

# Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 22 September 2021

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**Subject:**

Update on Children's Services Improvement Journey

**Summary statement:**

This report will provide an update on highlights from the Improvement Plan and focus on areas of progress, and highlight areas of work in progress.

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**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Children's Services**

## 1. SUMMARY

This report will provide an update on highlights from the Improvement Plan and focus on areas of progress, and highlight areas of work in progress.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the outcome of the OFSTED Help and Protection Monitoring Visit. The Committee heard that whilst OFSTED recognised the progress made since the 2018 inspection, it remained clear that the improvement work needs to be accelerated. This report seeks to provide Members with an update on the continued work to improve services for children.

### Overview of Performance

- 2.2 We continue to monitor performance utilising bi-weekly forecasting reports and the monthly Vital Signs report to ensure we are on track and any concerns are identified at the earliest opportunity. Performance management is now embedded across the service, where performance dips there is Management oversight from the Team Manager through to the Deputy Director is now routine.

### Progress and Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC)

- 2.3 For the last 5 months, demand for ICPCs was a significant factor in meetings being delayed as the unit had not been able to accommodate the number of requests – highest in June at 156. Following some additional capacity, it is pleasing to report so far (September 2021) that timeliness of ICPCs has improved to 50% and continues to improve. It should be noted that children are seen and a safety plan is agreed pending the Initial Child Protection Conference being convened.

Audit activity has confirmed that our thresholds remain consistent and appropriate with regards to progressing to strategy discussions and decision making to progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference.

### Initial Health Assessments (IHA) for Children in Care

- 2.4 The Initial Health Assessment (IHA) is a holistic health and well-being assessment, to identify these unmet health needs, to agree a health action plan to address them and then to involve the right services to implement the plan. The health assessment needs to happen in a timely way (statutory requirement is 20 working days), to identify these needs and to involve primary and secondary care, other health therapy services and also to advise education. These children also need 6-12 monthly Review Health Appointments (RHA) to ensure the health recommendations are implemented and to identify any ongoing concerns.
- 2.5 Parental consent is required prior to an IHA being undertake. For some children for whom the Local Authority shares Parental Responsibility, consent can be provided by the Local Authority, however, it is best practice to encourage and support parents

to provide their consent.

- 2.6 At the beginning of the year there were 75 outstanding consent forms, this has now (September 2021) reduced to 37, some of these children are new care entrants. Weekly triage meetings now take place between Health and Social Care so as to ensure children entering care receive a timely health assessment.

### **Placement Co-ordination**

- 2.7 The Placement Co-ordination Team is responsible for the sourcing of placements for children and young people utilising the Regional White Rose Framework and the Leaving Care Purchasing System and other ad hoc arrangements. The Placement Co-ordination Team lead and manage the processes for ensuring that placement provision meets the need of children and young people and identifying placements that offer the value for money.

- 2.8 We have invested in the Placement Co-ordination team in order to address the gaps and support delivery of:

- Commercial review of placements to ensure they continue to deliver value for money
- Sufficiency planning and monitoring
- Market engagement and development to maximise opportunities for innovation
- Strong effective partnerships with Providers
- Quality assurance and contract management
- Effective commission and needs analysis
- Effective participation and engagement at a regional level
- Increased collaboration with social work localities
- Improvement and automation of processes
- Effective commissioning of post-16 placements

- 2.9 We have realigned current resources to ensure the roles are aligned to the correct Children's Services Team. Family finding roles were transferred to the Fostering Service as these roles search for foster homes for children. In April 2021, 2 posts were transferred from the Leaving Care Service to Placement Team, these roles are responsible for commissioning placements for children in supported lodgings, staying put and staying close provisions. The transfer of this function provides increased oversight, commercial governance and realigns all placement requests to a single pathway. The policies and procedures related to these activities are currently under review.

