

Report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Executive to be held on 2 April 2019

Subject:

BH

Ofsted Monitoring Visit – 6th and 7 March 2019

Summary statement:

Following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from the 17th to 28th September 2018, the first of a series of Monitoring Visits took place on the 6th and 7th March 2019.

The focus of the Monitoring Visit was on the Front Door looking at contacts and referrals, child protection enquiries, step-up from and step-down to early help and no further action/sign-posting.

The findings will be available from 29th March 2019. This is the only Monitoring Visit letter that will not be published by Ofsted.

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Portfolio:

Children and Families

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from the 17th to 28th September 2018, the first of a series of Monitoring Visits took place on the 6th and 7th March 2019.
- 1.2 The focus of the Monitoring Visit was on the Front Door looking at contacts and referrals, child protection enquiries, step-up from and step-down to early help and no further action/sign-posting.
- 1.3 The findings will be available from 29th March 2019. This is the only Monitoring Visit letter that will not be published by Ofsted.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Areas Covered in the Visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in relation to the Front Door, as well as the effectiveness of the manager oversight of the service, and the response to young people age 16-17 years old when they present as homeless.

The visit looked at electronic case records, observation of contact advisors, the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) social workers, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior managers.

2.2 Summary of Findings

- The Authority has started to make positive progress in improving its front door services with better screening of contacts, consent is better managed although there is still variability. Staff are embracing new ways of doing things.
- The interim Strategic Director and her leadership team have swiftly reached a good understanding of the scale and depth of inadequacies. A MASH Strategic Board with partners has been established and has demonstrated improvement in some activity at the front door. The improvement plan addresses the areas of improvement identified but would benefit from a greater focus on outcomes for children and young people.
- Homeless young people age 16-17 years-old who present to the council for help and support do not receive a good service. Improvements identified at the last inspection have not been progressed to meet the needs of these young people.
- The Children's Initial Contact Point is the first point of contact and contacts are screened promptly. The placement of a social worker in the team has strengthened the initial screening/consent for a referral.
- Cases sampled in the MASH demonstrated that thresholds are being applied appropriately. While there has been improvement in the level of screening which is now proportionate to the level of risk and need, decision making on some contacts goes out of the expected timescale for screening.

- The early help gateway has been co-located to the MASH and the process of a full integration with the service has been initiated. Staff have said they can see the benefits of co-location in improved communication and manager oversight.
- Early help triage is supported by a risk assessment methodology to determine the right service to meet the needs of the child and family. Contacts are appropriately sent to social care to be screened by the MASH when they are considered to require a social work service.
- When concerns or risks are heightened appropriate decisions are made to escalate for a social work assessment or a strategy meeting to consider whether child protection enquiries are required. Strategy meetings are well attended which promotes appropriate decision-making. Some delays in the completion of child protection enquiries due to basic checks and seeking of consent. The rationale for decision making is not always clearly recorded and not based on a sufficiently detailed outcome assessment.
- Interpreters are appropriately used for parents whose first language is not English, but this is not consistently the case for children. Children are seen and spoken to during child protection enquiries. There is little observation of their presentation and their views are limited to their current circumstances rather than ascertaining their wider lived experience. There is no evidence of social workers using direct work tools to aid communication. This means the ambition to improve the voice of the child has not yet been realised in the early stages of the child protection process.
- Safety planning agreed at strategy meetings identify basic protective actions but there is an over-emphasis on the parent to safeguard. This is a missed opportunity to consider the role of other professionals and the families wider support networks to develop comprehensive safety plans.
- The Interim Strategic Director is uncompromising in challenging practice within social care and across the partnership when it falls below expected standards or where practice has not been compliant. This has resulted in social work managers having more confidence to reassert their lead role. Police partners in the MASH report that it has been the strength of the relationships in the multi-agency hub which has enabled them to embrace the changes required to support the improvement plan.
- Domestic abuse contacts are considered by experienced and knowledgeable social workers which provides sensitive handling and timely response to referrals where domestic abuse features.
- In terms of young people who present as homeless, there are delays in assessing the needs of these young people and their right to become looked after is not explained or explored with them. The temporary accommodation arrangements offered are short term and not suitable, using bed and breakfast and adult hostels which leads to further exposure to risk.

- Improved data is enabling monitoring of service effectiveness, driving improvements and forward planning. More work needed to enable live data collection.
- Senior leaders understand the importance of having a robust programme of quality assurance. This is highlighted by a broad programme of auditing and dip sampling activity of the front door. More work needed to develop the skill base of auditors and auditing practice. Recognition that auditing is more meaningful for learning and in understanding quality when done with social workers and this will be developed. Use of moderation is good practice and provides additional checks and balances whilst consistency of approach is achieved.
- The auditing programme has enabled progress tracking of developments in social work practice, clearly identifying in December 2018 that the improvement plan had not yet brought about the necessary change to ensure children were safe. By February 2019, audits had identified that progress was now being made. Senior managers under the leadership of the Interim Strategic Director understand the service well and are clear about what is required to improve the quality and consistency of practice.
- Council leaders are fully committed to supporting the necessary changes so children receive good quality services. There has been significant financial investment, facilitating an uplift in social work salaries, retention payments and an increase in the social work establishment. Social workers are being supported in their learning and development and are fully engaged and enthusiastic about the change programme.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services and members of her leadership team will continue to work on the improvement journey and implement the actions in the Improvement Plan.
- 3.2 This report has not been included on the published forward plan as an issue for consideration however as the inspection took place on the 6th and 7th March and the draft letter was not received until the 14th March. As it is impractical to defer the decision until it has been included in the published Forward Plan the report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 10 of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in the Council's Constitution.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 Additional resources have been secured to support the improvement journey, including additional Social Workers to help reduce the demand and manage down the caseloads.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The Children's Social Care Improvement Board has been set up to ensure that timely and effective responses are made to all Ofsted's recommendations and DFE

required improvements. The Board focuses on outcomes for children and provides the drive and focus to ensure that necessary improvements are achieved and evidenced.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 The inspection in September 2018 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.

On 4 December 2018, following the Secretary of State's decision to take a non-statutory approach in Bradford's case, the DFE issued an Improvement notice to the council, requiring the council to take a number of actions to address all areas of improvement identified in the Ofsted report. The notice also provides for DFE reviews of progress against the improvement agenda.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

None.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Not applicable.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Not applicable.

7.6 TRADE UNION

Ongoing consultation with the trade unions around social work grade uplift and case loads continue between senior leaders within the service and trade union representatives.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The Improvement Notice and Improvement Plan affect all Wards, due to the Inadequate Judgement.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

In addition to the above improvements around the front door, further areas of improvement are also necessary, including services to children in care, subject to permanency plans, our fostering and residential services and children leaving care all of which sits under Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

None; both the Notice to Improve and Ofsted report have been published on their respective websites and are therefore in the public domain.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

- 8.1 Appendix 1 of this Report is embargoed and therefore not for publication.
- 8.2 Appendix 1 Ofsted Report of Monitoring Visit – 6th and 7th March 2019 contains confidential information as defined by section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 – Government restriction. The letter was given to the Local Authority by Ofsted upon terms which forbid the disclosure of the letter to the public until after 29 March 2019.

9. OPTIONS

- 9.1 Not applicable.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Not for Publication Appendix 1 – Ofsted Report of Monitoring Visit – 6th and 7th March 2019.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 12.1 None.