

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 16th January 2024

SUBJECT: CYP Improvement Plan

REPORT FROM: Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

CONTACT OFFICER: Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for 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.

2.0 ISSUES

2.1 The Children's Improvement Board meets bi-monthly and reviews performance and audit information and discusses progress on key issues linked to improvement.

2.2 The most recent Ofsted monitoring visit in November 2023 focused on care leavers, and inspectors noted that they did not see the same pace of progress in relation to improvement that they had seen in other areas on previous visits.

2.3 The attached summary report provides a detailed overview of the plan, with areas RAG-rated to indicate current progress. These include:

2.3.1 Leadership – there have been some challenges with capacity of the Senior Leadership Team due to the long-term absence of two Heads of Service. These have now been filled on an interim basis by moving one of the permanent Heads of Service, and then stepping up two other permanent members of staff into the vacant roles thus providing us with no gaps nor agency within the leadership team. Team Managers are mostly permanent, with just 3 agency team managers out of 25. Additional support for our managers has been agreed with the DfE as part of the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP) which will see Cheshire West & Chester beginning their work with us in January. This is part of our 'Back to Basics' approach with a focus on getting the basics right, and this extends to managers having a shared understanding of what a good manager looks like.

2.3.2 Recruitment activity continues with a renewed approach in the new year to ensure that we have a multi-faceted approach to recruitment. The international recruit we appointed in January 2023 are not all yet in post, due to delays in Social Work England (SWE) registrations and English competency tests (IELTS). We have 7 social workers in post with a further 2 due in February. We are working with Frontier, our recruitment partner, to ensure candidates are being supported appropriately and we have also escalated the SWE delays (a national issue) to the DfE.

- 2.3.3 Audit and performance continues to be developed, with the introduction of dashboards that are routinely shared with managers and senior leaders to develop a shared understanding of performance. The QA Framework is kept under review to ensure that it supports managers in understanding what good practice looks like and that it is a tool used for learning and development. Assurance Improvement Meetings (AIM) and Closing the Loop meetings provide the architecture to ensure discussions are taking place and actions can be taken to improve practice. There is more to do to ensure that the learning from audit is understood by front line practitioners.
 - 2.3.4 Family Safeguarding was formally launched in October 2023; adult practitioners have been part of the team since September although all adult practitioners are not yet in post.
 - 2.3.5 A diagnostic of the LCS case recording system will take place in January. This will assess whether we are getting the most out of the existing functionality and whether there are additional options we should consider that will directly impact on the quality of practice.
 - 2.3.6 A Performance Strategy & Framework was launched in February 2023, with the aim of ensuring we achieve permanence for our children at the earliest opportunity. The Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2023 noted our renewed focus on early permanence with a more structured approach.
 - 2.3.7 The Family Group Conference team is now in place and has been fully operational since October 2023.
 - 2.3.8 Our first Family Hub opened in October in East Bury (Redvale). We are hoping to roll out to the other 4 neighbourhoods by September 2025.
 - 2.3.9 Revised Elective Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing Education (CME) policies have been launched in September 2023 and the new School Attendance, Exclusions & Community Education Manager is leading on these, ensuring that there is a clear focus on these statutory areas.
- 2.4 The Business Support resource for Children's Services has now transferred back into the department and managed by the Children's Improvement and Transformation Manager. This will allow us to align the prioritisation of our business support with improvement. We are reviewing the work undertaken to consider whether there are opportunities within business support that can support social worker recruitment and retention, by providing additional support to social workers.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Members are asked to note the updates in the attached paper.

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Improvement Plan Summary (attached)
Ofsted Monitoring visit to Bury children's services - report published on Ofsted website 6th December 2023

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Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____