

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Scrutiny and Overview committee 30 January 2018</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Update on Children's Improvement</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) Note the submission of the final Children's Improvement Plan</li> <li>ii) Note the Minister's agreement that Croydon should continue to manage its own improvement, in line with the Commissioner's recommendations</li> <li>iii) Note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan in December</li> <li>iv) Note the priority performance indicators for November</li> </ul>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 On 4th September 2017, The Office for Standards in Education (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 accepted 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 required the council to co-operate with an appointed commissioner, Eleanor Brazil. The Commissioner's Report was submitted to the Minister on 4 December. The final Children's Improvement Plan was submitted to Ofsted and the DfE on the 8th December. The plan has been published on the council's website (link below) and hard copies distributed to staff across Children's Services.

[https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/Croydon\\_Children%27s\\_I](https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/Croydon_Children%27s_I)

1.3 The Commissioner's advice to the Minister of State for Children and Families is that the Council should continue to have responsibility for managing children's services and be given time to drive the improvements forward. However she also concluded that support is needed to undertake these improvements effectively and at pace, as the service does not currently have the necessary capacity and expertise to lead, manage and direct improved day to day practice alongside the improvement programme, given the breadth of the challenges in Croydon. Camden Council, who were recently judged as good with outstanding leadership, management and governance by Ofsted, have expressed a willingness to provide this support.

1.4 On 19th December the council was notified that the previous Minister for Children and Families had formally agreed the recommendation that Croydon continue to manage children's services, subject to the service actively pursuing intensive support arrangements with Camden Council. A fully developed proposal for this support needs to be submitted to the DFE by the end of March 2018.

1.5 The change in Secretary of State on 8th January 2018 delayed the publication of the Commissioner's report along with a revised Direction that reflects the recommendations. However the key points of the Commissioner's report have been shared with senior officers and are included in this report. The Commissioners report is due to be published in January 2018, the date is yet to be confirmed.

1.6 Ofsted carry out quarterly monitoring visits to children's services departments judged inadequate to assess progress. The first monitoring visit to Croydon took place on 12th and 13th December 2017 and was focused on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Assessment Service. Initial monitoring visit reports are not published but are shared with the Local Authority and the DFE. Subsequent monitoring visit reports will be published on the Ofsted website. Key messages from the visit are included in section 3 of this report, and were reported to cabinet on 26 February 2018.

1.7 At its meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were provided with a progress update on implementing the actions in the improvement plan in November, including key highlights for the month and an overview of investment to date. The Committee were also made aware of the key challenges facing the service, including a significant increase in demand (contacts and referrals) at the front door which has prevented caseloads from being reduced to be more manageable for social workers, and ongoing challenges to recruit more permanent social workers and managers across the service.

1.8 On 12th December the Scrutiny and Overview Committee also discussed the children's temperature check survey findings and processes and posed a number of challenges and questions which are answered in paragraph 2.3.7 of this report.

1.9 This report seeks to provide an overview of children's improvement activity in December 2017, 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. It also provides an update on progress against the priority performance indicators and a brief discussion around Ofsted's findings on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of December

2018.

## 2. PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

### 2.1 Overview of progress in December

2.1.1 The table below provides a high level overview of the actions in the improvement plan for December. Each of the four work streams are 'on track' in the first two months of the plan and the overall status of the programme is therefore 'on track'. This means that the vast majority of scheduled actions for this period have been completed, or are 'on track' to be completed by the specified deadlines; we are doing what we said we would. It should be noted that in many cases it is still too early to see what the impact for children has been from these actions, although this impact will be tracked and reported when available.

Work stream	SRO	Progress RAG
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 was activity across all four work streams of the plan in December, highlights of which are outlined below;

- The Improvement plan was submitted to Ofsted and the DfE on the 8th December
- A new temporary structure in the assessment service with smaller spans of control for managers was approved to respond to rising demand, reduce social workers' workloads and ensure sufficient management oversight
- 'Train the trainer' sessions on the new social work practice model (strengthening families) were commissioned for January and staff across the service have volunteered to act as 'champions'
- A new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) was finalised and endorsed at the last Children's Improvement Board, which will be rolled out from January
- An open session for Elected Members focused on the MASH took place on the 6th December, with positive feedback from members who attended.
- Executive Director, People and the Lead member for Children and Families visited and observed Camden's Corporate Parenting Panel on 14 December.
- The results of the staff 'pulse' survey have been returned and analysed, with some encouraging feedback around awareness of the improvement journey and staff feeling that they are making a difference for our children and young people

- The Head of Early Help and MASH and Head of Targeted Services visited Camden on the 11th December to learn from best practice there around MASH and supporting vulnerable adolescents

2.1.3 Despite the overall good progress against actions in December 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 3.4 of this report.

