

## Children's Social Care North Improvement Plan

Report of the Chief Officer Childrens Services

*Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.*

### **Recommendation:**

That Children's Scrutiny Committee (CSC)

- Note the progress in the North Locality and identify any risks/issues that require further attention.

### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 Devon County Council Children's Services commissioned a review of its social work service in May 2017. The review identified that Children Social Care overall is well placed to get to good and gave a clear message that the service needs to focus on consolidating improvements achieved since 2015. The review also identified that services were weaker in the North Devon teams than other areas. A subsequent deep dive audit was undertaken and this confirmed significant inconsistencies in leadership and management of core operational processes, in the supervision and support of staff and in assessment and care planning for children and young people.
- 1.2 A decision was made to establish an improvement board to oversee and provide time limited support to the implementation of a North Devon improvement plan; incorporating key actions from the service wide improvement plan and locality specific improvement priorities, with the aim of accelerating improvement. Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) and North Improvement Plan (Appendix 2) are attached. The North Improvement Board is chaired by Mark Gurrey, Independent Chair of Devon Safeguarding Children's Board. This adds an important layer of independent scrutiny and challenge
- 1.5 The Board will formally review progress in December 2017 and will need to be satisfied that:

1. Improved performance is sustainable.
2. Leadership and management in the north are robust enough to drive continuous improvement in practice and performance.

1.7 The Board has focussed on a number of core issues identified within the service review and deep dive:

- Leadership and culture within the locality
- Staffing levels and caseloads
- Quality and quantity of management oversight and supervision
- Adherence to core practice standards
- Quality and relevance of input from support services, especially HR and management information

1.8 The Chair has regular contact with the Chief Officer and brings issues to her attention as necessary. She, with the Head of Service, will together take a view about the longer-term need for the Board. There is now a near-permanent Team Manager cadre in the area, a new Area Manager and a new Locality Director being recruited to. Ensuring these new management arrangements are secure and continuing the improvements already made will be a key factor in making that decision.

## **2.0 Progress to date**

2.1 Additional resource was agreed to support improvement by way of additional social workers and frontline management capacity to be able to get back on track and support workers to meet required practice standards. Caseloads needed to be manageable.

2.2 Progress has been hampered by recruitment difficulties. Recruitment to social work posts nationally is challenging and the summer months even more so. Recruitment and retention is a priority for Devon. We are re-profiling the workforce to ensure we are making the best possible use of all the resources at our disposal.

2.4 Progress has been made; the workforce is more stable and settled and morale is improving. Systems and processes have been implemented to ensure that case tracking occurs and that there is clear oversight of work with children and their families from now a full complement of permanent team managers. Work is underway to recruit to senior leader posts within North locality that will be able to continue to drive improvements forward.

#### **2.5 Caseloads**

In July and August caseloads remained in the high 20's for the majority of social workers. Since the start of September these have started to slowly reduce across the teams. This is due to combination of children in need case closures (113 in total) and a slight increase in staffing as a result of additional experience agency social workers being recruited.

#### **2.6 Timely child protection visits**

In June, performance in the North Locality was 17% lower than the rest of the county. That gap has been closed to 4%. Visits to Children in Care were and remain comparable with the rest of the County.

#### **2.7 Audits**

Auditing is crucial to evidence the quality of practice. In August North cases were audited by managers across the County. The moderated findings are not available at the time of writing. Any inadequate practice is followed up immediately of course. The learning from audit is built into the overall improvement plan.

It is important to note the improvement in compliance with audit requirements in the North. August and September saw a significant improvement and North is now in line with other Localities in achieving 100% compliance with the majority completed on time.

2.8 Progress against the Improvement Plan is set out in the plan attached.

#### **Electoral Divisions: All**

Cabinet Member for Childrens Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes  
Chief Officer for Childrens Services: Jo Olsson

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

### *Contact for Enquiries:*

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **NORTH DEVON IMPROVEMENT BOARD**

#### **Terms of Reference**

##### **Background**

Devon County Council Children's Services commissioned a review of its social work service in May 2017. This identified that services were weaker in the North Devon teams than other areas. A subsequent deep dive audit was undertaken and this confirmed significant inconsistencies in leadership and management of core operational processes, in the supervision and support of staff and in assessment and care planning for children and young people.

##### **Overall Purpose**

The improvement board is established to oversee and provide time limited support to the implementation of a North Devon improvement plan; incorporating key actions from the service wide improvement plan and locality specific improvement priorities, with the aim of quickly improving the effectiveness of social care services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

##### **Chair**

The Board will be chaired by Mark Gurrey – Independent chair of the LSCB.

##### **Reporting**

Progress will be reported to the Chief Officer Children's Services and the impact of the plan will be evaluated by the Board in September 2017.

##### **Core Membership**

Mark Gurrey – Chair

Mark Lines Head of Children's Social Care

Marian Martin - Locality Director

Jean Kelly Senior manager - safeguarding

Valerie Cannon Principal Social Worker

Jme May - Senior manager - performance

North Team Managers will be invited to join Board meetings

##### **Meeting Schedule**

The board will meet monthly June to September 2017.