

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2023

SUBJECT: IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATES, INCLUDING DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION VISIT AND OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

REPORT FROM: CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CONTACT OFFICER: JEANETTE RICHARDS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Children's Services Improvement Plan that was put in place in response to the findings of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) carried out by Ofsted between 25 October 2021 and 5 November 2021, which judged services to be inadequate.
- 1.2 To provide an update on external scrutiny designed to monitor the progress of our improvement, including a Department for Education (DfE) review that took place on 11th January 2023 and our second Ofsted Monitoring Visit which took place on 12th and 13th October 2022.

2.0 ISSUES

Children's Services Improvement Plan

- 2.1 The Children's Improvement Board has continued to meet monthly and is well-attended.
- 2.2 The Neglect Strategy has now been approved which will support the development of a partnership wide understanding of the 6 forms of neglect at the earliest opportunity, and to ensure we respond in the most effective way and ensure that the impact of cumulative harm is considered. The Strategy will be underpinned by an Implementation Plan, which will include learning and development sessions.
- 2.3 There is now only one vacancy within the senior leadership team which is that of Head of Service for the My Home team, with the recent round of recruitment being unsuccessful. However, Director of Social Care Practice Seán Walsh joined us in September 2022, Head of Service for Care & Support Michelle Hughes in November 2022 and Head of Service Sarah Dearden in January 2023. The team is further strengthened with the support of the Head of Service for Strategy, Assurance and Reform Robert Arrowsmith and Children's Improvement Manager Beth Speak, who both joined in November and have a clear remit to drive forward on improvement.
- 2.4 In January 2023, the Director of Social Care Practice and Head of Service for IRT travelled to South Africa as part of our international recruitment strategy. Interviews were held over 3 days and we made offers to 23 candidates who we believe will be assets to Bury. While we

are prepared for some candidates to withdraw we are hopeful that at least 20 candidates will join us in Bury, and are aiming for the first cohort to arrive in April. We are working with colleagues in HR and the Workforce Development Team to plan a robust induction and a targeted training and support offer to help these social workers convert their experience and skills to UK legislation and practice.

- 2.5 We are reviewing our approach to audit and performance and ensuring they are closely aligned to Ofsted recommendations (from both the ILACS of October/November 2021 and subsequent monitoring visits). A discussion on what performance indicators need to be presented took place in our most recent Improvement Board meeting (24th January 2023) and development activity continues. This is also informing our internal assurance mechanisms and how we hold ourselves to account.
- 2.6 Work has begun on the Family Safeguarding implementation: a Family Safeguarding Strategic Partnership Board was held on 6th January and meetings will be held monthly. An Operational Board will also be established which will be chaired by Director of Social Care Practice. The training programme has started, with a series of training sessions being delivered throughout the first half of the year. This is a blend of training provided by The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice (Hertfordshire) and training on motivational interviewing, which is key to the model.
- 2.7 A Systems Working Group will be established within the Department to ensure that developments around our recording system (LCS) are aligned to improvement priorities and issues identified through audit and performance analysis. This group will be established in Spring 2023.
- 2.8 As reported previously to Committee, we have strengthened our Public Law Outline procedures and standards and have more effective tracking systems in place. The North West region is working together to develop practice following the recommendations set out in the Public Law Working Group, and there is peer review activity taking place as part of this work. Bury have been paired with Salford Council, and peers will be visiting Bury on 31st January, 1st and 2nd February to review practice (and Bury will be visiting Salford in March as part of reciprocal arrangements). The region will then use findings from all 23 peer reviews to identify themes and share learning on use of pre-proceedings.
- 2.9 A Strategic Lead from Manchester City Council completed a review on the Safeguarding Unit and the effectiveness of our practice. The review highlighted a number of areas for further development, which have formed the core of a new service improvement plan:
 - To strengthen identity, vision and profile of the team in understanding their accountability for children's progression in the system
 - Design a robust performance framework including voice and attendance of children in their reviews
 - Embed a Restorative Practice approach - facilitating progress through a new outcome resolution process, demonstrating the footprint and impact of their work on children's case electronic files and building relationships both within the service and with children and young people

