

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 August 2020

OFSTED IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Report of the Interim Director for Children's Services

Strategic Aim:	Protecting the vulnerable	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr D Wilby, Portfolio Holder for Lifelong Learning, Early Years, SEND, Inclusion, Safeguarding Children & Young People	
Contact Officer(s):	Dawn Godfrey, Interim Director of Children's Services	01572 758358 dgodfrey@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	All	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

1. Endorses the actions taken in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and offers comment on any areas where they feel progress is slower than expected.
2. Notes the role of the Children's Improvement Board.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Committee on the actions taken in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and their progress, including the governance of the improvement plan.
- 1.2 Further, the Committee is invited to share their views on any areas where they feel progress is slower than expected and how these might be mitigated.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 The strategic improvement plan was submitted to Ofsted in June 2020, who confirmed that they had reviewed the action plan and agreed "that it demonstrates an accurate understanding of the findings of the inspection."
- 2.2 A new approach to the governance of improvement was put in place immediately following the Ofsted inspection. The Children's Services Improvement Board reports directly to Cabinet on progress, reviewing and challenging practice quality in key

areas identified by Ofsted. The Board is chaired by the portfolio holder for children's services and includes the member champion for children in care and care leavers, and also the Deputy Director, Legal and Governance, to add an additional level of independent scrutiny and challenge.

- 2.3 The Children's Improvement Board have continued to meet monthly since the end of March 2020 and this is supplemented by the monthly Children's Practice Oversight Group which informs the Board monitoring of the improvement plan. This complements the existing performance management and quality assurance frameworks. The governance structure is available at Appendix A.

3 PROGRESS OF IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 3.1 The most recent improvement plan tracker is attached at Appendix B.

- 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 remains a key focus for the service. Robust management oversight and direction underpins all good practice, and is a key element of all improvement actions.

Recent practice reviews undertaken show an improvement in management oversight and robustness in child protection and child looked after cases and evidence follow up of actions and tracking of progress which is positive.

The service manager has a strong grip on supervision and actively monitors this to ensure it is happening regularly and is recorded properly on children's files.

Case Example – a young child had been placed in residential care for a number of years and had not received a good enough service in relation to his need for family life. This child's extended family had not been properly considered as alternative carers. This situation was allowed to continue without a manager challenging whether this was an appropriate placement. Since new management has been in place, there has been a comprehensive review, resulting in this child being able to be placed within his extended family. A thorough assessment of his needs was completed alongside an assessment of a family member, how she would meet his needs and a comprehensive support plan put in place. This child is now successfully living with his extended family, and his emotional needs are being well met. This exemplifies why strong management grip and direction is so important and the impact it has directly on children's lives.

We have re-focussed our quality assurance activity and the head of service moderates this activity to ensure compliance and quality of audit is embedded. This is now a feature of the monthly performance meetings with the focus on identifying themes arising and working with the principal social worker to share learning with staff. Feedback from parents/carers and children needs to become better embedded in this learning loop and the new participation and engagement lead will work with social care to embed this.

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

All single assessments are completed within 45 days and we have improved the number of assessments which are completed much earlier than this. Progress has been made on the quality of assessments but we are not yet satisfied that good quality assessments are 'business as usual' in Rutland. There has been some improvement in the quality of assessments and plans, but it has been identified, through our quality assurance work, that the 'lived experience' of a child is not always considered well enough, particularly for very young children.

The quality of pathway plans for care leavers is good and show collaboration with our young people in drawing up the plan for their future. There remains a challenge in ensuring all pathway plans are recorded fully on the case recording system and this is being managed as a performance issue.

Through our quality assurance work, there is growing positive feedback from service users reflecting the value they have put on the engagement with services, indicating improved outcomes for children and young people.

Case Example – E is clear about what they want their outcomes to be and is confident about expressing their needs. This is reflected in the pathway plan and they have made excellent progress since coming to the UK. They have been supported by the practitioner, and when required, an interpreter, and this is evidenced through good case recordings and attendance at reviews. Overall, this case indicates that the outcomes for this young person have improved significantly through the provision provided by the local authority and this is supported by positive feedback from the young person.

A series of workshops are planned and taking place in line with Signs of Safety¹ to aid practitioners in gaining children's experiences and using these more effectively when formulating assessments and plans. Managers are also stronger in driving practice standards, and will not sign off work which is not at the required level. This is supported by reflective supervision to help practitioners understand where gaps are and to increase professional curiosity.

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.

Contract monitoring meetings are taking place monthly with, Lincolnshire County Council (Adoption), Peterborough City Council (Legal Services) and Leicestershire County Council (Out of Hours Service).

We are clear about what needs to improve and improvements have been made with the out of hours service in relation to recording of contacts. There is weekly contact between Service Manager and Team Managers across Rutland and Leicestershire to ensure progress is maintained.

¹ 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.

The contract with Lincolnshire expires in September 2020 but work is underway to renew this contract. There is good communication between Rutland and Lincolnshire, and Rutland benefits from the high quality adoption services Lincolnshire offer. The issue raised by Ofsted in relation to the Agency Decision Maker role is being addressed and will form part of the new contract.

The legal services contract works well for Rutland. The head of legal services and head of children's social care meet monthly and there has been constructive challenge on both sides regarding the quality of work. The current service level agreement will be expanded to include legal advice for Rutland Agency Decision Maker regarding adoption cases as this was identified as a gap.

