

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: Council

DATE: 16th March 2022

SUBJECT: Childrens Services Update on the Improvement Plan

REPORT FROM: Councillor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills

CONTACT OFFICER: Jeanette Richards

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The Senior Leadership Team have continued to work on the draft improvement plan which will be forwarded for consideration at the extraordinary Childrens Scrutiny Committee scheduled for the 23rd of March.

The focus of improvement activity has been

- Transformation of the Front Door - MASH (multi agency safeguarding hub).
- Refresh and embedding of the quality assurance system and learning offer.
- Review of service structures and recruitment.

This report provides an update and next steps for each area. These areas will be a focus through the improvement plan once it is finalised and progress monitored through the Improvement Board.

2.0 Priority Actions

Front Door - Multi agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

We continue to progress two strands for the MASH; the immediate assurance that decision making is safe whilst we also progress the wider transformation.

2.1 Immediate Assurance

Since reset of the MASH and return to office space in October 2021 there has continued to be:

- Weekly sampling of closed cases
- Weekly reflection time with staff to discuss the learning
- Specific learning sets around identified themes

For the first time we have been able to better track and monitor the progress through the production of monthly reports which feed into the new revised monthly performance

management meeting as well as an appreciation of progress over a period through the first quarterly report.

The report outlines the activity which is taking place and the methods of testing out decision making. Of importance, is the stability we have been able to build through supporting permanent staff to act into management positions which has culminated in one member now taking on overall management of the MASH. This will provide the stability we need to build the quality and improved focus on practice and decision making. It will also provide the platform for moving to the next stage of transformation

2.3 Wider Transformation

Whilst this change provides some immediate wrap around and we are starting to see some 'green shoots' in the quality of the intervention, this is not a long-term solution to develop and deliver strength based relational approaches, where children and their lived experiences are at the heart of every conversation and intervention, and it will not provide the context to reduce referrals where other preventative support can be provided. A significant programme of transformation which is co-produced between partners but also through families and children accessing services is required.

The vision for MASH is to move from a 'safeguarding' approach to a wider system of advice, support, and prevention with only those children who cannot be supported through an early help preventative plan moving through for statutory assessment.

Where children require a statutory assessment or immediate protection, they will move through the system swiftly and be responded to in a timely manner by the Initial Response Teams. The MASH will not only provide the base for outward facing preventative work but will be the centre of excellence for all complex safeguarding issues to be quickly identified and addressed such as, Domestic Abuse, Missing, Complex Safeguarding and Sexually Harmful Behaviour.

The MASH steering group met on 18 January 2022 and agreed to progress the transformation programme. It reviewed the terms of reference which were refreshed and agreed several principles and priorities

- Sharing data and performance.
- Learning together and using audit findings to drive and improve partnership approaches.
- Connecting the front door with the locality partners to reduce the disconnect.
- Looking at a shared single point of access both for Social Care and mental health to reduce duplication but also to respond effectively to Rapid Review and CSPR learning.

A further development session was held on 28 January 2022 co-chaired between the AD for Social Care and the Safeguarding Lead within the CCG. This took the form of a co-production meeting where we reviewed data, demand, processes and started to share a vision for what a fully integrated multi-agency front door could look like. We agreed principles and next steps.

- Outward facing focus on prevention and reach out to communities to ensure where possible, families are supported locally at the lowest possible level of intervention
- Appropriate resources to be made available to locate in the new front door. Some in person and some with a virtual link
 - o Police
 - o Social Care

- o Early Help
 - o IDVA
 - o Community Health
 - o Drug and Alcohol Services
 - o Education Lead
 - o Adult Services
 - o Housing
 - o Youth Justice
 - o Probation
 - o Mental Health
- Shared data set which all will contribute to
 - Shared audit framework - learning together
 - It's 'our' front door; real ownership across the partnership
 - Co-production with families and young people
 - Focus on building on family strengths and assets, relational, restorative and strength-based approaches
 - Shared budgets: we all contribute to deliver our front door service
 - Shared systems / Information governance
 - A new name

There is a project lead appointed and first phase implementation plan has been drawn up. The group agreed the first iteration would bring social care, health colleagues, business support, police, and early help into full co-location with the first launch in April 2022.

To this end the MASH management will move under the Early Help Service Manager from March 2022.

