

## Service Review: Children's Social Work

Report of the Chief Officer Children's 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)

- Receive the 2017/18 Improvement Plan at a future meeting
- Review progress of the three priorities for accelerated improvement in Autumn 2017
- Visit teams in the north in Autumn 2017 to satisfy itself that improvements are embedding and that resources are sufficient to the task

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### 1. Introduction

Devon County Council wants good Children's Services. An effective social work service is at the heart of good Children's Services. In early 2017, Children's Services undertook a detailed self-assessment (appendix one). A service review was commissioned to test the validity of the social work elements of the self-assessment. The service review took place in May 2017 and a summary report is attached (appendix two). The service review broadly endorsed the self-assessment, which is encouraging.

### 2. Summary

The national picture of the quality of Children's Services adjusts with each report published. Currently only two Local Authorities, less than 2%, have outstanding Children's Services (Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea). 45%, like Devon, are judged requires improvement to be good, 28% are judged good and 25% are inadequate. Getting to good is not easy and Devon does not have a comprehensive history of strong performance in Children's

Services (education, early years and adoption have all been strong for a long time).

Robust self-assessment and independent service review are two of the keys to success, hence the significance that should be attached to these two pieces of work.

### **3. Recommendations**

The summary report attached identifies the top 10 strengths and areas for development. The latter will form the basis of the Improvement Plan 2017/18 which CSC should review once drafted. Three priorities for accelerated improvement have been identified; early help, children in need and practice in North Devon. Failure to strengthen these areas will undermine the potential to achieve good Children's Services. Scrutiny in Devon has been a very effective mechanism to challenge and hold to account the administration in its delivery of core safeguarding and child protection functions. CSC is recommended to check progress on these three priorities through senior officer's reporting back and through a frontline visit to the teams in the north of the county

Jo Olsson

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

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

Chief Officer for Children's Services: Jo Olsson

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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## Appendix 1

### SUMMARY OF DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELF-ASSESSMENT 2016/17

| Local Authority: | Devon County Council |
|------------------|----------------------|
|------------------|----------------------|

This self-assessment provides an up to date evaluation of the needs of children and families within our area, the effectiveness of current service provision and our performance in improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Self-Assessment has been completed by senior officers in the council. In future years we may want to consider a co-produced self-assessment that more fully captures the whole system.

The self-assessment uses a six point scale to assess each domain

|             |                                             |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Red         | Inadequate                                  |
| Dark Amber  | Requires significant improvement to be good |
| Light Amber | Requires Improvement to be good             |
| Light Green | Good                                        |
| Dark Green  | Secure Good                                 |
| Purple      | Outstanding                                 |

#### Summary Judgements

|                                              |                                    |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Leadership and Governance                    | Good                               |
| Commissioning and Quality                    | Requires Improvement               |
| Partnerships                                 | Requires Improvement               |
| Resource and Workforce Management            | Good                               |
| Culture and Challenge Social Care/Early Help | Requires significant               |
| improvement                                  |                                    |
| Culture and Challenge Education              | Secure Good                        |
| Education – Strategy and Support To Schools  | Secure Good                        |
| Education – Outcomes                         | Secure Good                        |
| Early Help                                   | Requires significant               |
| improvement                                  |                                    |
| Thresholds and Step Up/Step Down             | Requires Improvement               |
| Children's Social Care                       | Requires Improvement               |
| Looked After Children                        | Requires Improvement               |
| Fostering & Adoption                         | Requires Improvement & Outstanding |
| Care Leavers                                 | Requires Improvement               |
| Youth Offending                              | Requires Improvement               |
| /Good                                        |                                    |
| Missing Children (Home, Care, Education)     | Requires Improvement               |
| Child Sexual Exploitation                    | Requires Improvement               |
| Domestic Abuse                               | Requires Improvement               |

**Summary:**

Following something of a lull in the second half of 2015, while the Council worked to secure permanent leadership in Children's Services, progress has significantly accelerated during 2016. A final permanent appointment is underway, and restructuring into Localities will be operational from 1.4.17.

