

Meeting: Policy and Development Decision Group (JCT) Date: 4th June 2018

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Children's Services Improvement Plan: 2018/19 – Update on Progress

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. A revised Statutory Direction was issued to Torbay Council in March 2018 to enter into a contractual arrangement with Plymouth City Council by 1st April 2018. The partnership has commenced with a transition process now underway to a joint Director of Children's Services (DCS), subject to re-inspection by Ofsted which is anticipated shortly and will be led by the current DCS.
- 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 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 evidence of impact on outcomes for children.

1.4 Alongside the work of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB), Torbay Children's Services has been subject to periodic monitoring visits by a team of Inspectors from Ofsted. Since services were judged inadequate in January 2016 there have been five monitoring visits, the most recent of which took place 21st/22nd February 2018 and looked at children subject to the Public Law Outline (PLO). A copy of the final monitoring letter is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Reason for Proposal

2.1 A detailed planning and oversight tool was developed with input from Hampshire as our improvement partner, in order to monitor progress against the recommendations made by Ofsted in their January 2016 report. The improvement plan has been subject to regular review by the CIB, Children's Services and Corporate Leadership Teams and Elected Members.

2.2 In light of the most recent Ofsted letter the Improvement Plan for 2018/19 has been substantially revised to move on from a focus on basic compliance (which must be sustained) to focus on impact for the child. A copy of the revised Improvement Plan 2018/19 is attached at Appendix 2. The plan summarises progress against the 16 Ofsted recommendations from their January 2016 report and key actions/priorities for the next 12 months. Progress against the plan will be monitored by the CIB, Corporate and Children's Services Leadership alongside regular reporting to Elected Members.

2.3 Alongside the work to refine the Improvement Plan 2018/19 a number of immediate actions have been taken to address the concerns set out in Ofsted's final monitoring letter:

- A legal gateway meeting has been established with a legal officer working within the social work teams to ensure PLO cases are progressed in a timely manner.
- The PLO Tracker has been substantially enhanced to ensure senior management have effective oversight and a tight grip on cases.
- An extensive programme of case file audits has commenced using highly experienced external auditors to identify any gaps or issues of delay and to support managers and practitioners in understanding what constitutes good practice. This includes around 120 cases subject to audit by Hampshire County Council as Torbay's improvement partner.
- All managers have had very clear written guidance on what is expected from them in terms of management oversight, supervision, decision making and planning. This has included taking robust action to tackle unacceptable performance in the interests of children and young people.
- Further development work has been undertaken to our case management system (PARIS) in order to standardise forms and reduce input/output discretion to address the variability in the timeliness and quality of case recording highlighted by Ofsted.
- The Council's Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator is co-located for a couple of days each week within the social care teams and an on-line service directory

created to ensure children and adults affected by domestic abuse receive a service.

- A Therapeutic Service for children and young people has been established to ensure social workers can access specialist consultation for children and young people with mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns.

- 2.4 Much of the past two years has involved putting in place the necessary infrastructure and arrangements to improve services and outcomes for children. Whilst Ofsted have noted these positive changes they have also highlighted the lack of impact to date on outcomes for children and an entrenched culture that does not challenge poor performance. The actions set out above, alongside the programme of work within the 2018/19 Improvement Plan, are designed to progress our journey from a compliance based approach to one in which quality is a key feature and focus. A further aspect is the need to increase the pace of change in light of Ofsted's comments acknowledging that services will shortly be subject to re-inspection.
- 2.5 Progress against the Improvement Plan will be considered alongside relevant performance data by the CIB and Children's Services and Corporate Leadership Teams. The revised Statutory Direction issued in March 2018 has confirmed that the CIB and DfE Commissioner will remain in place until September 2018 after which the CIB will transition to a multi-agency Children's Services Strategic Group as part of a longer term governance framework for future service improvement.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 That the Policy Development and Decision Group (Joint Commissioning Team) note the revised Children's Services Improvement Plan (2018/19) and support the immediate actions being taken, identified in the submitted report, to respond to Ofsted's most recent monitoring visit.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ofsted Monitoring Letter – 21/22 February 2018

Appendix 2: Improvement Plan 2018/19