

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 April 2022

CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

Report of the Strategic Director for Children and Families

Strategic Aim:	Building a Brighter Future	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	David Wilby, Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Dawn Godfrey Strategic Director Children and Families	01572 758358 dgodfrey@rutland.gov.uk
	Emma Sweeny, Head of children's Social Care	01572 758859 esweeny@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	NA	

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 next steps being taken and any areas of risk to progress.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Committee on the progress being made in children's social care and actions taken in response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and our own quality assurance processes.
- 1.2 To update on next steps and future challenges and invite the Committee to share their views on any areas where they feel additional attention is required.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 In January 2022 Ofsted undertook a focussed visit to look at children in care. The letter of findings was published on 24th February 2022 (Appendix B).
- 2.2 The findings were positive and highlighted a good experience for children and young people in our care. The young people that Ofsted met were positive about their

experiences and spoke positively about the care afforded to them.

- 2.3 Alongside the Ofsted visit we had already commissioned an independent agency to offer some quality assurance of our child protection and child in need process, assessments, and planning - the purpose of this was to ensure that we are maintaining progress in improving the children's services offer and ensuring children and families are receiving the right service.

3 OFSTED IMPROVEMENT

- 3.1 The feedback from Ofsted was positive and gives the service a robust basis for further development. They highlighted that:

“The local authority has maintained a clear focus on protecting children and improving the quality of social work practice in Rutland. Senior leaders know their services well and have focused effectively on an improvement plan despite the challenges of the pandemic”.

- 3.2 Areas for improvement from the focussed visit were around the recording of data on missing episodes and we have taken swift action in relation to this and there is now a clear format for recording missing episodes on the liquid logic system and all staff have been trained in this.
- 3.3 There was also some challenge around recording participation of children and young people on case files and ensuring participation opportunities are offered at different times to young people. It was noted that participation is taking place but isn't always noted on case files. Again, immediate action has been taken to rectify this and to ensure the good work undertaken by the team is captured.
- 3.4 Within the Ofsted feedback it was noted the positive social work practice that has taken place with our young people and the value that is placed on their voice. This was positive progress in relation to the inspection of 2020.
- 3.5 Assessments and plans were found to be of good quality and life story work evident and embedded which again is significant progress from 2020.
- 3.6 The areas of progression and impact on children and young people is encouraging and gives the service momentum to strive towards better outcomes in our next inspection.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

- 4.1 We had also commissioned an independent agency to undertake some quality assurance of our Child in Need and Child Protection work. This took place in February 2022.
- 4.2 Their findings were also largely positive although have highlighted areas for development and improvement.
- 4.3 The review looked at work undertaken at the front door of the service and the longer-term child protection and child in need team. The review highlighted that there was a good level of assessments taking place and that there were clear plans on all case files.

- 4.4 The reviewers also found that supervision was happening regularly but made some recommendations about the clear recording of this. Work has begun and is included in the development plan around supervision. We know that supervision is taking place but the effective recording of the discussions that take place is required, and this is being developed further.
- 4.5 There were some queries raised about the consistent application of threshold in relation to child protection concerns and appropriate escalation. The concern raised was that at times practitioners may be over optimistic in their approach and not be as professionally curious as they would be when offering challenge to the narrative of parents.
- 4.6 This is an area of development that we will take forward as we have a number of newly qualified workers who have trained and practiced within covid restrictions without the benefit of wider team support and reflection. We are now moving back to face-to-face training and more team members being in the office on a daily basis to offer appropriate peer challenge.
- 4.7 It is positive to note despite the concerns regarding over optimism we have not seen an increase in re-referral rates as we have continued to work with families and ensure that they have a service in place. We are working with social workers on developing professional curiosity and appropriate challenge.
- 4.8 Another issue raised for development was the way reports are written to children and ensuring that whilst writing in a child friendly manner, we are not minimising or softening the concerns. Service development days have been planned to reflect on this and this will be revisited throughout the year through the quality assurance process. Managers will also be mindful of the appropriateness of language and style when signing off assessments and plans through supervision.
- 4.9 Finally, the report highlighted the need to look at the plans and give measurable outcomes for families with dates. The reviewers felt that at times plans became a list of tasks rather than giving clear objectives and outcomes - again this is something to be addressed as part of our development plan.
- 4.10 Within this time, we also undertook quality assurance of our LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) function. This feedback highlighted some elements of process and data recording that could be improved but positively found that the decision making and outcomes were robust and accurate.
- 4.11 The main recommendation from the LADO audit that is being taken forward is the use of the Liquid Logic system to record LADO information which will enable better reporting capabilities in the future.
- 4.12 The overall summary of quality assurance work that has been undertaken and the Ofsted focussed visit has reassured us that we are making progress in our improvements with children's services and the service we are offering to children and families is of a good standard. We have created our service development plan to ensure that the pace of improvement is maintained pending our next inspection from Ofsted.

5 WORKFORCE

- 5.1 An area to note of future risk is workforce stability. Historically we have struggled

with maintaining staff due to the ability of larger local authorities to offer higher pay, promotion opportunities and incentives. We are working hard to maintain our staffing cohort and are revising our workforce development strategy however there are external factors that impact on our ability to maintain staff.

- 5.2 The current cost of living is a challenge for everybody, social workers are being offered in excess of £50 an hour by agencies to work for them and neighbouring authorities have seen numbers of social workers leaving to take up these opportunities. While this has not yet happened for Rutland, we have seen some social workers leave to go to a neighbouring Local Authority who are offering much larger salaries and retention bonuses.
- 5.3 We are currently engaging in work with the East Midlands region to look at staff stability and to attempt to manage agency pressure which will help to mitigate some of this risk, however this will remain a key factor for us.
- 5.4 Our children and young people value stability of workforce and this is what is required to enable us to continue to make the improvements in our service. While we do offer very manageable caseloads and a positive working environment, external market pressures are likely to impact on us and our staffing cohort.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 This report is for information only.

7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8 Not applicable.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None currently - if we are unable to maintain our staffing cohort and need to use agency staffing this could have a significant cost implication.

10 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 None Identified

11 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

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

12 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

13 COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 13.1 None Identified

14 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 None identified

15 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 We have continued to make progress with our children's social care offer and ensured that children and families are offered the right support from our services.
- 15.2 While we have made progress there is still work to do in relation to embedding and consolidating the changes that have been made and ensuring that we continue to strive for excellence in practice.
- 15.3 We are unique in comparison to most Local Authorities where we have been able to limit our use of agency workers and have successfully recruited to our social work vacancies, although this is becoming more challenging.
- 15.4 An area of risk to note is the retention of staff in these challenging times and work is being undertaken within the region to look at staff pay and development. This will be reported on in the coming months and is something that will form the basis of planning next steps for our retention of staff.
- 15.5 There is an Independent Review of Children's Social Care due to be published in May and this may have implications for the way children's social care services are delivered in the future. It is likely that there will be new statutory duties and responsibilities', and these will have an impact on frontline practice.
- 15.6 It is recommended that the Committee endorses the current children services development plan and comment on any areas where they feel additional focus may be required.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 There are no additional papers to the report

17 APPENDICES

- 17.1 Appendix A – Children's services development plan.
- 17.2 Appendix B - Ofsted Letter

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