

**Meeting:** Joint Commissioning Team Policy and Development Decision Group

**Date:** 27 October 2016

**Wards Affected:** All

**Report Title:** Children's Services Improvement Plan: Six Month Update

**Is the decision a key decision?** No

**When does the decision need to be implemented?** N/A

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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 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 the Department for Education, Council, partner agencies and Elected Member representatives has now been established to oversee improvement activity. Meeting on a monthly 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 A key element within the improvement journey is the planning and oversight tool. This has recently been refreshed with input from Hampshire to ensure a very tight focus on the recommendations made by Ofsted, as the starting point for the development of a vision for sustainably good services for children. The improvement plan remains a work in progress and is subject to regular review by Children's Services and Corporate Leadership within Torbay Council and the CIB. A copy of the Improvement Plan is attached at Appendix 1.

## 2. Reason for Proposal

- 2.1 A key finding by Ofsted was that corporate and departmental leadership and management had been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and improving the quality of Children's Services, particularly those for children in need of help and protection. This was compounded in Ofsted's view by a lack of focus on ensuring effective practice and good frontline services for children and families.
- 2.2 Research suggests that sustainable and demonstrable improvements commence at the point there is a frank recognition and acceptance of the service's weaknesses<sup>1</sup>. At this stage, improvement activity requires to focus on core systems, dealing with any backlogs and securing thresholds in order to 'stabilise' the service, as the basis for service improvement.
- 2.3 Working within a clear evidence base for improvement activity and with the support of Hampshire colleagues, Children's Services have refocused its improvement activity towards getting the basics right and building an ethos and culture that embraces rigorous and forensic self assessment. A revised format for articulating and monitoring the delivery and impact of improvement activity is key to this changed approach.
- 2.4 The revised improvement plan (attached at Appendix 1) builds on the Hampshire experience as improvement partner to the Isle of Wight and seeks to create clear links between Ofsted recommendations, improvement actions and better outcomes for children. It is a direct response to the challenge posed by Hampshire colleagues that previous improvement activity was far too diffuse and complicated with the risk that it compounded rather than addressed Ofsted's concern about a lack of focus on core activities.
- 2.5 The improvement plan attached at Appendix 1 summarises activity up to the end of August and will be considered by the CIB at its meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September. It is acknowledged that some areas of improvement activity are less well developed particularly those around cross cutting themes such as domestic abuse and early help. The improvement plan will be kept under regular review to ensure that any remaining gaps are addressed, that agreed actions are delivered and determine the impact of activity on outcomes for children and families. Further improvement actions will emerge as evidence shows that service stability is such that the focus can shift towards the pursuit of quality in practice.
- 2.6 Ofsted undertook their first monitoring visit on 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> July since their judgement of inadequate in January 2016. Their overall finding is that the local authority is making **expected progress** to improve services for its children and young people. Ofsted's findings are broadly similar to those of Hampshire particularly around the ongoing variability in the quality of assessments and plans, the timeliness of some activity and evidencing impact for children and families.
- 2.7 Hampshire are providing substantial input from a team of senior children's social care leaders and managers who are offering a range of tailored support

interventions which, at this stage, is heavily 'diagnostic' in character. This is beginning to shift towards a greater focus on actions including revising practice standards, management oversight and training for practitioners/managers.

- 2.6 Alongside scrutiny of the improvement plan 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 enhancement of governance arrangements 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 and agree to receive updates on a regular basis.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Children's Services: Improvement Action Plan

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment

### **Background Documents**

Action Research into improvement in Local Children's Services (Spring 2016)

ISOS Partnership and Local Government Association (LGA)<sup>1</sup>