**Leadership and governance judged RI in 2015, is now judged to be good**

School leadership is secure, while there are national challenges in some subject areas that are reflected locally and succession issues in specialist areas of education, the position overall is securely good. Chief Exec, Scrutiny and DSCB chair walkabouts during 2016/17 report encouraging levels of staff morale and well-being; caseload reduction being a key contributor. Excellent progress has allowed us to make the original target of average 15 by September 2017 more ambitious (15 by July 17). This is endorsed in our social work health check in 2016. The ASYE programme and the work of The Academy has been strong. Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges in the north of the county, **workforce judged RI in 2015, is now judged to be good**

**Devon has areas of very strong and sustained performance, in most aspects of education and in adoption.** The development plan for SEND is expected to bring SEND in line with the excellence in all other aspects of education performance. Similarly performance in fostering currently judged RI in the self-assessment is expected to be good in 2018.

**The Youth Offending Service (YOS) and The Atkinson Secure Unit are good.**

The absence of workflow in the social care information system has undermined management grip, management oversight and performance management. This is being remedied with a new system planned for autumn 2017. **All aspects of children's social care are judged RI**, but not requiring significant improvement to be good. This is particularly important for care leavers, an area which was judged inadequate by Ofsted in 2015, so good improvement has been made in this area. The OFSTED RI category is wide and the self-assessment judges that Devon has progressed from a low RI to a more secure RI. The key issue is the absence of a robust Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and a systematic, reliable and embedded culture of practice scrutiny and challenge, strong performance management, and robust audit focused on outcomes and impact. This, more than anything, is recognised as the key difference between RI and good. The green shoots are there in the Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU) improvement plan, the area managers' ownership and leadership of performance management and the developing QAF.

**Partnership and commissioning are both self-assessed as RI** because whole system thinking, culture and practice is under-developed. As a consequence things that are dependent upon strong partnership and whole

system practice are inevitably also RI, with the weakest area being Early Help, which requires significant improvement to be good. Early Help is the top improvement priority for the partnership in 2017/18.

Accelerated improvement is underway and must be sustained. The South West is not the strongest region and many staff and managers have not worked in Local Authorities that are 'good' under the SIF regime. We will need to create opportunities for Team and Area Manager as well as Locality Director exposure to good practice, so that we have a strong, shared understanding of the benchmark.

Devon can be very proud of all staff and managers in Children's Services and in all the support services that have contributed to the excellent progress that has been made.

## **Appendix 2**

### **SERVICE REVIEW CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK MAY 2017**

#### **BACKGROUND**

In 2015 Ofsted gave Devon an overall judgement of 'Requires Improvement to be Good' (The LSCB and Services for Care Leavers were judged inadequate). This gave Devon the platform from which to develop the next phase of its improvement journey. Progress was seriously undermined by the challenge of recruiting the calibre of permanent leadership that was recognised to be necessary. Interim senior leadership was secured in March 2016 and a permanent appointment came into post in May 2017. Middle leadership was reasonably stable through the period from 2015 and frontline (social worker and team managers) has now stabilised, matching broadly the national picture with most locum posts covering periods of maternity and extended sickness rather than frontline vacancies. The staffing picture in the north of the county is less benign.

A self-assessment using an Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS) template was initiated in December 2016 and completed in March 2017. The Service Review was commissioned and took place 22<sup>nd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The purpose of the review was to test our progress on the improvement journey since 2015.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The following parameters shaped the review

- That it mirror the Ofsted inspection framework as far as is practicable
- That it be carried out by highly credible ex-HMI
- That the DCC management of the process enable full and frank exploration
- That all four localities be reviewed
- That the focus be on social work practice
- That there be some examination of the DSCB's improvement journey

Three ex HMI reviewed and analysed our Annex A data including a 10 case audit before coming on site for five days (four days frontline case tracking and sampling with practitioners and managers and one day analysis and reporting findings). On each case tracked, sampled or audited, the reviewer explored, with the practitioner and manager, the judgements reached on the practice and the steps they need to take to build on and improve their practice.

