

Report of the Interim Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of the Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 13th February 2019

Subject:

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Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Summary statement:

This report provides updated information about the Council's response to the published OFSTED ILACS judgement with a focus on the Theme Four: Improving the Front Door and MASH arrangements.

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Portfolio:

Children & Families

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the steps the Council is taking in response to OFSTED's inspection of Bradford's Children's Services and offers an update on Theme Four Front Door and MASH arrangements.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 OFSTED carried out an inspection of Bradford's Children's Services from Monday 17 September 2018 until Friday 28 September 2018. In the ILACS inspection, Ofsted make three judgements

- Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families- this was judged as requires improvement to be good.
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection- this was judged as inadequate
- Experience and progress of children in care and care leaders- this was judged as requires improvement to be good.
- Because the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection is classed as a limiting judgement, the overall judgement is inadequate.

Bradford shares Ofsted's ambition that "only good is good enough for Bradford's children" and therefore the judgement is extremely disappointing. The focus is now on improving at pace the areas identified by Ofsted with the ambition of achieving good or better services for children.

The findings were reported to Executive on 6 November and Executive resolved:

- (1) To note the outcome of the OFSTED inspection.
- (2) To note the plans to deliver rapid improvement and to offer support.
- (3) To refer the report to the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- (4) To request that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services work with Officers to prepare a robust Improvement Plan with the voice of the child at its heart for the next meeting of the Executive in December 2018.
- (5) To invite the Chair of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee to join the formal Improvement Board.
- (6) To request that the Chief Executive identify an appropriate Improvement Advisor to work with the Council and to act as independent chair of the Improvement Board.

(7) To refer the report to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2.2 The Department for Education (DfE) has written formally to serve the Council with an Improvement Notice.

2.3 In November 2018, Gladys Rhodes White joined the service as Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services to help drive the improvement journey.

3. THEME UPDATE - IMPROVING THE FRONT DOOR

3.1 Purpose of the update

3.1.1 To update the committee on the activity progress on the theme "Improving the Front Door", and MASH arrangements as outlined in the Improvement Plan

3.1.2 For the committee to note the progress as set out within this report.

3.2 Background/Governance

3.2.1 All activity within the 'Key Themes' is managed through 6 key strategic working groups each focussing on:

1. The "Lived Experience" and the Voice of the Child
2. Improving the quality of Social Work Practice
3. Improving Management Oversight and Quality Assurance
4. Improving the Front Door and Mash Arrangements
5. Improving the sufficiency of placements for Children Looked After (CLA)
6. Improving the operating environment to create optimum conditions for success

3.2.3 It is proposed that each Strategic lead, including the lead for 'Enabling Support', has responsibility for driving activity to address improvements within the scope of that group. Accountable leads provide highlight and exception reports to the Multi Agency Operational Improvement Board.

3.2.4 It is also proposed that each area of work is addressed through a priority work stream plan, which describes the activity, milestones, progress and risks or issues that may impact on progress towards the improvement priority.

3.3 Overview of Progress

3.3.1 For the purpose of this report and to assist the reader, progress in Theme Four has been grouped against the four strategic group headings, using the Improvement Plan reference where identified.

The group has primarily focused on four key strands of work:

- 1) **Improved all aspects of Multi agency child protection work including the development of the MASH service, management of risk around domestic violence and neglect, together with screening contacts and decision-making (IP Ref No R1, R3, R5 AFI 2)**

Within the front door of the MASH service, creative capacity has been achieved through the simplification of the Children's Social Care process within the MASH. This has enabled a more child focused approach, allowing identification of the most relevant professionals to attend strategy meetings, clear and concise planning, and partners the time and opportunity to undertake qualitative research in advance of their attendance to such meetings.

The next phase of MASH development will be looking to increase the partnership footprint including:

- Increase in health partners
- IDVA Representative (Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor)
- Youth Offending Service
- Housing.

The latter of which is of particular importance, given the rising number of homeless families that are redirected to the MASH by the Housing Department.

It was evidenced with the OFSTED inspection that the front door, including the MASH in its current format was not fulfilling effectively its core functions. For example the MASH screening, which should allow concerns held by a single agency to be disclosed and shared with relevant agencies, to enable them to better understand risk and issues at an earlier stage, had not been fully implemented.

To offset and reduce this issue, the service has introduced a more thorough scrutiny around thresholds proceeding to a S47 strategy.

Consequently, progress has begun to be made around the reconfiguration of the MASH in consultation with partners, through the newly established MASH group which is chaired by the Interim Strategic Director for Children's Services.

