations with these key staff to identify what is getting in the way of all managers working at the level of the best, what our offer of support to staff will be so they can consistently achieve these standards and clarify the consequences of non-compliance. High focus practice improvement areas will be agreed with the managers, to be pursued relentlessly over the next 3 months to achieve measurable improvements.

The peer support partnership with Camden is contributing to this overall action area through the developmental work with managers across the service.

3. A relentless focus on practice

The Improvement Plan is being refreshed around six priority areas and aims to tackle these with increased vigour and whole-system purpose. The plan will be considered by the Improvement Board in September. In parallel a management and practice action group has been established, chaired by the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, as part of the Council's refreshed internal governance arrangements for the improvement programme. The action group will drive the operational improvements needed to gain better traction and so increase the pace of change, holding senior managers to account for progress in their service areas. Progress against the areas agreed at the managers' seminars will be held by this group. It will be important to ensure that the six month window of opportunity whilst the managed social work teams are in place is used understand the current drivers of increased volume, act decisively to reduce these or, where necessary, respond differently.

The peer support partnership with Camden is contributing to this action area.

4. Recruitment and retention of staff

Targeting the recruitment of permanent staff and continuing to work closely with the agency supply chain to fill vacancies is a core priority. Alongside this, following discussion and feedback from the Improvement Board a refreshed learning and development offer is being rolled out so equal attention is paid to retaining and developing staff already in Croydon.

5. Develop the early help offer

Led by the task and finish group work is well underway to improve the offer of earlier intervention and prevention through early help services across the borough. Cabinet will consider an Early Help Strategy in September.

The peer support partnership with Camden is contributing to this action area.

6. Relaunch the Children and Families Strategic Partnership

The strategic partnership will provide the appropriate governance, accountability and visibility for partners' contribution to Children's Services across the borough. The partnership will report directly to the Local Strategic Partnership.

The peer support partnership with Camden is contributing to this action area

6. PREPARATION FOR THE FOURTH MONITORING VISIT, 3RD AND 4TH OCTOBER 2018

- 6.1 The theme of the next monitoring visit has been agreed as children looked after including thresholds and permanence planning. Some consideration will

be given to adoption and the experience of care leavers although this will be proportionate to the 'Requires Improvement' judgement given for each of these services in the full inspection.

- 6.2 A monitoring visit preparation group is already in place, chaired by the Executive Director. Meeting fortnightly over August and weekly over September the group will oversee preparations against a fixed agenda that includes progress against actions in response to the previous monitoring visit, actions to achieve the practice improvement priorities linked to the focus for the next visit and the overview of cases in scope for review including response to the issues arising from case audits.
- 6.3 The twice-yearly practice week is scheduled for 10th – 14th September, and will include case audits on around 40 of the cases that are in scope for inspectors to sample or track
- 6.4 A programme of support and preparation for social workers, managers and personal assistants is underway to ensure they are as prepared as possible to discuss their work with children and families with the inspectors should one of their cases be selected.

7. CROYDON/CAMDEN IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP QUARTERLY REVIEW MEETING

- 7.1 The first quarterly review meeting for the Croydon/Camden improvement partnership was held on the 17th July. The lead members, statutory Directors of Children's Services (DCS) and the directors for children's social care from each borough attended the meeting, along with the independent chair of the improvement board, the DFE case officer for Croydon and the children's improvement programme director.
- 7.2 At the meeting an overview of Croydon's progress was presented by the DFE, by Camden and by Croydon. In addition, a draft report jointly authored by the DCS in Camden and the chair of the improvement board was considered. It was agreed to use this format for these meetings. The DFE confirmed that every other meeting will be used for the formal, half-yearly DFE stocktake of progress.
- 7.3 At the end of the meeting the following areas were agreed for development over the next quarter, and joint work on this is underway by officer leads across both boroughs:
 - 1. Review the deployment of the support allocated in the plan to ensure the right support is focused in the right places, adding areas and actions where Camden have particular expertise or strength.
 - 2. Provide greater clarity in the planning for areas identified for joint work.
 - 3. Use the learning from the early help & front door workstream in future practice-focused work. The familiarity and understanding gained by the team from Camden was essential. It helped push through Croydon's case volumes and complexity to enable honest professional

- conversations about how things could be done differently.
4. Develop and include a sharper focus on the evidence of impact of the partnership in the detailed delivery plans, clarifying how both the Improvement Partners and the Improvement Board will know it is making a positive difference

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A communication and engagement plan has been developed to underpin the improvement activity, with the following objectives:
 1. To communicate how we are improving children's services in Croydon over the next two years
 2. To inform our staff, stakeholders and partners about our improvement plan – progress, key decisions, activities and dates
 3. To encourage staff, children and partners that they are a vital part of the journey and the solution and to create confidence in them that we can run an effective and safe service – we are people focused.
 4. To help create the environment for effective culture change through communication and engagement
 5. To help in the recruitment and retention of key children's service staff – by showcasing Croydon as a great place to work through creating a strong 'We are Croydon' brand
- 8.2 A Council staff reference group has been established and feeds into the improvement board through the chair and vice chair of the group, two social workers, who sit on the board bringing practitioners' perspectives. Our line of sight leaflet also outlines a range of ways in which leadership is kept in touch with progress.
- 8.3 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is central to social work practice and service improvement. Croydon has a range of mechanisms to engage and consult with children, young and their families. This includes the Youth Engagement Strategy which sets out a number of initiatives to ensure that children and young people have a voice, and the Children in Care Council.
- 8.4 Listening and responding to the experiences, wishes and feelings of children and young people is one of the priorities of the improvement plan and will be central to the improvement programme. The plan includes actions to strengthen how the views and experiences of children, young people and their

families influence service design. This feedback will also help monitor the impact of improvement activity.

9. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 The 2018/19 budget includes growth of £10.2m in the People (Children's base budget) and £0.7m in Resources (Business Support base budget) to ensure the staffing structure and budget support both the level of demand being experienced and also the areas of focus for improvement.

9.2 Approved by Richard Simpson, Executive Director Resources

10. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

10.1 The Solicitor to the Council comments that there are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report

10.2 Approved by Jacqueline Harris-Baker, Director of Law and Monitoring Officer.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

11.1 It is recognised that in order to improve outcomes for children in Croydon we need to attract and retain a skilled and committed workforce with manageable workloads and good management oversight. Work is continuing to utilise all available options to maintain the successful recruitment of permanent staffing and plan for turnover of both permanent and locum staff. This is showing signs of progress but remains challenging and we continue to use high levels of locums.. The investment in newly qualified social workers and the revision of the learning and development offer for staff aligns to workforce planning and development priorities for the service

11.2 Approved by Sue Moorman, Director of Human Resources

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation.

12.2 Croydon has a diverse population of children and young people. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 57%, compared with 30% in the country as a whole. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language across primary schools is 44% (the national average is 18%).

12.3 Social workers' planning and recording in relation to inequalities is inconsistent, which can result in plans for children's care that do not reflect their needs. The improvement plan addresses the additional work which needs to be done to ensure that children's diversity and identity needs are accurately and consistently identified, inform assessment and so met through their care plans.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

N/A

16. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

N/A

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

APPENDICES: Appendix 1 Monitoring visit to the London Borough of Croydon children's services, Ofsted, 9th May 2018.
Appendix 2 Statutory Direction to Croydon Borough Council in relation to children's services under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, DFE, 8th May 2018
Appendix 3 Line of Sight leaflet.