



## **Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 7 October 2020**

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**AE**

**Subject:**

**Children's Services Improvement Programme**

**Summary statement:**

The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with a progress update on elements of Children's Services Improvement Plan.

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**Portfolio:**

**Children & Families**

**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Children's Services**

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with a progress update on the Children's Services Improvement Plan which is enabling us to improve our services for children and families.

## **2. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 2.1 The following updates are split into three sections:

- Highlights this period and areas for improvement over the coming months.
- Key areas of focus and action with more in depth updates.
- Children's Improvement Plan summary of progress.

### **2.2 Highlights this period and areas for improvement over the coming months**

- 2.2.1 Highlights this period:

- Placements and Sufficiency Strategy is complete – action plan is being compiled and will be published by the end of September 2020
- Workforce Development Strategy is being finalised – action plan is being compiled and will be published in October 2020
- Life Story Work - Heads of Service have reviewed all cases in their areas and identified children and young people who are outstanding life story work. A specialist service is being commissioned to complete life story work for some children who are identified as needing this work urgently. In addition, work is underway reviewing the approach to life story work to embed this into practice across all services.

### **2.2.2 Areas for improvement over the coming months:**

- September will see the start of Performance Clinics with individual Heads of Service to review performance data; quality of practice; workforce and financial management.
- Scoping of the ICT projects needs to be completed and projects progressed to support practice; managing quality and financial management.
- Finalise remuneration package, workforce development strategy and launch a refreshed recruitment drive.
- Begin rollout of modern ICT kit.

### **2.3. Key areas of focus and action with more in depth update**

- **A robust recruitment and retention policy that will reduce reliance on agency staff.**

*Action being taken:* The Bradford Offer to attract level 3 social workers is now in draft for ratification. The Workforce Development Strategy and action plan will improve and maintain focus with priorities on Recruitment; Retention and Capability.

### **2.3.2 Launch of the recruitment drive for qualified social workers**

Work is underway to develop and launch a new attraction and recruitment campaign for early October 2020. Key elements include:

- Centralised view of vacancies by level and team alongside early awareness of leavers coupled with agency numbers to provide a baseline for activity and on-going focus for targeted campaigns for localities. Recent work on the establishment should enable this to start.
- Focus groups and engagement with Staff Reference Group and the social care leadership team to develop the existing brand ‘Children at the heart of all we do’ and to answer the key question about ‘why the people we need would want to join us in Bradford’.
- The above outputs from staff and leaders will inform new imagery, tone of voice, channels to market, microsite and data/reporting to measure the impact and success of campaigns. This work will be part delivered internally alongside the Communications team and externally through a specialist branding organisation. Costs to be discussed and agreed on an ‘invest to save’ basis.
- Interim plan is in development with Procurement to use a hybrid model for supply of a limited number of permanent Level 3 qualified social workers on a fixed rate via 2-3 social care agencies while the direct permanent campaign is built in-house and launched.
- Utilise new attraction channels – to include Community Care, JobsGoPublic, BASW and stepping up social media and programmatic work on e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to advertise roles where they have traditionally only been promoted on Bradford’s own careers pages on the website. Costs to be discussed and agreed on an ‘invest to save’ basis.
- Define with Service Managers and Heads of Service’s ‘what good looks like’ in terms of Level 3 social workers to inform a rewrite of the interview packs to reduce instances of new starters leaving with <12 months service.
- Revamp of candidate information and induction packs and review of on-boarding activity so that new starters have a great experience when joining Bradford.

Many other elements of work are also starting or being scoped but the above headlines are recruitment focussed only for the purposes of this update.

- **A supervision policy which sets out how social workers will be supported to reflect on practice and are more effectively supported in their role.**  
*Action being taken:* Recent improvements in supervision are providing the opportunity for reflective practice; along with clear practice standards will support effective working and statutory compliance.
- **The recruitment of business support workers to take away time consuming administrative duties from social workers.**  
*Action being taken:* A comprehensive review of demand and cost appraisal will be concluded in September. This appraisal has a number of clear aspirations and plans to support practice which includes a quota of Business Support to work directly with case holding workers, this will assist them to

focus on front line practice with families. The cost and demand appraisal will be considered by the Council's management team in October 2020.

*Action being taken:* We have initiated a detailed analysis to better understand the reasons behind the increased rate of sickness absence. Early indicators suggest that since 2017, there has been a steady increase in permanent leavers over. Unchecked, the impact of leavers and starters has been building in the background for some time. Agency usage increased significantly in 2019, the usual impact of an inadequate Ofsted rating. In turn, sickness almost doubled as all of the typical 'people indicators' show that a steady decline and set of issues had been building in the system for some time. Vacancy rates have hovered at or around 15% from 2017-2019. Rates over 15% usually indicate that a recruitment challenge is highly likely to happen and action should have been taken at least two years ago to address this matter.

- **Improved practice of sickness absence.**

*Action being taken:* We have initiated a detailed analysis to better understand the reasons behind the increased rate of sickness absence. Early indicators suggest that since 2017, there has been a steady increase in permanent leavers over. Unchecked the impact of leavers and starters has been building in the background for some time. Agency usage increased significantly in 2019, the usual impact of an inadequate Ofsted rating. In turn, sickness almost doubled as all of the typical 'people indicators' show that a steady decline and set of issues had been building in the system for some time. Vacancy rates have hovered at or around 15% from 2017-2019. Rates over 15% usually indicate that a serious case is highly likely to happen and action should have been taken at least two years ago to address this matter.

