

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny and Overview committee 6 March 2018
SUBJECT:	Update on Children's Improvement
LEAD OFFICER:	Barbara Peacock Executive Director (People)
CABINET MEMBER:	Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item follows the OFSTED inspection of the council's children's services in June and July 2017.
RECOMMENDATIONS	Members are invited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan, including key achievements and challenges ii) Note the priority performance indicators for January iii) Note the preparations for and focus the next Ofsted monitoring visit on 20th and 21st of March 2018

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Following the publication of the Ofsted report on children's services in Croydon on 4th September 2017 the Secretary of State for Education (the Secretary of State) issued a Direction to the Council to co-operate with Eleanor Brazil as the Children's Services Commissioner for Croydon (the Commissioner), who was charged with making recommendations to the Minister for Children and Families (the Minister) on the best course of action for the future of children's services in Croydon. The Commissioner's report was submitted to the DfE on 4th December 2017 (available via this link: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676364/Ways_forward_for_children_s_services_in_Croydon.pdf) and a letter was sent to the Leader of the Council on 19th December setting out the Ministerial response to the Commissioner's recommendations.

1.2 The final Children's Improvement Plan was approved at Cabinet on 20th November 2017 and submitted to Ofsted and the DfE on the 8th December. The plan has been published on the council's website (available via this link: https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/Croydon_Children%27s_Improvement_Plan_Nov_2017.pdf) and hard copies distributed to staff across Children's

Services. Progress against the plan is monitored and challenged at a monthly Children's Improvement Board, which has an independent chair and includes the Commissioner and Elected Members in its membership.

1.4 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. Initial monitoring visit reports are not published but are shared with the Local Authority and the DFE. Subsequent monitoring visit letters will be published on the Ofsted website.

1.5 A revised Direction was published by the DFE on 25th January 2018 alongside a copy of the Commissioner's report, revoking the previous Direction and requiring Croydon to agree an intensive peer support proposal with Camden Council. The Commissioner's contract has been extended until 31st March 2018 to broker appropriate support arrangements between Croydon and Camden Councils and provide an assessment of the proposals including a view on the appropriateness of these to address the shortcomings in Croydon's performance identified by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

1.6 A report detailing progress around developing support arrangements with Camden was presented to Cabinet on the 26th February. Areas for immediate support, advice and expertise between Camden and Croydon have been agreed as phase one and senior officers are developing a one year intensive support plan to be implemented from April 2018 as phase two, supported by the Commissioner as broker.

1.7 At its meeting on 30th January 2018 Scrutiny and Overview committee were presented with an update on progress against the Children's Improvement Plan, and questioned the Executive Director, People (DCS) and Interim Director of Early Help and Children's social care on improvements around their line of sight, knowing 'what good looks like', changes the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB), the quality assurance framework frontline and staff engagement and feedback opportunities (including the staff survey). The Committee also discussed challenges around recruiting and retaining good quality staff and the role of Camden in supporting Children's Services to improve, and were updated on emerging learning from visits, including a visit to Camden's Corporate Parenting Board.

1.8 This report seeks to provide an overview of progress across the plan to date, including key achievements, challenges and mitigations. It also provides an update on progress against the priority performance indicators in January (attached as appendix 1) and a brief discussion around preparation for the next Ofsted monitoring visit on the 20th and 21st of March.

2. PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

2.1 Overview of progress reporting against the plan

2.1.1 Progress against the improvement plan will be reported to the Children's Improvement Board on 6th March, including an overview of the completed actions across the programme to date and any risks to delivery. However, a high-level summary of the key achievements and challenges in February is set out below.

2.1.2 The performance discussion at the Improvement Board focuses on the impact of these actions. Evidence and impact assurance is sought by the improvement team around completed actions to ensure that they are having a positive impact on frontline practice, and, if not, what further action needs to be taken to ensure that changes are making a difference.

2.1.3 Where there is a risk that actions are unlikely to be completed by the programmed deadline, mitigations will be put in place for each of these actions to ensure progression at pace and, where necessary, lead officers may request a change of deadline. A robust change control process is in place, whereby requests to change an action, lead officer or deadline are signed off by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for each work stream before being interrogated by the independent chair and taken to the Children's Improvement Board for final approval.

2.2 Key achievements

Key achievements across each of the work streams, and the priorities and actions that these relate to are set out below.

2.2.1 Practice

- **Strengthening families roll out (priority 1):** Good progress is being made to establish a clear social work practice framework (Strengthening Families), with training for all staff starting w/c 12/2 [action 1.5]. Leaflets for practitioners and families have been produced and formal launch events for partners and Children's Services staff are scheduled for March.
- **Early Help (priority 2):** An Early Help workshop for partners took place on 31/1 to develop a common understanding of what 'Early Help' is and means. The First Early Help Task and Finish Group took place on 19/2, chaired by the Executive Director for People (DCS) with good multi-agency engagement and commitment [action 2.2a]. This group will report into the CSCB. This work is also being supported by Camden who will be sharing their good practice in this area to help Croydon develop a single point of contact (single front door) in March.
- **Support for children who go missing (priority 5):** Investment in additional capacity (new posts) to conduct return home interviews for children who go missing has led to significant improvements in both the number of children who are offered an interview and the number of completed interviews [see KPI MC3 and MC4], this means that we have a better understanding of the reasons why children go missing and can put in support arrangements (e.g. safety plans) to reduce risks and help keep them safe. The Head of Service for Targeted Services has also launched new

procedures around missing, including a flow chart to help social workers. Camden will also be supporting our work to improve practice for young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE), by strengthening the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel.