### **Review of Placement Referral Process and Improvements Implemented**

- 2.10 A number of improvements to the processes for placement referrals and management of placement demand have been made in the last 12 months. The improvements provide increased management oversight of demand and better prioritisation of work:

- Implemented demand management meetings twice daily
- Implemented new searching and offers template
- Referral form redesign (automation/flow and language)
- Placement Coordinators assigned to localities and attend locality team meeting to increase collaboration and joint working
- Demand data set created to provide statistic on number of “Emergency, Urgent and Routine” request to support improvements to notice given for placement requests.
- Implemented Priority 1 meetings for High needs/challenging placement search activity (SW Team, PC Team and education where appropriate) – Joint working

### **Post 16 Semi Independent Accommodation and Support contract review and improvements**

2.11 A review of the current commissioned arrangements for Post 16 and processes for management of providers has been undertaken. Post 16 Semi-independent placements are not OFSED regulated as such internal quality assurance, governance and scrutiny of arrangements is important. The review highlighted areas of improvement and the following improvements have been implemented:

- Quality assurance framework and tracking tools developed
- Independent QA visits process – Visits undertaken by Reg.44 Officers
- Joint working with Housing Standards Team for H&S checks (training booked for member of PC Team to be trained on Housing Standards inspections Sept 2021)

2.12 The improvements delivered to date strengthen our governance and quality assurance of Post 16 placements ensuring that mandatory annual check of H&S certification, insurances and DBS checks are conducted and evidenced and that placements are visited to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of our young people.

### **Joint Placement Panel (Joint funding CSC, Education and CCG)**

2.13 A review of the Joint Placement Panel processes and governance was undertaken, the review highlighted complex and time consuming processes that did not provide the required governance and did not support effective working relationships with partners. New automated processes implemented have been well received by all panel member organisations (Health, Education & Children’s Social Care). The new process streamline panel activity, provide auditable decision making and financial agreement. The new financial processes reduce admin time and provide clear and auditable financial information for joint finding agreements.

- Implemented new governance processes
- Implemented new financial processes
- Developed and implemented Joint Placement Commissioning

- Pathways

## Progress being made in relation to Children in Care

### Care Planning Meeting

- 2.14 The Care Planning Meeting to support permanence guidance was introduced in July 2020 and relaunched in Summer 2021. The form has now been built into the LCS system and was launched in July 2021. The data is now built into the system and will be available in the weekly reports. To track the frequency and quality of care planning meetings, an electronic recording form was launched on Liquid Logic in August 2021. Managers are now able to oversee practice and performance in this area in a way that was not previously possible. Weekly reports are shared within the Management group to identify children who are overdue a Care Planning meeting alongside themes across the service.
- 2.15 The regular use of permanence trackers has ensured that operational and senior managers can proactively work to monitor and support children to achieve permanence. From January to August 2021, we have successfully secured permanence for 60 children via a Special Guardianship Order which is an increase of 12 from the previous year. Our tracking systems in place have greatly assisted with these outcomes and the below feedback from carers demonstrates our effectiveness in relation to the timeliness of our work;

*“Myself and J would like to say a massive thank you for everything you have done. We honestly believe that had you not stepped in we would still be at square one. We are really grateful for not only what you have done but also the speed in which these have been done”.*

- 2.16 Alongside this, over the past 6 months and by working closely with One Adoption West Yorkshire, 31 children have been successfully placed for adoption. Our data tells us that we can demonstrate an improving picture when it comes to achieving permanence for children through adoption. In February 2021, the percentage of children ceasing care to become adopted was 7.1%. Since this time, we have seen a gradual monthly increase in this figure which currently stands at a rate of 8.6%.
- 2.17 A recent audit of our Care Planning to Achieve Permanence meetings has identified how the revised template is being used in most children’s cases. When meetings are taking place, recommendations are followed up in child in care reviews ensuring timely progression of actions. The impact of this for some children has been positive and demonstrates unmet needs being identified and supported. The quote below demonstrates that carers are actively involved and listened to;

*“The meeting was lovely and informal, though obviously following the agenda so all points were discussed. We were given the opportunity to voice our thoughts on all topics covered. We were made to feel very comfortable and encouraged”  
(Child in Care review parent feedback form 11/02/21).*

### **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no other considerations.

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

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**

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

### **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

Not applicable.

### **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

#### **7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

#### **7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

Not applicable.

#### **7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

#### **7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

Not applicable.

#### **7.5 TRADE UNION**

Not applicable.

#### **7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

The Ofsted judgement affects all wards.

#### **7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)**

Not applicable.

**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**

None.

**9. OPTIONS**

None.

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

**11. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 -Improvement Plan

Appendix 2 - Vital Signs Report

**12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.