Wider strategic discussions and consultations are in process to finalise the MASH model together with the development of core functions namely:

- a. Simplifying systems and pathways, reducing the number of transfer points, reducing delay for the child.
- b. Introducing a MASH intelligence gathering function.
- c. Controlling the flow of incoming electronic contacts, by merging the various routes into the MASH.
- d. Creating capacity by piloting changes in processes between the MASH and the Assessments teams – chairing strategy meetings, this enables Children's Social Care within the MASH to focus more on the core

- business in applying thresholds, decision making, and improved management oversight.
- e. Revisiting the threshold document, to ensure this reflects the Working Together Guidance (2018) good practice standards, including previous history and creating high support and learning.
 - f. Supporting staff through regular supervision, mentoring and management availability.

Feedback Note: Following the introduction of the pilot, (see point d above) positive feedback has been received from social workers and team managers, who have indicated that these changes have given them more time, both practical and thinking, to reflect and re-evaluate referrals and cases where the decision was to progress to a strategy meeting and revise the earlier decision appropriately. All felt that they have produced a better quality of work.

2) Reviewing children being subject to inappropriate social work processes. (IP Code ref No R5, AFI 3)

- Key improvement within this area has centred on capacity which has enabled an increase in management capacity around screening, quality assurance and risk assessment grading through a RAG rating system.
- Developing closer links with the contact centre and specifically the social worker co-located there to triage telephone calls before they are transferred to the MASH
- As previously indicated the merger of the different routes to the 'front door', ensuring consistent application of threshold and timely decision making.
- Undertaking dip sampling of No Further Action (NFA) contacts and contacts which have been signposted to early help.

3) Developing and improving on performance reporting and accuracy of data to help inform future commissioning needs.(IP Ref No R3 & R5)

Receipt of accurate and relevant data is still being developed, with some data now being available, planning is in place to work with the performance team and IT colleagues to enable managers to draw out and utilise the data from the system.

4) Development of quality assurance audits, testing impact of changes around timeliness and response around the "lived experience" for the child, their family and partner agencies.

Findings and recommendations from OFSTED's inspection, peer review and in house audit have informed practice and process changes within the Children's Social Care section of the MASH.

Dip sampling and analysing data continues to be undertaken and this will be used to inform the quality of practice and outcomes for the child and their family.

4. Risk, Issues & Challenges

- Final approval of the reconfigured MASH and its core functions needs to be completed within an agreed timescale.
- MASH firewalls need to be fully implemented in an agreed timescale to enable them to better understand risk and issues at an earlier stage.

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

None

7. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The financial implications of the improvement plan are set out in the Budget proposals to be considered by Executive.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

This report is for information only.

9. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 9.1 The recent inspection was undertaken under the new Framework, Evaluation Criteria and Inspector Guidance for the Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). This contains provisions regarding actions to be taken after an inadequate inspection report. These include monitoring by Ofsted including an action planning visit, quarterly monitoring visits and a re-inspection, and also an action plan prepared by the local authority within 70 days of receiving the report.

The Secretary of State has a wide range of powers available following an inadequate judgment, including statutory and non-statutory interventions. The type of intervention is dependent on the severity of the situation, how long the authority has been underperforming, and the perceived capacity for improvement.

S497A Education Act 1996 gives the Secretary of State a wide range of statutory powers if satisfied the local authority is failing to perform its social care functions. These include statutory directions to the local authority aimed at securing adequate performance and also statutory directions requiring the functions to be taken over by others including the Secretary of State or those nominated by him.

In Bradford's case, the Secretary of State intends to take a non-statutory approach, appointing an improvement adviser and issuing a formal improvement notice. The Department for Education 'Putting Children First – Delivering Our Vision for Excellent Children's Social Care (July 2016) indicates that the Secretary of State will only take the non-statutory route if the evidence does not indicate persistent or

systemic failure. The local authority will be involved in discussions regarding the content of the notice and it will clearly specify the issues of concern, the improvement required, how this will be assessed and subsequent steps that may be taken if improvement is not achieved.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

10.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.6 TRADE UNION

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

10.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

The ILACS inspection provides a comprehensive external assessment of outcomes for Looked after Children. An action plan will be produced to address areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and progress will additionally be reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

10.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

There are no specific data protection implications.

11. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

N/A

12. OPTIONS

N/A

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 The Committee notes the continuing risks, issues and challenge
- 13.2 That the next meeting of the Committee continues the scrutiny of the Front Door in advance of the Ofsted monitoring visit.
- 13.3 A summary outcome of the key findings arising from the Peer Review of the Front Door is brought to the next Committee.
- 13.4 The Committee request that for their next meeting, data and audit information is available on theme four (front door and MASH) to enable a deep dive focus to take place.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft Improvement Plan: Theme Four

15. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.