2.2.2 People and performance

- **‘Spotlight Scorecard’ performance clinics (priority 8):** A series of performance clinics with Unit Managers and Service Leads began on 2/2, starting with the Care Planning Service [action 8.10]. These sessions are led by the Executive Director (DCS) and Director for Early Help and Children’s Social Care. The sessions ensure a clear line of sight into performance at a team (unit) level and an opportunity to challenge poor performance through the ‘scorecard’ mechanism.
- **Exit interviews (priority 7):** An improved exit interview process (as suggested by frontline staff in the ‘Recruitment and Retention’ sprint sessions before Christmas) has been implemented leading to a 65% completion rate of interviews for permanent staff. Common reasons for leaving were around career progression and better work/life balance.
- **Croydon Local Strategic Partnership (priority 6):** A review of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has resulted in sweeping changes to the partnership, that include agreed changes to structure, governance, strategy, transparency and co-ordination [action 6.5]. There is also agreement to focus on young people across the partnership. In addition, a significant amount of work is progressing to ensure an appropriate level of resource to support the new LSP, with co-ordination, forward business planning, project and policy support.

2.2.3 Partnerships (priority 10)

- **SCR learning themes:** At the last two board meetings the CSCB has considered an overview of the learning themes identified in all SCRs undertaken and published, since 2016, including a list of SCRs and Learning Reviews which are in the pipeline but have not yet been published. An overview of these themes was presented to the Children’s Improvement Board on 6 February. Themes included a lack engagement with fathers or step fathers, disrupted education, domestic violence and mental health issues.
- **Awareness of Early Help amongst partners:** The CSCB received a presentation on the proposed Early Help arrangements and strategy in January and will continue to ensure that all partners are aware of and engaged in this work (for example, through the task and Finish Group) [action 10.12].

2.2.4 Platforms (priority 11)

- **Increasing the base budget for Children’s Services (action 11.2c):** A new base budget of £10.9m for Children’s Services has been set (excluding the £3.8m commitment to fund improvement) and will go to cabinet on 26th February for final approval.
- **Children’s Recording System (CRS) forms (action 1.4 and 11.4):** Work is underway to streamline and simplify forms in CRS and ensure they are aligned to the new social work practice model (Strengthening Families). Workshops took place

throughout February to redesign these forms alongside practitioners and testing is scheduled for March, with an expected go live date for the forms of 1 April.

- **Business support improvements (actions 11.3a and 11.3b):** In addition to extra capacity (34 additional business support posts added since July 2017) to provide dedicated support for each team (unit) and address recording backlogs, the previous Business Support Service Level Agreements have been reviewed to include more tasks (e.g. further support for meetings, allocated time dedicated to support social workers, support to Unit managers). Proposals on the Business Support model/offer and resourcing levels for 2018-19 was taken to the Children's Services Management Team on 1 February with a follow-up session on 22 February for further discussion and decision-making.
- **Pre-paid cards (action 11.4):** In order to reduce petty cash payments and the administrative burden that accompanies this, pre-paid cards for children and families were rolled out in the assessment and care planning services on 19/2. These cards enable the service to upload immediate payments online as needed which will help to support those who receive regular financial support and those who cannot come into Croydon (e.g. those fleeing domestic violence).

2.3 Challenges and mitigations

- **Increasing demand (more referrals leading to assessments)**
 - **Risk/issue:** The service continues to see a rise in the number referrals leading to assessments and current trends suggest this will continue. This means that caseloads cannot be reduced in the assessment service and they are likely to increase in care planning once more as the service cannot recruit fast enough to meet the demand. Increased demand also leaves staff feeling like nothing has changed and with insufficient space and time to improve their practice and spend more time with families.
 - **Mitigations:** Four 'surge' teams added to the care planning service in addition to a new structure in the assessment service which went live in January.
- **High caseloads in the assessment service;**
 - **Risk/issue:** Average caseloads in the assessment service remain very high (34 per per social worker in January) due to rising demand (referrals) [see KPI - W1a]. This is a major barrier to improving practice (as set out above) and described as feeling 'relentless' by staff.
 - **Mitigation/s:** A new team structure in the assessment service went live in January (with 9 social workers, one deputy team manager and one team manager per unit). However, this additional capacity has been absorbed and referral trends indicate that the demand for assessments will remain high.

