

Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny to be held on 12th October 2022.

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Plan - Overview and Scrutiny

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Summary statement:

In late 2021 and early 2022, the Secretary of State for Education issued a statutory direction to Bradford Council. This required the Council to work with a central Government appointed Commissioner to set up a Trust to deliver Children's Services in the District. In the past year, the Council and the Commissioner have worked with local partners to review and strengthen our improvement work. One area of concern, highlighted by the Commissioner was the overly complex nature of the previous improvement plan. As such the Council and the Commissioner have worked with partners on the Improvement Board and have agreed to a revised Improvement Plan. This sets out, how the district will work together to improve the lives of local children and families and the services that work with them.

To ensure Overview and Scrutiny have proper oversight of the implementation of the plan, it is proposed that officers provide:

- Regular reporting of the Improvement Plan scorecard in line with Overview and Scrutiny timetable.
- Exception reporting of other issues as required.

This approach should provide Overview and Scrutiny with full information and enable it to assess progress and scrutinise the effectiveness of the plan and the Improvement Board.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area: Childrens Services

1. SUMMARY

2. Improvement Plan for Children's Services

Background

In late 2021 and early 2022, the Secretary of State for Education issued a statutory direction to Bradford Council, requiring the Council to work with a central Government appointed Commissioner and then to set up a Trust to deliver Children's Services in the District. In the past year, the Council and the Commissioner have worked with local partners to review and strengthen our improvement work.

One area of concern, highlighted by the Commissioner was the overly complex nature of the previous improvement plan. At the time of appointment of the Commissioner, the Council put together a focused, Seven Priority Improvement Plan (Appendix 1) which ran from September 2021 to March 2022. Further to this, the Council and the Commissioner have worked with partners on the Improvement Board and have agreed a revised Improvement Plan, that sets out how the district will work together to improve the lives of local children and families and the services that work with them.

The Seven Priorities Improvement Plan September 2021 to March 2022

This plan served a useful interim role, in focusing improvement work during this six-month period. Some useful progress was made and some work had to be carried over to the new Improvement Plan.

A summary of the Seven Priorities plan:

1. Children and young people will recognise Bradford Council and its partners as good Corporate Parents.

The Corporate Parenting Panel has been re-established and reviewed with the involvement of Children and Young People (C&YP). Training events on Corporate Parenting have been delivered to C&YP, Senior Managers across BMDC, Elected Members and Partner Agencies.

The Council, along with the Corporate Parenting Panel, Young People and Partners are now in a position to develop the Corporate Parenting Strategy which is outlined within the new Improvement Plan.

Views of C&YP have been collated and statutory care reviews have taken place. This is shown in the Monitoring Visit, where the experiences of C&YP demonstrate that things are improving.

2. Caseloads across all Social work teams, including Fostering, continue to be safe and manageable.

Practice Supervisors have been holding cases where required, for some time and there will be a future expectation that they will hold up to 8 cases as part of their job

role.

Staff teams continue to return back to offices and face to face contact has increased.

A new Locality structure has been put in place, to support spans of control for Managers. They will be required to manage no more than 6 Social Workers to ensure adequate management capacity.

The new Improvement Plan outlines the improvement work, that continues around the reduction of the numbers of single agency workers and proportionately increased numbers of permanent staff and fixed-term teams.

Continued focus on the new Improvement Plan.

3. We will have a sufficient Fostering workforce to look after children and young people in Bradford.

New permanent Team Manager recruited with a focus on increasing in-house Foster Carers and have increased the Fostering staffing establishment to support this. We have also increased fostering fees to better enable us to recruit and retain Foster Carers. We are now using a skills-based alignment approach for fostering which is linked to the experience and re-numeration.

Continued focus in the new Improvement Plan.

4. Fewer children will be coming into care as our Edge of Care strategy is effective.

Redesign of the service is in place, to enable a defined way of working on Edge of Care. The team will be closer aligned to the Locality frontline Social Work to prevent children coming into care. This work reflects the outcomes of the Sufficiency Strategy.

Continued focus in the new Improvement Plan

5. The Implementation of a workforce plan, that will lead to the increased retention of ASYEs, and provide progression opportunities for all Social Workers

A supervision database has been developed and implemented. Data informs areas of improving practice and quality for CPD, performance objectives and audit outcomes (best practice and learning) to align.

Brand work and microsite launched which includes video interviews to drive attraction.

We have a newly developed ASYE Academy, which has increased the number of intakes to twice a year and includes a comprehensive training offer.

Stay Interviews; this was launched and is a work in progress which will continue to

be developed within the new improvement Plan

Group Supervisions are happening within some Service Area's and proving beneficial. These will be rolled out in all other Service Areas as part of the new Improvement Plan.

There will be a review, as part of the new Improvement Plan, being undertaken on Induction's that will cover both Corporate and Service based elements. This is to ensure that no case work will be allocated during the induction period and that other areas are being covered such as: health, safety and wellbeing, governance, recruitment, procurement, IT, navigating systems and processes.

6. The Sufficiency Strategy is fit for purpose, iterative and responsive to the changing demographic of C&YP in our care.

The Sufficiency Strategy has been developed and launched.

Residential provision has been reviewed and a bid has been submitted for Capital Match Funding investment from the DfE. There is a continued focus in the new Improvement Plan.

7. Leaders (all of DMT) have a greater understanding of the quality of social work practice.

Leaders are more visible across the Service through fortnightly DCS drop in sessions and Monthly Service Wide Staff Briefings. A direct e-mail inbox has been created that Leaders have access to and will respond to. A SharePoint Site for the workforce has been developed with regular updates on processes, systems and general news. The SharePoint site also includes a weekly Pass it On and a Monthly Newsletter from the Deputy Director.