The children's commissioning group meets six weekly, chaired by the Interim Director of Children's Services. This group has reviewed and simplified the operating protocol for the commissioning of placements (including children with complex needs and disabled children), and clarified the role of the commissioning team and social care and SEND panel. Work is ongoing with Leicestershire about the quality assurance of placement providers on the Framework, and Rutland have identified a manager who will be the Rutland link to this work.

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

We are absolutely clear that bed and breakfast accommodation is not an option for our young people. There is a new housing protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds in place and being adhered to. There is now clarity about the offer to vulnerable young people about their housing options and management sign off of this decision. The service manager is currently completing an audit to ensure compliance with the housing protocol remains.

At the time of the Ofsted inspection, there was one young person living in bed and breakfast accommodation. This young person is now living with his mother and we have arrangements in place to view a couple of flats for him to move into which are local to his family. This young person will remain living with his mother until a tenancy is arranged. There had been a delay in viewing alternative accommodation due to the lockdown restrictions.

We want to increase the number of children who benefit from 'Staying Put'² arrangements with their foster carers, and are revising our fostering offer to reflect this. We need to recruit more local foster carers in order to achieve this and a recruitment campaign is planned for the autumn.

As part of our recovery plan we are planning a review of how Rutland 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. This work has stalled due to the response to Covid-19 being a priority but is planned to be completed by the end of the year.

² 'Staying Put' refers to an arrangement where young people remain with their foster carers following their 18th birthday. They are not 'looked after' by the Local Authority but remain with their foster carers on a supported living basis.

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.

When a social worker is concerned about the welfare of a child, they may invite parents to a Public Law Outline Meeting (PLO)³ or a pre-proceedings meeting. These meetings are called if the Local Authority and the Social Worker are concerned about the care that a child is receiving and they may make an application to the Court to see if the Court will make orders to protect the child.

Ofsted identified that the use of these pre-proceedings meetings were not consistent or always timely enough. Since Ofsted, all previous cases in PLO have stepped down from PLO, and we are progressing one additional case following legal planning meetings and ensuring assessments are in place.

We have discussed with legal the learning from the last year in relation to our care proceedings cases and are looking at some learning events regarding threshold for care proceedings. In addition to this our new managers have more robust management challenge and scrutiny in relation to legal planning.

We have had to issue proceedings immediately with two other families which included unborn babies and the plan was to immediately issue care proceedings on the birth of the babies concerned. Legal advice was sought and both were deemed appropriate for immediate issue due to the nature of the concerns and risks to the babies and other children in the families.

Case Example - Family A are a flight risk and have dual nationality, therefore the decision was made not to alert them to the intention for care proceedings until baby was safely delivered. This meant that we had to immediately issue care proceedings when baby was born. This was an appropriate use of immediate issue to safeguard the baby and the social work assessment was commended in court for being robust. The judge commented "rarely have I seen such a comprehensive pre-birth assessment, it runs to 40 pages and the first work was undertaken at the end of April and on occasion interpreters were present. RCC have done an enormous amount of work before baby was born."

3.7 Early permanence planning for children.

Permanence planning meetings have been taking place on a fortnightly basis and have allowed the service manager to have robust oversight of cases and plans. A permanence tracker is used to ensure no child is allowed to 'drift' in care. This is updated weekly and the head of service has oversight of this.

We have revised the role of the 'children in care/ at risk of care' panel, chaired by the head of service, and this panel follows up all new or potential placements to ensure there is no delay in planning for permanency, and that children are appropriately matched with carers.

³ The Public Law Outline (PLO) sets out the duties local authorities have when thinking about taking a case to court to ask for a Care Order to take a child into care or for a Supervision Order to be made.

We have concluded a number of care proceedings recently and have reunified a number of children into parental or family care. There is a more robust oversight of the plans for children in our care and progress is being made with securing permanency. By the end of September 2020 we should have progressed care planning for 10 children to have moved back into the care of family members and out of Local Authority Care.

3.8 The timeliness of foster carer annual reviews.

All foster carer reviews are completed within timescales and the Fostering Panel has robust oversight of these. Foster carers are invited to attend Panel for their reviews and the Panel offers constructive challenge to ensure quality of fostering assessments and reviews remains good.

4 CONSULTATION

4.1 This report is for information only.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 Not applicable.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None identified.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 There are no legal or governance considerations.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

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

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None identified.

11 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None identified.

12 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 There has been much progress made since the Ofsted inspection in March. It is acknowledged that children's services are not yet consistently good and there remains a challenge in continuing to improve and sustaining those improvements.

12.2 Workforce planning is central to our improvement and this will be strengthened by a fully permanent management team by September. Social work vacancies have largely been filled, including an advanced practitioner post, and a new team of social work students will be starting in Rutland in September. This gives social care an opportunity to build on the progress already made and embed our practice standards with a new workforce.

12.3 Recruitment to the remaining vacant posts is ongoing, and these vacancies are currently filled by agency social workers.

12.4 There is a potential risk to the pace of progress due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the possibility of increased rates of referral following the full return to school from September. Whilst referral rates remain stable at the present time, there is the possibility that these will increase when more children are being seen by professionals outside of the home and any 'hidden harm' identified. Children's social care is already planning for this, including the possible need for additional capacity, to ensure that we are able to manage any increase in work and continue to offer the right level of service.

12.5 It is recommended that the Committee endorses the actions taken in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and offers comment on any areas where they feel progress is slower than expected.

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 There are no additional papers to the report.

14 APPENDICES

14.1 Appendix A – Improvement governance arrangements

14.2 Appendix B – Children's Services Improvement Plan Tracker

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