- High demand at the front door: despite the deployment of the best start team into the assessment service to increase capacity, the service has continued to see an increase in demand (referrals), reaching a peak of 70 families per week in December, which is more work than can be absorbed by one team of six social workers on duty. A business case for a new temporary (6 month) structure with larger teams and assistant management capacity has been approved in principle, to be implemented from early January. However, it should be noted that it is proving difficult to source the additional staff required through both permanent and temporary recruitment channels and steps are being taken by HR and the service to explore all recruitment options in order to implement the new structure as soon as possible.
- High workloads: increased demand and complexity of work means that workloads, particularly in the assessment service and to some extent in care planning, remain high despite additional ('surge') capacity being added. This impacts on staff morale, retention and performance around assessment, child in need and child protection timescales.
- Staffing: Creating a more stable and permanent workforce remains a major challenge and applications through the recruitment campaign and microsite have been lower than anticipated, although they are of a high quality. There has been some progress in converting agency to permanent staff with 5 in the process of converting, including one manager.
- Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC's): The percentage of ICPC's held within 15 working days (priority indicator CP5) remains low, despite additional capacity, which is partly due to the surge in demand at the front door. However, there was a slight improvement in performance in November. There are issues with the Police CAIT team requiring 5 working days' notice of an ICPC that appears to be impacting on this indicator. This will be raised with the CSCB Chair and CAIT.
- Protecting vulnerable adolescents: This continues to be a significant risk across the council and wider partnership, and 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 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remain significant. A safeguarding board learning review on vulnerable adolescents is underway and a new 'Targeted Services' service with a dedicated Head of Service is in place integrating the Youth Offending Service (YOS), CSE and missing teams.

## 2.2 Practice actions

2.2.1 In relation to the first priority outlined the Children's Improvement Plan; 'Ensuring consistent, high quality social work', a detailed implementation plan for rolling out the new social work practice model (Strengthening Families) was endorsed at the last improvement board on 5th December and 'train the trainer' sessions have been commissioned for January, with volunteers from across the service identified to take part and act as 'champions' (alongside the consultant practitioners). Guidance on pre-birth assessment and intervention to promote early permanency has been developed in consultation with health and there is some evidence that the use of the Public Law Outline (PLO) in pre-birth work to promote early permanency is increasing, although further work is required to fully embed this at the referral stage. The Children's Improvement Programme Team are supporting the service to ensure that all policies, guidance and templates (including those revised as part of strengthening families roll out) are collated and stored in a central location which all staff have access to.

2.2.2 Actions to improve the quality of practice for children who need early help and protection (priority 2 of the Children's Improvement Plan) included strengthening oversight of the quality of social work for children with disabilities (CWD) by giving the Head of Service for QA and Safeguarding a clinical supervisory role with the Service Lead for CWD. The Service Lead for CWD also attends Children's Leadership Team, where performance is discussed monthly.

2.2.3 Progress has also been made on improving outcomes for our Looked after Children, for example, steps have been taken to promote early permanency for children through timely adoption, with Unit Managers from the Adoption Service attending legal planning meetings to ensure that adoption is identified as a long term plan for children at an early stage of the PLO or legal proceedings. Temporary administrative support has been put in place to support the work of the adoption service and a new social work post has been created to focus on increasing access to the adoption support fund.

2.2.4 Although additional business support is in post to manage the notification for initial and review health assessments for looked after children, there is a concern relating to capacity within the provider to meet demand and fulfil their responsibilities. The current capacity for initial health assessments is meeting demand but there is a deficit in capacity for review health assessments. A case has been proposed to increase the resource which will be presented to the CCG senior management team to be agreed.

2.2.5 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 Head of Service for 'Targeted Services' has been in post since November. She has reviewed the systems and processes for responding to young people who go missing and is working closely with the performance team to improve data accuracy in this area. A system is in place to track the completion of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for missing children and performance continues to be below target but improving.

