

Meeting: Policy and Development Decision Group (JCT) **Date:** 9th October 2017

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Children's Services Improvement Plan: Six Month Update – October 2017

Is the decision a key decision? No

When does the decision need to be implemented?

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1. Proposal and Introduction

- 1.1 Torbay Children's Services were judged to be inadequate in January 2016, following an inspection by Ofsted undertaken in November 2015. The Council had previously been issued with an improvement notice in January 2011, following similar findings in respect of safeguarding services for children and young people.
- 1.2 In May 2016, Torbay Council was subject to a Statutory Direction confirming the appointment of Hampshire County Council's Chief Executive, John Coughlan, as the Commissioner for Children's Services in Torbay. Hampshire Children's Services were also contracted as 'expert advisor' to support the required improvement activity.
- 1.3 A Children's Improvement Board (CIB), chaired by the Commissioner and comprising of Department for Education, Council, partner agency and Elected Member representatives has now been established to oversee improvement activity. Meeting on a six weekly basis, the CIB receives regular updates on improvement activity, within Children's Services and across partners, performance data and the emerging impact on outcomes for children.
- 1.4 Alongside the work of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB), Torbay's Children's Services have been subject to periodic monitoring visits by a team of Inspectors from Ofsted. Since services were judged inadequate in January 2016, there have been three monitoring visits on 25th/26th July and 14th/15th December 2016 and 25th/26th July 2017.

- 1.5 The first two visits looked at the quality and timeliness of plans and decision making in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and for children in need of help or protection. On those occasions, Ofsted concluded that 'adequate' or 'expected' progress was being made and that the pace of improvement had increased in recent months.
- 1.6 The most recent monitoring visit looked at the Care Leavers' service and concluded that improvements in their arrangements had not kept pace with that in other areas. Ofsted also highlighted concerns at the Council's wider role as a Corporate Parent. A copy of the most recent monitoring letter is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Reason for Proposal

- 2.1 A detailed planning and oversight tool has been developed to monitor progress against the recommendations made in their January 2016 report. The improvement plan remains a dynamic document and is subject to regular review by the CIB, Children's Services and Corporate Leadership Teams and Executive Member. The plan has recently been revised to distinguish between completed and outstanding actions in order to ensure a tight focus on the latter. A copy of the most recent update of the improvement plan is attached at Appendix 2.
- 2.2 In light of the most recent Ofsted letter, the programme of improvement work with Hampshire Children's Services, as the Department for Education appointed improvement partner, has been substantially revised. It places considerable emphasis on preparation for the next Ofsted monitoring visit, scheduled for 31st October/1st November, and assumes that full re-inspection is likely within the next three to six months. A copy of the revised programme is attached at Appendix 3.
- 2.3 Set out below is a summary of the current position in respect of improvement activity:
- The pace of improvement work has increased over recent months although the lack of progress in the first nine months of 2016 has not been recovered.
 - Good progress has been made in developing and embedding a robust performance management framework that enables the service to understand its strengths and weaknesses.
 - The timeliness of visits, decision making and assessment improvement has improved in most areas although further work is needed to ensure this is sustained and encompasses all areas of service provision. Improvement in this area has been adversely impacted by more recent Social Worker 'churn' in case field work teams.
 - Recent 'churn' in the Social Care workforce in some teams is impacting adversely on the continuity and quality of case work – this is currently subject to intervention by senior managers to stabilise the service.
 - Children's Services and partner agencies have recently revised their Early Help arrangements, including the implementation of a 'single front door' for all contacts and referrals.

- The quality of assessments and plans remains too variable with inconsistent management oversight.
- The quality and scope of case recording is not always reflective of good direct work with children and families.
- Corporate oversight of Children's Services' plans and decision making has improved although Ofsted has raised concerns about the Council's wider approach towards Corporate Parenting. This is particularly so in relation to support for Care Leavers in respect of housing, employment, health and education.

2.4 The cumulative evidence from the work of the CIB and Ofsted monitoring visits is of a service that is making steady progress in most areas but from a very low starting point. The pace of improvement has recently accelerated following the appointment of a new Director and Assistant Director, Children's Safeguarding, but this will need to intensify over the coming months, as the service approaches re-inspection. Alongside the work within Children's Services, the Council and its partner agencies will need to evidence their material contribution towards improving outcomes for children looked after and care leavers if a positive inspection outcome is to be achieved.

2.5 Alongside the regular scrutiny of improvement activity and performance by the CIB and Children's Services and Corporate Leadership, updates will be provided to Council on at least a six monthly basis as part of the enhanced governance arrangements now in place for Children's Services.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

3.1 The Joint Commissioning Team Policy Development and Decision Group is asked to note the progress to date as set out in the Improvement Plan (Ver 21) and agree to receive updates on a regular basis.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ofsted Monitoring Letter August 24th

Appendix 2: Improvement Action Plan Version 21

Appendix 3: Hampshire County Council Revised Work Programme