Throughout March, the systems, policies, and processes will be refreshed, and the new arrangements taken through appropriate governance arrangements including the Improvement Board.

A programme of workshops is being developed for March which will be delivered to the 'new team' ready for a soft launch in April 2022.

Alongside this the MASG steering group will continue to scope the additionality required and we will be seeking commitment through the improvement board partners to second, or support recruitment of key professionals into the new MASH team.

Superintendent Joanne Rawlinson from GMP has been seconded to Council to support in developing pathways to and from the police and multi-agency responses

3.0 Quality Assurance

- 3.1 We have commissioned an independent auditor to undertake some baseline activity
- 3.2 The focus of the work is to ensure that the Quality Assurance Framework, auditing, and moderation are driving change and addressing areas outlined in the October 2021 Ofsted report. The Ofsted report clearly highlights areas which need to improve. Practice issues include 'getting the basics right': timely recognition and response to risk at the front door; timely interventions and drift and delay, over optimistic assessments, plans and planning, pre-proceedings and quality of supervision and management oversight. Improvements in practice, particularly in the above areas can be addressed through more regular and challenging auditing. Findings from ongoing auditing should help measure the pace of change and inform and update the improvement journey.

Stage 1

The first stage is to ascertain how effective current auditing is through moderation of approximately twenty-five audits. (This is an initial exercise which can be repeated if required on a regular basis).

The moderation process will:

- Address consistency and quality of audits and auditors
- Review grading and check whether there is sufficient evidence to justify grades
- Identify whether there are gaps in auditing in terms of identifying strengths and areas for improvement
- Provide individual feedback to auditors and help them develop skills in auditing
- Identify whether there is a need for training for auditors and/or review of practice standards

3.3 It is important that auditors understand 'good practice' and are able to use their professional knowledge to support a culture of improvement, but also of learning and continuous improvement.

3.4 Initial moderation of audits – 25 cases to be completed by 4th March 2022 (5 days)

Stage 2

3.5 Discussions with auditors, to include feedback from moderation but also consultation on their auditing role, use of audit form, strengths and barriers to auditing and their views on how auditing can improve practice.

3.6 Meetings with auditors on-site 9th and 10th March (2 days)

Stage 3

3.7 Review of the frequency and numbers of audits completed based on discussions with managers, auditors and some front-line staff. The aim is not to re-write the Quality Assurance Framework, but to ensure that the auditing function is sufficient to (as said) drive the levels of improvement in practice required to move from an inadequate grade.

3.8 Drawing information from meetings, discussions, and moderation by the end of March 2022 (2 days)

Stage 4

3.9 Following the above, there are options to continue to moderate audits, or indeed to undertake some independent audits to help with numbers of audits. In addition, there may be a requirement to undertake training for auditors and moderators

4.0 Service Structures and Recruitment

The service structures have been reviewed, and we have within the IRT team, and the Safeguarding team established teams with ratios of one manager to 6 social workers. Caseloads are reducing but are not where we would want them to be, hence we are considering commissioning a further managed team service to support the IRT team.

The rolling recruitment is underway. The December recruitment led to 5 ASYE appointments; they will join Bury in the summer when they have their qualifications confirmed and are registered. The January recruitment has led to only two applicants; however, they are experienced. Interviews are planned for 4 March. All shortlisting dates and interview dates are booked in through the year for the rolling programme.

We have sought feedback from applicants in the December recruitment drive who have expressed that they found the application process easier, and they also enjoyed the recruitment day which included introductions from all Strategic Leads and provided time for discussion amongst the applicants, written exercises along with the traditional interview process.

The recruitment working group meets every month and we are reviewing and refreshing the processes to try to reach out and make Bury the employer of choice.

The advert will be reviewed and freshened, and further short films are being produced so that we can target certain areas like the MASH and the recruitment of managers.

The recruitment task group is now focused on the recruitment of managers. A paper has been completed by the Children's HR business partner to review enhanced payments to attract managers into Bury. A recruitment drive for managers alongside another for social workers will go out in March 2022. This will be a sustained campaign throughout this year, and beyond which will be reported through to the Improvement Board.

Headline Data	
Qualified Social Work Posts (FTE)	
Filled by Perm. Staff	98.71
Filled by Fixed Term Staff	3
Established Vacancies	45.75
Agency staff engaged	55
TOTAL Qualified Social Workers Engaged	156.71

List of Background Papers:-

None

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