## 2.3 People and performance actions

2.3.1 With regards to strengthening leadership and governance (priority 6) a series of open sessions for Elected Members to meet social workers and understand a child's journey through the system have been scheduled. The first session took place on 6<sup>th</sup> December and focused on the MASH. There was good cross party attendance and Elected Members were shown a presentation by the recently appointed Head of Service for Early Help and MASH outlining the functions of his services and recent trends around contacts and referrals. The second session took place on January 17<sup>th</sup> and was focused on the assessment service.

2.3.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) terms of reference and membership have been reviewed. The panel has put in place a plan of work and regular reporting schedule to ensure it can focus on key practice areas. The Chair and Executive Director of People (DCS) have visited Corporate Parenting Meetings at Camden to learn from best practice.

2.3.3 With regards to staff engagement, the results of the first Children's Services 'temperature check' survey were received in early December, with 99 respondents from across Children's Services. The purpose of these surveys is to help us understand the impact that changes are having on staff and this initial survey will help us to benchmark against future surveys. There were some encouraging responses to the following statements;

- I understand the wider improvement journey for children's services (9% 'strongly agree' 39% 'agree' 33% 'somewhat agree')
- I am making a difference for our children and young people & improving their outcomes (27% 'strongly agree' 45% 'agree' 16% 'somewhat agree')
- I leverage opportunities to work with partners (26% 'strongly agree' 45% 'agree' 19% 'somewhat agree')
- Colleagues and peers value my contributions (11% 'strongly agree' 42% 'agree' 39% 'somewhat agree')

2.3.4 However there were still some strong messages around high caseloads, poor work/life balance and not having the tools and resources to do a good job. For example;

- 51% tended to disagree that they are able to maintain a good work/life balance
- 48% tended to disagree that the tools and resources they need (e.g. CRS, Business Support) enable them to manage their workload

2.3.5 The survey response rate was approximately 25%. Although this is a statistically significant number across the whole service, the service is working with corporate learning and development colleagues to look at how we can improve the return rate for future surveys in order to ensure that the rate is more robust at team level. An all-council staff survey is also due to take place in February.

2.3.6 The findings from these surveys are being reviewed by senior managers and will inform further improvement planning and communications, in addition to the Workforce and Learning and Development strategies.

2.3.7 At its meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> December the Scrutiny and Overview discussed the Children’s Temperature check findings and the way that the survey was carried out, and sought clarity on the following questions;

- a) *Why was the return so low?*; 109 participants started the survey and 99 completed it, common reasons for non-completion include survey/feedback fatigue (following an extensive series of in person staff engagement sessions between September and November), Staff just wanting to get on with their jobs and not having enough time to complete the survey and a lack of buy in and belief that their feedback will change things.
- b) *Greater clarity on who participated*; The table below shows the teams that were sent the survey of which 109 staff accessed the survey with 99 end to end completions.

Permanence [Looked after Children]	15	14%
Leaving Care [Looked After Children]	7	6%
Adoption and Fostering [Looked After Children]	11	10%
Safeguarding and Looked After Children Quality Assurance	15	14%
MASH [Children in Need]	3	3%
Assessment [Children in Need]	10	9%
Care Planning [Children in Need]	17	16%
Early Help	17	16%
Children with Disabilities [CWD]	4	4%
Targeted Services	2	2%
Children's Integrated Commissioning	8	7%

- c) *What can we do to increase return in the future?*;
  - Share survey results in a timely manner post survey close
  - Produce a ‘you said’ ‘we are doing’ or ‘we did’ communication before launching another survey. This signals that there is a follow up and follow through on the feedback received and their feedback matters
  - Leave enough space and time in between temperature checks to ensure we can evidence what is being done as a result of the results
  - Increase communications through direct line management prior to release of next survey
  - Explore incentives for survey completion
- d) *Lessons learned?*; Lessons included the need to validate HR data to gain greater clarity on the target audience and to increase communication & engagement prior to launch from line managers
- e) *What date will the next one go out & when will it report?*; The current intention is not to distribute another temperature check survey until June or July as staff will have another opportunity at telling us what they think through the corporate staff survey to be launched on 15 January, closing 2 February.