The new Improvement Plan

The Improvement Board has now developed and agreed to a focused plan, which is organised around two main themes and twelve priorities. This will shape our work until 2024.

The two themes are (A) 'Improving the lives of Children and Young People' – i.e. actions that are focused on change that will directly improve practice and outcomes for children; and (B) – 'Creating the conditions for success' – changes to the services, structures and policies around Children's Services that will create an environment, where practitioners can thrive and do their best work with children and families.

The priorities are as follows:

A - Improving the lives of children and young people:

1. Who is referred to our Front Door
2. Who needs Early Help

3. Who is in need of help and protection
4. Who are on the Edge of care (to include a Turning the Curve plan to safely reduce the number of children needing to be looked after)
5. Who are looked after and who have left care

B – Creating the conditions for success

6. Ensuring children, young people and families have voice and influence
7. Strategic leadership, ensuring the conditions for success are created
8. A sufficient and stable workforce
9. A constant focus on practice improvement and an agreed practice model
10. A strong and collaborative partnership
11. Buildings, IT, Finance, Admin, HR support and equipment that support quality practice
12. Data and Insight (Learning and improving through performance management and quality assurance)

Each of these priorities has a short but focused action plan, and a set of key performance indicators to assess progress and impact.

Monitoring, Evaluation and the role of Overview and Scrutiny

The progress and impact of the Improvement Plan will be monitored and evaluated through:

- An overall scorecard of the Improvement Plan performance indicators
- A 'report card' for each of the priorities of the plan
- Exception reporting of any significant issue, data or problem that may have an impact on the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

The Improvement Board made up of the Council and all significant local partners. It has the responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation of the plan. As such reports will go to the Improvement Board for consideration and, where necessary, the Board may agree remedial partnership actions.

In order to ensure Overview and Scrutiny continue to have oversight of the implementation of the plan, it is proposed that officers provide:

- Regular reporting of the Improvement Plan scorecard
- Regular reporting of each priority's 'Report Card', with additional information setting out any remedial actions agreed by the Improvement Board.
- Exception reporting of other issues as required.

This approach should provide Overview and Scrutiny with full information without duplication and enable it to assess progress and scrutinise the effectiveness of the plan and the Improvement Board.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are no further considerations that Overview and Scrutiny are asked to consider at this time.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The success and progress of the improvement of Children's Services, relies on continued adequate financial investment, to ensure the sustainability of Children's Services within the future financial plans of the Council.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Ensuring the Improvement Plan succeeds, is a key Council priority. The report sets out the Governance arrangements for the plan and how OSC will fulfil its constitutional role.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

The Council is under a duty pursuant to the Children's Act 1989 (including 2004 amendments) and through reforms in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to safeguard and protect looked after children, and children in need in its area.

The Directions issued by the Secretary of State Direction state at paragraph 5(b) and (c) of Annex 1 (Terms of Reference) that the Children's Services Commissioner will:

- “(b) Support the Council in shaping the trust's strategic vision for the transformed services, including organisational design, governance and its scope of delivery
- (c) Identify key deliverables, and produce a plan detailing the outputs and key performance indicators the Children's Services Commissioner will meet over the duration of the project, agreeing this with the Secretary of State.”

The Ofsted reports must also be taken into account in the formulation of the Improvement Plan and the recommendations in the 20/21 Ofsted report state that:

“In order to fully address ongoing concerns expressed by Ofsted in its 2018 Report and subsequent Monitoring Letters, the Council should continue to improve its arrangements and action plan. The Council should also ensure that robust monitoring and reporting processes are in place and that challenge, scrutiny and escalation arrangements drive the required improvements for service users and sustain the progress made to-date in implementing the actions to address the issues raised by Ofsted.”

Additionally, to be lawful the improvement must be sound, reasonable, proportionate, consistent, transparent. fit for purpose and in compliance with best value considerations. Best value is defined as: the legal duty introduced in the Local Government Act 1999 that requires councils to make arrangements to continuously improve the way in which its functions are exercised and to have regard to a

combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The report states that the visions and objectives set out in the Improvement Plan are reasonable and proportionate and will be monitored and evaluated through:

- An overall scorecard of the Improvement Plan performance indicators
- A 'report card' for each of the priorities of the plan
- Exception reporting of any significant issue, data or problem that may have an impact on the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

These measures ensure continuously, consistent and fit for purpose operations which meet the best value considerations, and detail the actual outputs against the key performance indicators (being set target measures) in order to ensure that improvement, efficiency, effectiveness and economy are transparent.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct impacts from the contents of this report relating to Sustainability

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

There are no direct impacts from the contents of this report relating to Green House Gas Emissions.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

This Improvement Plan is intended to ensure the community safety, in particular for the young people living in Bradford. The visions are aligned to enable objectives and working practices to develop the safest community possible.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no direct impacts from the contents of this report relating to the Human Rights Act.

7.5 TRADE UNIONS

There are no direct HR implications in this report for consideration at this stage.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct ward implications for this report.

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

N/A

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The report sets out a plan for improving services for children and young people, and how Overview and Scrutiny will provide oversight, support and challenge.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There are no direct Privacy Impact Assessment implications for this report.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

9. OPTIONS

There are no options provided for this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview and Scrutiny is recommended to consider and agree the proposed approach, which includes the vision and objectives for arrangements to monitor and evaluate improvements delivered to Children's Services through the Improvement Plan, and the work of the Improvement Board.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Seven Priorities Improvement Plan September 2021 to March 2022



Improvement Plan
25 November 2021.p

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS