

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: June 2022

SUBJECT: Update on the Let's Do It for Children Improvement Plan

REPORT FROM: Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet member for Children and Young People

CONTACT OFFICER: Jeanette Richards, Executive Director, Children's Services

1.0 BACKGROUND

As agreed previously the aim of this paper is to update members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the Let's Do It for Children Improvement Plan.

2.0 EXTERNAL SCRUTINY

- 2.1 Bury's Improvement plan received formal approval from Ofsted on 4 June 2022. There has since been further discussion in respect of the plan and progress during our Annual Conversation with Ofsted. The feedback from Ofsted was that we know the issues we need to progress, and Ofsted are assured that we have a plan to progress that is appropriately focused.
- 2.2 Bury Council Children's Services has been served with an improvement notice, by the Department for Education; because of this we receive 6 weekly reports written by our DfE (Department for Education) improvement lead and more detailed reviews every 6 months. This process provides a balance of support and challenge. The first 6-month review (undertaken by the Department for Education) took place on 25 and 26 May 2022. The team was comprised of our improvement advisor Linda Clegg, our DfE case officer Charlotte Harker and the regional DfE improvement Lead Kellie Knott.
- 2.3 The methodology included: meetings with stakeholders including partners, staff members, the leader of the council, the cabinet member for Children's Services and the CEO. They also observed social work practice.
- 2.4 The DfE reported back:
- that they had observed good quality of practice.
 - we have a highly engaged, motivated, loyal and committed workforce.
 - they could see improved morale and culture within the department.
 - there was a strengthened and visible leadership team, with staff reporting that they felt well supported.

- Work is ongoing to strengthen our communication with staff.
- There is still an over reliance on agency staff which is impacting on the quality of practice and the progression of plans for children and young people. The DfE acknowledged that we need to continue our focus on the recruitment and retention of staff
- There is further work to do to strengthen partnership working.

2.5 Ofsted are carrying out the first of their monitoring visits on 21 & 22 June 2022. The focus of this initial visit will focus on the front door of social care:

- The Multi agency Safeguarding Hub and the Initial Response Team and referrals to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer who deals with allegations professional abuse) and the response
- Workforce
- Supervision and management oversight and decision making
- Quality Assurance

2.4 Inspectors will also triangulate and consider:

- Performance management
- Supervision
- Quality Assurance
- The Impact of Leaders upon outcomes for children

3.0 LET'S DO IT FOR CHILDREN – CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

3.1 The details of the report below outline our progress in creating the conditions for Good Practice

4.0 STRENGTHEN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTI-AGENCY GOVERNANCE, PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS AND THE SUPPORT PROVIDED TO CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

4.1 The Improvement Board continues to meet monthly.

4.2 The Independent Review of the BISP and our Governance arrangements by Jane Shuttleworth is progressing:

- A project plan has been established to achieve improved effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- With 7 workstreams – **The overall architecture**, the newly constituted executive has been established including key partners and this is meeting fortnightly.
 - BISP current existence to continue, with the new partnership to be meeting from September.
 - **Multi-agency strategies/policies and procedures** – including links to the community safety partnership and the impact of the Integrated Care System, we have the first draft of the revised threshold document for review by the executive.
 - **Knowing how well we are doing** – strengthening the Quality Assurance Framework, establishing a data set, drawing learning from case reviews, and establishing a learning plan. Following which this activity will be used to agree practice priorities.

- **Quality Assurance** – we continue to monitor the quality and impact of multi-agency teams such as MASH and the Complex Safeguarding team.
- **Training, learning and development**; we have incorporated a training review, and review of the website, establishing a communication plan.
- **Review of the Business management of the BISP**
- **Case Review activity** (Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, local reviews)

5.0 ESTABLISHING A STABLE AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TEAM.

- 5.1 A priority has been covering the role of Assistant Director of Social Work Practice whilst engaging the right individual as a priority. To this end several CVs have been considered and on Monday 23 May 2022, Linda Evans joined the team as interim whilst recruitment to the substantive post was progressed.
- 5.2 Following a strong field of applicants, the recruitment process has been concluded with Sean Walsh being appointed to the role, Sean brings with him a proven track record in both leadership and transformation and will join the team in September 2022.
- 5.3 The newly appointed Strategic Lead for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), Michael Kemp, joined us on 9 May 2022. Michael joins us with a proven record of accomplishment of effective service delivery across SEND.
- 5.4 The role of Principal Social Worker (PSW) is currently advertised, with dates arranged for interviews to take place on 5 July 2022.
- 5.5 The role of Principal Social Worker (PSW) is key to driving practice improvement and embedding a culture of learning and development. They will oversee the practice development team to support learning and development activity to further progress the development of the quality of practice.
- 5.6 Linda Clegg, our Independent Chair has met with Executive Directors and LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Parenting Training is planned for Executive Directors and Elected Members in order that we ensure children are at the heart of the Council's Corporate planning.
- 5.7 A LGA peer review with a focus upon corporate parenting is to be commissioned for October 2022.
- 5.8 The Corporate Programme Management Team have been working with Strategic Leads to develop Service Plans which will direct the operational activity within services that follows from the Improvement plan.