2.3.8 Actions to develop a stable and skilled workforce (priority 7) included agreeing a proposal to increase capacity within the assessment service in response to rising demand. This has been identified as a key risk, and the proposal involves implementing a new temporary structure, moving from 6 teams of 6 social workers with 1 unit manager to 5 teams of 9 social workers with a unit manager and deputy team manager who will share supervisory responsibilities. It is hoped that this new structure will enable to service to respond to rising demand, reduce social workers' workloads to manageable levels and ensure sufficient management oversight of all cases and support for social workers.

2.3.9 Work is also underway to create an overarching Workforce Strategy for children's services and a year one workforce action plan has been agreed and is in progress in support of the wider children's improvement plan. Workforce working group meetings have been scheduled from January onwards to monitor progress on delivery.

2.3.10 Although there has been a considerable amount of traffic to the recruitment microsite, the number of applications has been lower than anticipated and Jobs go Public are calling those who didn't complete the application to find out the reasons why. However, the quality of candidates has been high. There has been slow but steady progress on converting agency staff to permanent staff, with 5 in the process of converting, including one Unit Manager. Going forward it will be important to refresh the Jobs go public micro-site post ministerial letter to ensure that potential candidates are not deterred from applying to Croydon by the prospect of government intervention

2.3.11 With regards to learning and development, initial training has been commissioned on the strengthening families' model and the graded care profile. A Children's Services induction event took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> December for recent starters, which introduced staff to the new practice model.

2.3.12 In order to strengthen management oversight and ensure robust quality assurance and performance management (priority 8) a new quality assurance framework has been finalised and was endorsed at the last Improvement board in December. The framework includes a process for monitoring and following up on actions; a clear learning loop, and roll out will begin in January.

## **2.4 Partnership actions**

2.4.1 The Interim Chair of the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) presented an update on the Board's activity in November, highlighting partnership work around vulnerable adolescents.

2.4.2 With regards to the actions set out in the Children's Improvement Plan outline proposals regarding arrangements for safeguarding partners and implications for the remit of the executive group were presented. These proposals were drafted in early Jan.

## **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 (business) support and recording systems. The Commissioner's report recognised the strong corporate support and focus on children's improvement provided to date.

2.5.2 Actions to improve the level of business support to social workers and managers have included:

- 30 business support temps recruited to backfill gaps and provide additional interim support to social care teams
- Revised interim Service Level Agreements for business support have been consulted on and agreed by most service areas, this includes details of a more flexible offer and inclusion of new tasks e.g. increased meeting support
- A short term agreement is in place to support Unit Managers and Service Leaders with recruitment during this period of high volume and rapid recruitment.
- A scanning amnesty, which has been very well received by social workers, was extended until 15 December

2.5.3 With regards to systems improvements, the following should be noted;

- The CRS document management module went live on 1 December 2017, which makes the indexing process much easier for social workers and business support staff. Feedback from staff has been positive and it is hoped this will improve recording across the service
- A legal workspace has gone live on CRS with some initial positive feedback from staff on improved ease of use
- An automated payment form in CRS is in development which will link payment requests to the case file and is expected go live in January 2018. As an interim measure, an automated finance request e-form has been designed by Business Support and rolled out to Care Planning and Assessments
- Pre-Paid card use for service users is also being progressed. Payment process efficiencies using Pre-Paid cards have already been evidenced by use in Leaving Care, and we are going to replicate this by the end of January in Care Planning and Assessments with the aim of reducing cash payments.

### **3. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE OFSTED MONITORING VISIT**

3.1 The first Ofsted monitoring visit took place on the 12th and 13th of December and was focused on the Front Door, including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and assessment service. During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the areas of help and protection, including:

- the identification of risk and the timeliness of responses to assessing risk, in the assessment service

- the understanding and application of thresholds, management oversight and decision-making, and support of and guidance to social workers in the assessment service
- consideration of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) response, as part of looking at the assessment work undertaken.

3.2 Children's Improvement Plan and performance information for October 2017 were reviewed. Inspectors spoke predominantly to social workers in the assessment service and to a small number of managers.

3.3 Positively, inspectors noted that staff morale is generally improved and staff say that they feel better supported and that they are being listened to, although there is still remains an issue to address in relation to high demand in the assessment service and the pressures this brings for social workers and managers.

3.4 Feedback from the Ofsted monitoring visit was varied, with positive feedback on the prompt action taken by senior leaders to establish the strategic infrastructure for improvement, secure initial financial investment and ensure sufficient senior management capacity. The strong corporate focus on improvement was noted. Continued improvement in the MASH and some examples of good social work practice were also highlighted.

