

## CABINET

16 June 2020

### CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN IN RESPONSE TO THE AREA

#### Report of the Strategic Director for People

Strategic Aim:	Protecting the vulnerable	
Key Decision: No	Forward Plan Reference: FP/070520	
If not on Forward Plan:	Chief Executive Approved Scrutiny Chair Approved	
Reason for Urgency:	N/A	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr D Wilby, Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning, Early Years, SEND, Inclusion, Safeguarding Children & Young People	
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Ward Councillors	All	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Children's Services Improvement Plan in response to the Ofsted inspection and areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.
2. Approves funding to invest in training for children's services to improve practice in line with the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT (MANDATORY)

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Cabinet of the analysis of the areas of improvement identified by Ofsted and to seek their approval of the improvement plan produced as a result.

## 2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS (MANDATORY)

- 2.1 Rutland County Council was inspected by Ofsted between 2 and 13 March 2020. The overall judgement is that children's services requires improvement to be good in all areas. No children were found to be at immediate risk of harm and Ofsted recognised that we act swiftly, and urgent safeguarding concerns are addressed promptly.

### Findings overview

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

- 2.2 Having undertaken a thorough review of the service in the past year, the inspection did not present any unexpected findings, and the grading was in line with the authority's own self-evaluation. Overall Ofsted identified the following areas for improvement:

- Management oversight and decision-making to ensure that children's cases are comprehensively overseen and that their progress is closely reviewed.
- The quality of assessments and plans to ensure that they identify needs and lead to improvements in children's well-being.
- Commissioning and contract monitoring arrangements, to increase the sufficiency and quality of commissioned services, including placement matching for disabled children and those with complex needs.
- The housing offer for vulnerable young people and care leavers, including addressing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The use of the pre-proceedings phase of the public law outline, to ensure that parents can make changes within a legal framework and that children come into care when they need to.
- Early permanence planning for children.
- The timeliness of foster carer annual reviews.

## 3 ANALYSIS OF AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- 3.1 In response to the Ofsted report, senior leaders have completed an analysis of each of the areas for improvement identified. This has allowed us to fully understand the context of the improvements required and how to address these.

3.2 Management oversight and decision-making to ensure that children's cases are comprehensively overseen and that their progress is closely reviewed.

Management oversight and decision making is a key developmental area for us and one which affects all areas of practice.

Prior to the Ofsted visit we were already working with our managers around quality assurance, practice standards and how to evidence effective management oversight.

Since Ofsted visited us we have had almost an entire new frontline management team join us. Two team managers and a service manager have left the service. We currently have three new interim managers in place with a permanent team manager joining on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and a permanent service manager joining in July 2020. This management change is positive for us and as a senior management team we are clear on what our expectations are for service delivery and are confident our new management team will deliver these.

3.3 The quality of assessments and plans to ensure that they identify needs and lead to improvements in children's well-being.

The quality of assessments remains mixed across the service, this is another key area for development.

Our new managers have already begun to embed a culture of quality practice, sharing good examples of assessments across the service to help others to understand what is required. The lack of management oversight over time has meant that some social workers have lost focus in relation to what good looks like and how to formulate good assessments and plans. The new team managers are challenging poor assessments and giving guidance around how these should be written in order to formulate appropriate plans.

3.4 Commissioning and contract monitoring arrangements, to increase the sufficiency and quality of commissioned services, including placement matching for disabled children and those with complex needs.

Overall our placements for children looked after are good and they have stability. We do have a challenge in relation to a small number of placements where the young people have more complex needs. There is a national shortage of placements particularly for more complex young people and the approach to identifying placements in Rutland has been bespoke to individual children. Whilst this has its advantages, there is recognition that a corporate commissioning strategy is required which articulates our shared approach, particularly for complex needs, in a more formal way.

A children's commissioning group has been established, which will oversee all commissioned services for children's services and ensure that there is clear scrutiny of contracted services to ensure they are fit for purpose and offering the high quality service required for children and young people.

3.5 The housing offer for vulnerable young people and care leavers, including addressing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

During the Ofsted inspection varying practice in relation to young people who find themselves homeless was identified. There were two young people where different approaches were taken and the option of section 20 accommodation (where a young person enters the care of the local authority) was explored with only one young person and not the other.

Locally there is a need for more affordable housing so that our care leavers and young people are able to remain living in County if they wish to do so. As corporate parents we are looking at how Rutland County Council responds to the local issue of housing and link with work in the local plan regarding affordable, single occupancy housing for our young people leaving care and in need of housing support.

3.6 The use of the pre-proceedings phase of the public law outline, to ensure that parents can make changes within a legal framework and that children come into care when they need to.

The use of pre-proceedings work has been poor, and the lack of management expertise has meant that work within the public law outline (PLO) has been reactive rather than proactive. We have identified that there have been past practice issues that we have now addressed, however further work is needed to embed the changes and assist social workers to plan ahead and to carry out proactive rather than reactive work.

3.7 Early permanence planning for children.

Permanence planning meetings take place monthly and are chaired by the Service Manager. There is a permanence tracker which was viewed positively by Ofsted as a tool to enable senior management oversight of cases and to ensure scrutiny of the timeliness of permanence planning for our children and young people.

We need to ensure all children looked after have a clear permanence plan and so we are increasing the frequency of permanency planning meetings to get this element of care planning on track and ensure that progress made is maintained. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is clear of the need for all children to have an appropriate permanence plan and the need to challenge when this is not in place.

3.8 The timeliness of foster carer annual reviews.

Foster carers' annual reviews are now in hand and was an area of improvement highlighted. The new panel is sitting virtually to ensure that all reviews take place despite the current restrictions and we are mindful of ensuring this progress is sustained. Historically foster carers had not been required to attend their reviews however we have changed this and all carers must now attend their reviews and detailed review reports written for panel. This was an area identified by Ofsted as improving and we will ensure progress continues through performance monitoring.

## **4 NEXT STEPS**

4.1 A new approach to the governance of improvement is already in place and management changes that were underway prior to inspection will be concluded. The Children's Services Improvement Board will report directly to Cabinet on progress and Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee will also consider. The Children's Practice Oversight Group reports directly to the Improvement Board, reviewing and challenging practice quality in key areas identified by Ofsted. This will complement the existing performance management and quality assurance frameworks.

The governance structure is available at Appendix A.

4.2 Improvement actions and activities that were recognised by inspectors during the inspection will continue and the improvement plan in response to the Ofsted inspection findings is appended to this report at appendix B. This is a high level, strategic plan and is informed by the children's social care service plan and team plans which focus on more detailed planning to improve the quality of practice.

4.3 The strategic improvement plan will need to be agreed and submitted to Ofsted by the 21 July 2020.

## **5 CONSULTATION**

5.1 This report is for information only.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

6.1 Not applicable.

## **7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Whilst permanent recruitment is ongoing for the vacant management posts in children's social care (1 fte service manager, 2 fte team managers), these vacancies are filled by agency staff and this cost is fully offset by the permanent vacancies.

7.2 Our preferred model of practice, 'Signs of Safety'<sup>1</sup>, is being embedded and we need to invest in training children's services. The cost over the next two years is circa £49k, which includes £18k for 'train the trainer' to reduce ongoing costs. The funding of this will come from the core training budget and the remainder from social care reserves.

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 There are no legal or governance considerations.

## **9 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS)**

9.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed.

## **10 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as it is not deemed relevant to this report.

## **11 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 None identified.

## **12 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 None identified.

## **13 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

13.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Children's Services Improvement Plan in response to the Ofsted inspection and areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.

13.2 It is recommended that Cabinet approves funding of c£49k over the next two years for training for children's services to improve practice in line with the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.

## **14 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

14.1 There are no additional papers to the report.

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<sup>1</sup> Signs of Safety is a strength based, safety focused approach to working with children and families. It is the preferred model of practice in Rutland.

**15 APPENDICES**

15.1 Appendix A – Improvement governance arrangements

15.2 Appendix B – Children’s Services Improvement Plan

**A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.**