

# Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 2 September 2020

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**Subject:**

**Z**

**Children's Services Improvement Programme**

## **Summary statement:**

The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with information following the Department for Education (DfE) six month monitoring visit 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and report the publication of the revised Children's Services Improvement Plan

The DfE monitoring visit and the revised plan provide supplementary information which support the progress and areas of improvement detailed in the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 on Children's Services improvement journey.

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**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Children's Services**

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with information following the DfE six month monitoring visit 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and report the publication of the revised Children's Services Improvement Plan
- 1.2 The DfE monitoring visit and the revised plan provide supplementary information which support the progress and areas of improvement detailed in the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 on Children's Services improvement journey.

## **2. The DfE focused visit and Revised Children's Services Improvement Plan**

- 2.1 The DfE six month progress review of Children's Services was undertaken virtually through conference calls with Members, Strategic Directors and through staff groups and with partners.

The review was positive with DfE reporting that the foundations of improvement are now in place. They confirmed that the corporate centre reported working closely and collaborate with children's services which had been an area for development in previous reviews. Partners were positive, reporting that working practice and relationships were strengthening in recent months and there was more collaborative working.

Social work managers and staff described the leadership team as inspirational and recent improvements in supervision were providing the opportunity for reflective practice which was valued; along with clear practice standards which supported effective working and statutory compliance. It was identified that recruitment to permanent social work positions is still required, which is one of our top priorities.

Staff groups expressed challenges with the use of ICT which would improve their working arrangements and response to families. This has become more prominent with the pandemic and access to video conferencing along with improvements in case management systems would help. This is acknowledged and we already have a comprehensive 2 year programme of ICT projects started. The additional feedback from staff has been helpful in setting the priorities further and is being responded to.

Significant development in Early Help and the new Early Help Co-ordinator role is being valued by schools but there is further work required to clarify their role and communicate this to partners. We know this is especially important with children and young people returning to school in September 2020. DfE commented that early help work needs to be timely and concise if this is to support further reductions to the Integrated Front Door. This we acknowledge and is already detailed in the improvement plan with a new section dedicated to this work and progress to measure this.

Overall the DfE state they were presented with a positive view of progress and an improving culture within Bradford's Children's Services. The areas of focus that are highlighted from the review fall into two categories, namely HR and IT.

In relation to HR the establishment of the leadership and management teams with recent recruitment is a positive; however, DfE express this needs to be supplemented by a robust recruitment and retention policy. This is acknowledged and work is on-going with a renewed recruitment drive with retention plans for September 2020. The Bradford Offer has been compiled to support this and the Workforce Development Strategy and Plan will improve and maintain this focus with priorities on Recruitment; Retention and Capability.

In relation to IT issues the DfE acknowledge there is the capacity in Bradford to resolve these through the new ICT Programme of 10 individual projects. The areas which require some focus are the electronic audit and electronic supervision systems. In addition, improvement in the LCS case management system with new forms supporting practice; an e-learning platform for training and video technology will all bring significant benefits and are essential to drive efficient and effective work with families.

- 2.2 The revised Children's Services Improvement Plan has been agreed by the Children's Improvement Board and published on Bradford Council website. It will continue to be a 'live' document with regular progress reported at subsequent Boards.

The plan has been revised to reflect progress made and the changes in Children's Services leadership with a new DCS in July 2019; Deputy Director for Children's Social Care in November 2019; and Heads of Service since March 2020. In addition to the new leadership and management arrangements, Bradford has had four monitoring visits from Ofsted, the last one in February 2020, which have all provided valuable feedback and learning. This new plan supports us to take forward Ofsted feedback and learning, along with our own self-evaluation which Ofsted recognise is a strength in that we know what needs to improve.

A copy of the new Improvement Plan is attached. This now includes the project led improvement work through the four Improvement Programmes, along with Children's Social Care led service improvements through the new Head of Service structure and partner led improvement work. The key areas of progress and areas of current focus for improvement were reported in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee report in August 2020. Nothing has changed since this time with work continuing at pace.

### **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 None.

### **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

- 4.1 There are no financial issues beyond the additional social work resources that have already been secured to assist in the improvement journey. Any additional support required will be picked up and supported via the Enablers Programme.

**5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

5.1 Risks in relation to improvement are being picked up and managed through the Improvement Programme governance framework.

**6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

6.1 Not applicable.

**7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

Not applicable.

**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**

Not applicable.

**7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

The Ofsted judgement affects all wards.

**7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

All improvements across Children's Services will strengthen the council's ability to discharge its Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

**7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

None; the Ofsted report and Notice of Improvement are in the public domain.

**8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

8.1 None.

## **9. OPTIONS**

9.1 None.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That this Committee notes the contents of this report and the progress being made.

## **11. APPENDICES**

11.1 Improvement Plan.

11.2 DfE Monitoring Visit – 28 July 2020.

11.3 Bradford Children's Services Self-Assessment.

## **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

12.1 Report to Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 5 August 2020:  
[Children's O&S Committee - 5 August - Report V](#)