3.5 Nevertheless, there were some strong messages on the variable quality of social work practice, high caseloads in the assessment service, weak management oversight and a lack of rigour in quality assurance and case auditing which highlights that there is still more to do to ensure risk to children is fully understood and explored, in all cases.

3.6 Inspectors noted that Croydon is not in an unusual position at this first visit, and reinforced the challenge of moving forward in delivering parallel improvements on infrastructure and practice at pace. They also acknowledged the pressures presented by increased demand at the front door; a higher number of referrals coming in to the assessment team has meant that despite additional resources caseloads remain too high, although it was recognised that senior managers have taken steps to reconfigure resources and add capacity to address this.

3.7 The council accepts the feedback from the monitoring visit and senior managers have begun to address the issues inspectors raised, reflecting the findings and building upon the good practice observed as part of the wider children's improvement plan activity, and in preparation for the next visit in March. A new Quality Assurance Framework was agreed at the Improvement Board in December and will be rolled out from January to increase the rigour of the quality assurance and case audit activities. In addition, an action plan is being developed to ensure that the findings from the first monitoring visit are addressed and embedded in the Improvement programme, and to prepare for the second visit will be put in place.

3.8 The next monitoring visit will be on 20th and 21st March. The final scope of the visit is still to be agreed but it will focus on children and young people where there is a known risk including that of sexual exploitation or those who go missing from home or care. Inspectors have indicated that they will focus on assessing and addressing risk, actions taken to reduce risk and their impact on outcomes for children and young people.

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

4.1 The priority performance indicators for November have been included as an Appendix to this report (see Appendix 1). This document includes a summary from the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help, Philip Segurola, on key areas and strength and underperformance in October (see page 2).

4.2 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 and adherence to timescales for assessment and child protection work.

4.3 Areas of strength or improvement for the month of November include;

- A reduction in average caseloads in care planning, permanence, children with disabilities and amongst newly qualified social workers (ASYEs) to more manageable levels
- Stable re-referral rates within 12 months (19%)
- More children subject to CP plans being visited in timescales (87%)
- Visiting patterns for looked after children remain healthy
- Placement stability remains strong

4.4 Areas of underperformance include:

- No movement in the overall vacancy rate (43%)
- High caseloads in the assessment service
- A slight drop in the % of completed contacts actioned within 1 working day, due to an increase in the volume of contacts and referrals
- A drop in the % of assessments completed in timescales due to the volume of work coming in
- The % of ICPC's held in timescales remains significantly below target (32%)
- The % of children's cases subject to supervision within timescales (43%) is low, although the ability to accurately record and report on this indicator through CRS remains an issue and will be a priority going forward
- Records relating to the recording and monitoring of supervision for individual social workers are inadequate. Tracking information over the last six months is incomplete and insufficient to report against. A revised tracker has been developed to provide consistent reporting and it has been made clear to managers at all levels that regular monthly reporting of these figures is an absolute requirement.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

5.1 Key priorities and actions for January include;

- Developing and implementing actions in response to feedback from the December Ofsted monitoring visit around the quality of assessments, quality assurance and internal auditing

- Implementing a new temporary structure in the assessment service in order to respond to rising demand at the front door and reduce caseloads for social workers in this service
- Beginning the roll out of the new social work practice model, starting with train the trainer sessions
- Continuing to drive improvements in performance to ensure child protection conferences are more timely and children are seen with greater regularity

5.2 Actions scheduled for January include;

- Review the Early Help screening and assessment process and the MASH interface
- Work with foster carers to better understand the support that they need and improve the service
- Undertake an end to end review of the case transfer processes to ensure children are at the heart of decision making, support continuity of relationships with the adults responsible for their care and ensure that any impacts of delay for children are understood and minimised
- Model optimum staffing requirements and team sizes
- Refresh the supervision policy and recording template so that social workers and managers are clear about the expectations and standards for the frequency and quality of supervision
- Refresh the Jobsgopublic micro-site post ministerial letter and got to advert for specific roles including the HOS for quality assurance and HOS for the CWD

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The sub-committee is asked:

- i) To note the submission of the final Children's Improvement Plan and the Minister's agreement that Croydon should continue to manage its own improvement, in line with the Commissioner's recommendations
- ii) To note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan in December
- iii) To note the priority performance indicators for November

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Kerry Crichlow, Programme Director

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1. Priority performance indicators