The lead reviewer will return to Devon for a frontline managers' briefing session in late June and for a partner briefing session in July.

## **FINDINGS**

'You are progressing well in many areas but there are some areas where you need to double your efforts to get to good.....You are well placed to get to good'

'You need to keep building capacity through your efforts to improve joint work with partners and consistency.....you need to plan very carefully for the introduction of Eclipse so that its fit for purpose and enables staff to continue their work'

With the reviewers we developed our top 10 strengths and top 10 areas for development (see attached). The improvement priorities will form the core of our improvement plan 17/18, which is in development. There are three areas where we intend to double our efforts; practice with children in need (who are not in care or subject of a protection plan); practice in North Devon which has not progressed at the same rate as elsewhere in the County; children in need of early help.

The reviewers were asked to reflect on the strength of our partnership working. They recognised the good progress that has been achieved but judged that progress has been limited in some areas because some partners have not yet risen to the challenge. The reviewers noted some problems in partners' timely information sharing and in fully discharging their responsibility for children in need.

## NEXT STEPS

Following the completion of the Service Review, a North Devon deep dive analysis has been completed and terms of reference for a North Devon Improvement Board are being finalised. This board is planned to be short term, with a formal review in September and will be chaired by the independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Consideration is also being given to an Improvement Board for Early Help to galvanise and harness effective partnership working. The accelerated improvement in our work with children in need will be delivered through the social care improvement plan 17/18. The reviewer's words of caution about Eclipse derive from their experience in Lancashire County Council which plummeted from good with some outstanding features in 2012 to inadequate in 2015; attributable, at least in part, to the poor introduction of a new IT system that did not serve social work well. The Eclipse Implementation Project will be contacting Lancashire to ensure that we learn from their experience.

### Top 10 strengths

'A service that knows itself well and has created the conditions to enable good social work practice to flourish'

1. **Leadership:** Priority, ambition and commitment of senior management team, Lead Member and cross party elected members.
2. **Corporate Parenting:** step change leading to improvement in both the way the Board works and in the involvement YP.
3. **Engagement of staff:** positive morale and commitment to getting to good. SWs described good management support.
4. **Child centred practice:** workers know their children well, good child centred practice seen.
5. **Children in Care:** outcomes improving for almost all, notwithstanding the legacy of historically weaker practice; in every case recent practice better and some good work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
6. **Private fostering service:** best the reviewer had ever seen and the case tracked was outstanding!
7. **Virtual School:** managers have good oversight and understanding of performance and the areas that need to improve.



8. **Step change improvement in audit** which is beginning to make a difference ,
9. **Significant improvements in the availability and use of performance data**; the workbook is helping managers to make decisions.
10. **The LSCB improvement agenda and pace of change has improved**; under the skilled leadership of the independent chair

### **Top 10 priority improvements**

'Tackling inconsistencies; consolidate, consolidate, consolidate!'

1. **MASH volumes/timeliness/IRT interface**; too many contacts that don't lead to a social care intervention; timeliness of MASH response and quality of multi-agency analysis and decision making.
2. **CiN practice**; management information, supervision, management and audit to accelerate improvement
3. **Assessments and Plans**; analysis and embedding of strengths based model including good risk assessments and risk mitigation plans, depth of professional curiosity. Outcome focused (SMART) plans that drive purposeful interventions and outcomes/change.
4. **Supervision/Management oversight**; more consistently challenging/reflective and recorded to support best practice.
5. **Transitions to Adult Services**; for disabled children.
6. **Care Leavers**; more to do on accommodation and employment/apprenticeships.
7. **Performance management**: supervision and case management, use of data and audit, role of IROs demonstrating real and sustained impact.
8. **Workforce capacity**: some caseloads drifting upwards, minimum staffing for MASH, IRO caseloads do not permit full discharge of their responsibilities, teams in the north less resilient
9. **Eclipse implementation**: avoid the Lancashire experience!
10. **Early help**: performance framework for practice, step down needs to be secured