

Progress following Ofsted focused visit. 1-2 May 2019

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

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.

1. Background

- 1.1 Focused Visits are part of the Inspection Framework for Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). They are designed to support improvement and Local Authorities are invited to identify the area of practice they think will most benefit from a Focused Visit.
- 1.2 The Children in Need, Focused Visit letter for Devon was published: <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50079995> and members of the Scrutiny Committee received a report on 10 June 2019.

2. Ofsted feedback

- 2.1 Inspectors concluded that *"Senior leaders, including elected members, have appropriately focused their time and energy on creating an environment in which children can receive a better service than when Devon local authority children's services were last inspected by Ofsted in 2015. They have succeeded in stabilising the workforce at all levels and in bringing down social work caseloads to a manageable level. In the areas covered by this visit, they know their strengths and weaknesses well."*
- 2.2 Inspectors also found that:
 - there was some inconsistency in the application of thresholds across the county.
 - assessments were of a variable quality and did not routinely inform plans for children.
 - team managers provide support to social workers, but don't challenge enough when the lives of children in need have not improved as expected.
 - there are some examples of purposeful interventions with families and imaginative work with children that helps them to understand what is happening to them.
 - some children are left at risk of being harmed because some social workers lacked urgency and direction.
- 2.3 Four areas for improvement of practice were identified:
 - the quality of assessments so that these include an analysis of all presenting risks and what they mean for a child

- the focus of children in need and child protection plans so that they link directly to and address the risks identified in assessments
- the level of challenge and scrutiny that managers give to social workers
- the accuracy of performance management data and the consistency of quality assurance audits.

3. Service response

- 3.1 Senior leaders in children's service responded quickly and with appropriate rigour. Service priorities were immediately realigned, with a fourth priority added, and additional performance and management information reports were commissioned. Quality assurance activity was increased, and our Quality Assurance Framework refreshed and relaunched at the beginning of September.
- 3.2 The Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer met with all managers in the service on 28th May and made clear the service priorities and expectations. The Chief Officer chairs an Improvement Board that meets monthly. The Improvement Board has a narrow focus on staffing/caseloads, quality of supervision and the reliability of audit. The now four service priorities are performance managed through usual arrangements under the Deputy Chief Officer.
- 3.3 Experienced leaders and managers from Essex County Council Children's Services were invited as part of the Department for Education [Partners in Practice](#) programme to undertake a more detailed diagnostic of our child in need services and spent two days in each of the four locality areas, meeting practitioners and managers, sampling cases, and observing practice.

4. Progress update.

- 4.1 More children open to children's services have an annually updated assessment and more assessments are of a better quality. For example, of 45 cases randomly audited in August, all had an assessment on record and 76% (34) had an assessment updated within the past twelve months. In terms of quality, one was judged *Outstanding*, 20 *Good*, 3 *Inadequate* (immediate remedial action was taken to address these) with the remainder, 21, *requiring some improvement to be good*. The proportion of cases sampled, where the assessment is good, has increased significantly over the past 12 months.
- 4.2 Changes have been made to our Quality Assurance Framework over the summer to increase the focus on outcomes whilst maintaining a proportionate focus on activity and on practice standards. Auditors have undergone additional training and members of the Senior Management Team are moderating audits so that they are more strongly connected to both the quality assurance activity and to the practice being examined. Messages from the previous three months' quality assurance activity will be shared with all managers across the service at our Service Development Meeting later in November, an activity that will be repeated each quarter.
- 4.3 There were almost 400 fewer children and young people open to children's social care teams at the end of September than at the end of June as managers focused on eliminating drift and delay, closing cases that should be closed or stepping appropriate cases across to early help or other services.

- 4.4 Quality assurance activity and dip-sampling by senior managers shows an increased level of challenge in management oversight and supervision that is evident in case records whilst at the same time maintaining the support for practitioners that is key to supporting good practice and retention of skilled practitioners.
- 4.5 The Chief Officer regularly samples supervision records of Locality Directors and Area Managers, who are similarly sampling team manager and social worker supervision records. We know from management information reports and from the service reports to the Improvement Board that more practitioners are receiving more regular supervision that is of a good quality. The case supervision policy was refreshed over the summer and re-issued in September to better reflect our aspirations and to bring practice more in line with that of good and outstanding local authorities.
- 4.6 There remain challenges with performance and management information from Eclipse. This undoubtedly represents a risk in inspection. Focused activity, to remedy all residual challenges following implementation, is being driven by a Mobilisation Board of key partners chaired by the Head of Commissioning. A broad range of performance and management information reports are available to managers, including the PowerBI dashboard. A new data validation tool was introduced in June that team managers value and use well that helps the service identify case records that may be missing pieces of information or for which a key activity is pending.
- 4.7 The Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT), a national data analysis tool, is used routinely to inform service and practice development and is produced weekly and made available to managers and practitioners across the service on our intranet site - *reSOURCE*.

Darryl Freeman
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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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