- **Better IT systems for staff, including improved access to video technology**

*Action being taken:* Children's Services are working with ICT to prioritise workers who need new technology through a council wide project called the 'Modern Workplace' to improve access more widely. Improvements in case management systems are being progressed with 11 new ICT projects through a comprehensive 2 years' programme of ICT which has commenced. 11 new forms for case work have gone live this month.

- **Early help work needs to be timely and concise if this is to support a reduction in inappropriate referrals at the Integrated Front Door.**

*Action being taken:* This month sees the extension of support to partners to take on the Lead Practitioner (LP) role for children and young people who do not require CSC support or intervention, but still have needs which require a multi-agency response co-ordinated through an early help assessment and whole family plan. Working with Partners through the Bradford Partnership, agreement has been reached on some key documents, which include a lead practitioner handbook, an Early Help assessment and planning tool, and a multi-agency learning programme. Recording of all cases on the Early Help Module of LCS is currently being undertaken by Early Help Co-ordinators for individual LP's until the system is opened for access to partners to be able to do this themselves

### **2.3.3 The implementation of Practice Guidance and development of a Practice Model**

The Practice Standards were rolled out in July and August 2020. Audit activity to benchmark implementation and application of the Practice Standards will begin in October 2020.

The draft Practice Model will be shared with key partners through the Safeguarding Board and will be launched in November through the Thematic Task and Finish Groups, Bradnet and Newsletters. The Training Programme will be introduced in November, starting with a refresher course on Signs of Safety completed by trauma informed and relationship based practice.

Due to Covid-19, the training will be launched via virtual sessions and e-learning modules on the proviso that the ICT kit is made available.

### **2.3.5 Analysis of NFA Data (Integrated Front Door)**

In July 2020 we made some changes to our recording pathway and have since been able to break down our NFA data into the following categories:

- Does not meet threshold for Early Help
- No Consent (and therefore sent back to gain consent)
- Family moved out of area
- Information and advice provided
- Signposted to other agency (universal services)

Initial interrogation of the data detailed how almost 50% of cases were closed at the Integrated Front Door due to them not meeting threshold or having no consent. We initiated audit activity on cases that 'did not meet threshold'. This was also a key recommendation from the Health Check and will support us in understanding our thresholds, decision making and responses to children and their families. It will also allow us to feedback real case examples that didn't meet threshold coupled with the reasons why.

At the end of each month we will host a 'Feedback Day' where representatives from each agency will be invited to discuss and take away the audit findings linked to their service area. This will allow us to reflect together and ensure our partners are involved in the audit process. The process will help us form a 'learning loop' which in time will become part of our usual business.

### **2.3.6 Audits undertaken in August 2020**

August 2020 marked the beginning of our audit activity in the Integrated Front Door. The audit sample for August 2020 included:

- Cases which resulted in no further action due to them not meeting threshold for an Early Help support package.
- Age range 0-18

- 10 cases each from the following sources; Police, Education/Schools, Health, Other. The 10 cases in the 'other' category are from varying sources and could include referrals from professionals or the public.

Of the 40 audits, two thirds of them were appropriate to be referred to CSC. A third were considered to be inappropriate referrals and have been summarised below:

- Five of the 10 referrals were from the Police were incidents of verbal disputes between parents where no child was present.
- All ten of the referrals received from Education were in relation to SEN wanting to inform CSC that an EHC needs assessment is being undertaken. No information was being requested. Information was logged only on CSC file.
- From the 10 Health Audits, 2 referrals were via letter from paediatricians reporting that an accidental injury to a child had been sustained however no safeguarding concerns were raised. The incidents were not deemed proportionate for a referral to have been made to CSC.
- From the 10 'Other' Audits, 2 Court Orders were received providing information / update only on cases that were closed.

It should be noted that the IFD audit process remains in its infancy and will be reviewed on a monthly basis. It is hoped that over time, the exercise will improve the quality of referrals, responses and outcomes for vulnerable children across the Bradford District.

### **2.3.7 Development of Domestic Abuse (DA) services in response to Covid-19**

The Council allocated £900k to the Domestic Violence Service lead by the Place Directorate to meet need and minimise risk for victims of domestic abuse and their families.

The funding will:

- Open more supported housing units for families with children that have to flee to find safety.
- Increased workers that are working on a whole family basis to provide support to.
- YIDVA&CIDVA Project top up funding.
- Increased Counselling for children (subject to face to face counselling being reinstated).
- Increased support for victims and perpetrators.
- Added resource to cope with the higher level of referrals and bring victims into service.
- Additional and new provision of support to perpetrators.

## **3. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

- 3.1 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.

#### **4. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

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

#### **5. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

- 5.1 Not applicable.

#### **6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

##### **6.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

Not applicable.

##### **6.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

##### **6.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

Not applicable.

##### **6.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

##### **6.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

Not applicable.

##### **6.6 TRADE UNION**

Not applicable.

##### **6.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

The Ofsted judgement affects all wards.

##### **6.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

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

##### **6.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

None.

#### **7. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

- 7.1 None.

**8. OPTIONS**

8.1 None.

**9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That this Committee notes the contents of this report and the progress being made and that the Committee receives a detailed analysis in respect of recruitment and sickness absence at the next Committee.

**10. APPENDICES**

10.1 None.

**11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

11.1 None.