6.0 BUILD A SKILLED, CONFIDENT AND EXPERIENCED WORKFORCE

- 6.1 Recruitment and retention - The proportion of agency staff has reduced from 40% to 34.5%.
- 6.2 We remain challenged by escalating pay rates for agency staff across the Northwest up to £60 per hour and this is a threat to recruitment and retention.

- 6.3 Baseline activity in relation to the financial remuneration of social work roles including team manager roles bases us as competitive, which is pleasing.
- 6.4 Following feedback from the workforce and baseline activity we have agreed and implemented the following incentives:
- Retention payments – a total of £2000 (£1000 payable at 12 months service & a further £1000 payable at 24 months service)
 - Free carparking
 - Payment of professional fees
- 6.5 We have established a rolling recruitment campaign which is now live with shortlisting and interview dates already set. This includes attendance at recruitment fairs and drop-in sessions.
- 6.6 We have achieved some success in attracting permanent members of staff
- 5 new employees in post since April 2022
 - 10 new employees currently progressing through pre-employment checks (including agency conversions):
 - 6 social workers
 - 2 Safeguarding Team Managers
 - 1 IRO
 - 1 EDT Practitioner
 - Recruitment for Social Workers, Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead are ongoing at various stages.
- 6.7 We are working with colleagues in HR and finance to scope out a restructure of services that will provide sufficient capacity, improve spans of management control and develop areas of expertise.

7.0 STAFF ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 A series of communications have been held with the Workforce, sharing the Improvement Plan following the approval from Ofsted. These have been positively received.
- 7.2 Our Voice of the Workforce Board is meeting regularly and fortnightly updates to staff from the EDCS (Executive Director of Children's Services) have commenced to ensure all staff are kept up to date with priorities and progress within the Department.
- 7.3 **Exit Interviews** have been completed with permanent staff leaving the service between April and June 2022 to understand the reasons for staff leaving:
- 2 staff have retired after over 30 years of practice in Bury
 - 3 staff left for their work life balance / personal development
 - 1 member of staff left to move to agency as the payments are more attractive
 - 1 member of staff left for a change in career
 - 6 staff felt well supported by staff and colleagues and 4 would return to Bury if their personal circumstances changed

8.0 IMPROVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT, QUALITY ASSURANCE & MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS TO DEVELOP AND SUPPORT GOOD SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE / IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF PRACTICE

- 8.1 There is ongoing quality assurance activity focusing on the core components of practice. A sample of our audits are currently being moderated by an independent auditor.
- 8.2 Audits show some improvements in practice; risks are identified, and thresholds overall are appropriately applied. There are improvements in the timeliness of referrals and initial assessment of risk. There is evidence of improved practice in terms of capturing the voice of the child. Assessments contain the views of children. Similarly, there are improvements in building relationships with family and in ensuring that parents and carers views are captured in assessments and plans. There have been improvements in supervision and management oversight. 30% of audits are judged to be good or better, 50% of audits are judged to be Requires Improvement, 20% are judged to be Inadequate, this is demonstrating an improved practice. Moderation of audits has resulted in changes to 12% of the cohort which indicates that managers are developing audit skills and overall, we understand what good looks like.
- 8.3 The audit moderation process includes individual one to one feedback to auditors and the learning from audits is discussed with individual staff and wider learning is disseminated across the service to drive forward improvements
- 8.4 Regular dip sampling of case records is also completed across the service and regular multi-agency sampling of contacts into the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) has been established.
- 8.5 MASH and the Contextual Safeguarding Team (CST) have now co-located back to the police station.
- 8.6 We have agreement from the DfE (Department for Education) to progress sector led improvement support through Essex Council to progress our plans for an Edge of Care Team.
- 8.7 Establishing an effective and evidenced based model of practice is key to providing the framework for social work practice that enables change. Following consultation with key partners, discussion between the Executive Director of Childrens Services and the DfE, a business case has presented to the executive and recommendations supported to seek approval from Cabinet to implement the Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding Model of Practice.
- 8.8 This model of practice has been identified because of its strong evidence base around effective interventions with families who experience the trio of complexities – parental mental health, parental substance misuse, and where domestic abuse is a feature of family life.
- 8.9 The model has been independently evaluated in terms of positive outcomes achieved for children and families and a strong evidence base around cost avoidance.

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