Department for Education Review

- 2.10 The Department for Education (DfE) review scheduled for November was deferred due to an Ofsted Monitoring Visit, and instead took place on 11th January. This review was led Linda Clegg in her capacity as DfE Improvement Adviser, along with Regional Deputy Director Mark Taylor and Senior Case Lead Bec Taylor-Williams. The team met with front-line practitioners, Heads of Service and partners including colleagues from health, Police and the

Independent Chair of Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership (BISP). They explored leadership, workforce, performance and partnerships.

- 2.11 We received positive feedback in relation to staff morale and their enthusiasm and passion to get things to where they need to be. They reported that they can see that there has been lots of improvement activity and we have made good progress to date, and there was synergy between what they heard and saw on the day with discussions that have been taking place at Improvement Board. It was noted that we are one third into our improvement journey – 12 months in, it is clear lots of infrastructure work has been completed and there is evidence of a cultural reset. However there is still lots of work ahead and we must continue to press ahead with the same commitment and leadership, and be mindful of the risk of “improvement fatigue”.
- 2.12 The letter of findings is expected within the week and we will ensure is included in the next update to this Committee. However, we expect the following areas to be included in the letter as areas for development:
- continued focus upon workforce, ensuring we continue to consider all opportunities and options
 - data and QA, with a deeper analysis and understanding to support improvement activity and developing a shared partnership understanding of outcomes achieved for children and families, supported by outcomes based indicators
 - partnership working - embracing learning and development opportunities
 - communication strategy to ensure change is clearly communicated and understood
- 2.13 The DfE Improvement Adviser shared key messages with the Improvement Board on 24th January and as a result of the review findings, it has been agreed to review terms of reference for the board, including frequency of meetings and membership to ensure it is aligned to the ongoing priorities and the work that lies ahead.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

- 2.14 Our second Ofsted Monitoring visit took place on 12 and 13 October 2022. The focus of the visit was children in need, children subject to a child protection plan, pre-proceedings work, the impact of leaders on social work practice and the local authority's own evaluation of the quality and impact of performance and practice.
- 2.15 A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior managers. In addition, inspectors spoke to a range of staff including social workers and managers.
- 2.16 Inspectors noted “pockets of improvement” which is supported by increased stability in the leadership team and strong political and corporate support. Social workers feel leaders have focus on improving services for children. There is also a more restorative approach, with better engagement and consultation.
- 2.17 High caseloads and too many changes of social workers are leading to inconsistent practice for too many children although positive and meaningful relationships were noted where there was a consistent social worker.
- 2.18 Inspectors noted regular attendance at core groups from key professionals from across the partnership which was supporting sound decision making, however they observed meetings were not always effective at holding partners to account where actions had not been completed.
- 2.19 Supervision is valued by social workers but is not yet sufficiently reflective, nor does it result in specific actions with clear timescales. The PSW is leading on a Supervision Development Plan which will include observations and increased sampling of supervisions to support managers in their development.

- 2.20 Refreshed approaches to quality assurance and performance are evident but not yet embedded. More work is needed to ensure that actions from audit support case direction and inform learning. As noted earlier in this report, the approach to audit and performance is being reviewed to ensure there are clear links with improvement activity, and that learning is more effectively understood both at child level but also in what that tells us in relation to workforce development areas for development. Links between improvement activity, QA and the work of the PSW are being strengthened.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Improvement Plan is being reviewed to ensure that it is clearly focused on the areas of development highlighted in Ofsted visits as well as other external scrutiny. There will be consultation with partners and staff on the refreshed plan to ensure everyone is clear as to their role. We will review the reporting of the Improvement Plan and consider summary reports that can be shared across the partnership to ensure effective communication in regard to our progress. We are also reviewing our internal infrastructure around service/improvement plans to ensure clear golden thread between plans.

List of Background Papers:

Ofsted Monitoring visit to Bury children's services - Report published on 17 December 2021.

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Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____