- **Recruitment and retention;**
 - **Risk/issue:** The vacancy figure (41%) continues to be a concern with a low number of successful applications through the microsite and a slow rate of locums converting to become permanent staff (most citing pay as the main barrier). Increased demand in assessment and care planning is also making the service more reliant on temporary staff, and as performance expectations become stronger, several agency staff have been asked to leave.
 - **Mitigation/s:** The application process has been streamlined to improve ease, a wider workforce strategy has been drafted and a review of pay and grades is underway. Exit interviews are also taking place across the service to identify the main reasons why people are leaving.

- **Supervision;**
 - **Risk/issue:** Performance information on supervision and management oversight demonstrates a mixed picture, with some staff not receiving supervision from their manager with the regularity required to improve practice and provide them with sufficient professional or emotional support.
 - **Mitigation/s:** A tracker has been created in order to monitor performance in relation to the frequency of supervision and recording is also improving. The expectations around the frequency of supervision have been made clear to all managers and supervision is discussed as part of the team (unit) and service level performance 'spotlight scorecard' clinics.

3. UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

3.1 The priority performance indicators for January have been included as an Appendix to this report (see Appendix 1). A summary on key areas and strength and development is set out below.

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 and adherence to timescales for assessment and child protection work.

3.3 Areas of strength or improvement for the month of January include;

- Caseloads for newly qualified social workers (ASYE's) have now returned to a manageable average level of just under 11 per social worker, following the graduation of the previous cohort [see KPI W2]
- Performance in the front door continues to be strong, despite the increase in demand [see KPI FD3]
- A slight improvement in the rate of Child in Need (CIN visits), since December although this still falls short of the 75% target [see KPI CIN 4]
- A significant improvement in the number of child protection conferences (CPC's) in timescales (50%, up from 26% in December) when compared the figures for Sep-Dec 17, although this is still significantly below the target of 80% [see KPI CP5]

- More child and young people subject to Child Protection plans being seen on time (92%) [see KPI CP 13]
- A significant improvement in the number of Return Home Interviews (RHI's) offered to children and young people who go missing (86%) and the completion or 'take up' rate (55%) [see KPI's MC3 and MC6]
- An increase in the % of annual foster carer reviews completed on time (82%) [see KPI F3]
- There has been further improvement in the average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family [see KPI AD7]
- More care leavers having an up to date pathway plan (78%, up from 59% in December) [see KPI CLa]

3.4 Areas of development include;

- Continuing high caseloads in the assessment service (average of 34 cases per social worker) due the increase in referrals at the front door [see KPI W1a]
- A fall in the number of child & family (C&F) assessments completed on time [see KPI AMT2]
- Continued poor performance in relation to Child in Need (CIN) reviews in timescales [see KPI CIN 5]
- Below target performance in relation to visits and reviews for looked after children (LAC) [see KPI LAC 10 and 11]
- Although there has been an increase in the % of cases subject to supervision or other management oversight within timescales (50% for Jan, up from 39% in December) this figure is still concerning. Measures have been put in place to improve recording and understand the regularity of supervision across teams and services to ensure that all social workers are sufficiently supported [see KPI QA1]

4. PREPARATION FOR OFSTED MONITORING VISIT 20th and 21st MARCH

4.1 The second monitoring visit on 20th and 21st March will assess how effectively risk is identified and addressed for vulnerable children and young people, including those who go missing from home or care, those at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), gang involvement, serious youth violence and other crime.

4.2 A number of actions in the Children's Improvement Plan relate to the areas of focus for this visit and these have been closely monitored to ensure they are achieved. In addition, a tight and robust action plan has been put in place to ensure that risks are clearly identified, including areas where practice needs to improve, and mitigating actions are in place that will lead to long term, sustained improvements. The phase one partnership support from Camden Council is a feature of this work.

4.3 Work is also underway to improve internal quality assurance processes (e.g. audits) in light of feedback from the December Ofsted monitoring visit, to ensure that internal audits are providing an accurate picture of quality across the service and grade boundaries are clearly understood. Camden will be supporting Croydon with this work and the Head of Service for Quality Assurance in Camden will be in Croydon for one day per week.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 Key priorities and actions for March include;

- Completing the Strengthen Families training roll out and launching the new model with staff and partners.
- CRS form development and testing ready for the 'Go live' date of 1st April
- A new single point of contact for early help and children's social care will be launched on 5 March
- Agree protocols for attendance at strategy meetings with police, health and education partners to and seek agreement through CSCB.
- Develop, publish and disseminate a clear set of social work practice standards to drive improvements in performance
- Develop consultation mechanisms with representative groups of Children and Young People to ensure their views are reflected in our service development and the lived experience of the child is known and understood.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The sub-committee is asked to:

- i) Note progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan, including key achievements and challenges
- ii) Note the priority performance indicators for January
- iii) Note the preparations for and focus of the next Ofsted monitoring visit on 20th and 21st of March 2018

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: None

APPENDICES: Appendix 1. Priority performance indicators