

Report to the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 October 2015

Budget Position for the Children's Services Portfolio

Birmingham children's social care and safeguarding services - overview of progress

Purpose

To present an overview of progress on improvements in children's social care and safeguarding alongside a budget summary.

Summary

We have delivered year 1 of our improvement plan, as part of the response to Government Directions and with the oversight of Lord Warner, the appointed Children's Commissioner. The primary focus in year 1 has been establishing MASH, a highly visible single point of entry and multi-agency information sharing to ensure children's needs are met, establishing a credible budget and stabilising the workforce. All of these were achieved. **[Lord Warner 2]***

We now have a new 'Early Help and Children's Social Care improvement plan 2015-17' with a stronger focus on improving social work practice and reducing delays. We are almost fully staffed, although still relying on agency staff for a third of posts and we have more manageable caseloads. We have agreed partner thresholds and an early help strategy is in place, with a strong targeted early help offer. We have also established a system-wide Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership to shape our service responses and our offer across agencies and settings.

There is clear vision and purpose and direction for the service and more stable leadership with improved political ownership of the improvement journey. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure children and families receive a responsive and effective service that engages with them to enable positive change.

In particular, we still need to develop our quality assurance and performance management systems so that we are learning from practice and tackling poor performance more quickly. We also need to ensure that our systems and processes, information and data sharing around child sexual exploitation (CSE), children missing from home, care and education, and children who might be influenced by radicalisation, are all working more effectively and delivering better outcomes for the children and young people affected.

Recommendation

That progress be noted

** Note: Lord Warner's remit is set out at Appendix A. Examples of progress relevant to specific areas are indicated in bold and within brackets.*

Our current improvement journey

The next phase of our improvement work is captured within the **Improvement Plan for Early Help and Children's Social Care 2015-17**, agreed at Cabinet in April 2015. The Council has made children's services its top priority and has invested much-needed money into the service - making a further £21.5m available for 2015/16 (on top of an extra £9.6m in 2014/15). [LW 5]

Recruitment and retention of social workers remains a challenging area with 32% of our front-line social workers and 23% of our team managers agency staff. However, we are almost fully staffed: vacancies are down from 55.7 April-June 2014 to 13.7 April-June 2015 and turnover has decreased from 26.8% to 20.5% leading to greater stability in the workforce and more consistency for children and families. We now have a **workforce strategy** to stabilise staffing and give social workers the skills, confidence and the right tools to deliver social work that will make a real difference to children's lives. Recruitment of newly qualified social workers, social workers, team managers and foster carers is improving. We have a new contract in place to procure agency staff through a single master agency (HCL), and this will over time reduce cost and improve quality. [LW 4]

We have a new **workforce development plan** with a focus on evidence-based and systemic practice and a new supervision policy that improves management oversight and privileges reflective practice. We have set up assessment and short-term intervention teams and area resource panels to provide more timely assessment, management oversight of decision-making, and more support and challenge. We are focused on embedding relationship and evidence-based social work intervention at the core of practice in both targeted early help and social work, within a culture of high support and high challenge. [LW 4]

A range of **Recruitment & Retention Interventions** include:

- Regional Agency Agreement – 14 local authorities in the West Midlands engaged with a focus on agency capped rate of pay.
- Upgraded external recruitment micro-site to be launched at the end of October 2015 which will improve the candidate experience and also raise the profile of Team Manager recruitment.
- On-going programme of recruitment activities, including 'the Guardian Best of Birmingham' September 2015 publication.
- Full LEAN review of end-to-end recruitment processes with focus on requirement of design around customer need.
- Comprehensive Children's Services Career and Development Gateway launched 16th September covering:
 - Learning and Development Framework, including induction
 - Supervision Policy and Resource Pack
 - Social Worker Career Progression Pathway, including ASYE offering and transition from GR4 – GR5.
- Proactive sickness management through Managing Attendance Panels.
- Further proactive management of exit interviews to enable the gathering of reliable data on-line to inform the retention plan.

A review of the Starters, Leavers and Movers (SLAM) process, as part of the Integrated Support Services Future Council sub-programme, will further support recruitment and retention interventions.

Proposed next steps encompass a full review of salary benchmark data for the West Midlands to enable a fuller understanding of the ongoing competitiveness of our offer.

The above activity continues to be supported by a recent appointment to the HR Business Partner for the People Directorate and a Children's Services dedicated HR team which has a changed cultural focus and an ambition to operate at pace. This also includes a new interim HR Business Partner arrangement. Positive feedback is beginning to be received and the aim is to ensure progress is maintained and built upon.

Quality assurance (QA) remains an under-developed area, but the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) has just started as have two area-based principal social workers. We know that we need to maintain a strong **focus on practice** and there is still some way to go to achieve consistent good quality assessment, effective interventions and purposeful plans for all children in need or care in the city. **[LW 4]**

The CSWO will lead on developing effective social work practice and help us build effective QA systems that produce learning to inform improvement at area, team and individual levels. We have a new QA framework and we are launching a new case audit system. We also have a programme of monthly service area focused performance meetings to improve how we work together (this is in addition to arrangements in each Area) and we have developed a performance real-time scorecard for teams in CareFirst. We are undertaking two peer challenges within West Midlands in next few months – one about our leaving care services and another about our case audit system. **[LW 8]**

In July 2014 the Council launched the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and that is now an established city-wide point of entry for contacts and referrals for early help, children in need and child protection. MASH has improved partnership working by bringing Police, Health and Probation colleagues together to share information. In the first six months there was a big increase in contact and referrals resulting in more child protection (CP) plans, more assessments and higher caseloads as well as high levels of unallocated work. In the last 6 months we have improved our early help response, set up assessment teams to respond to child in need work and talked more with partners about thresholds for s.47. As a result contact, referral and assessment rates have stabilised at manageable levels, the amount of unallocated cases has dramatically reduced and average caseloads are now 18. **[LW 3]**

We are implementing a multi-agency **Early Help** Strategy with partners alongside a new multi-agency agreement about levels of need for children – 'Right Service, Right Time'. In June we appointed an Assistant Director for Early Help and Youth Justice who will be developing a consistent targeted early help service across the city, bringing together Family Support and 'Think Family' (our Troubled Families services) to provide a consistent key worker-based service to families requiring intensive support, below social work intervention. **[LW 6]**

We are seeing a cultural shift from a focus on process/repeated assessment towards **more direct work with families** to enable them to make positive changes and thus improve outcomes for the children. Our aim is that by undertaking more direct social work interventions with families we will be able to support more children to live at home with their families safely. This requires a change in culture in the social work teams with social workers providing more direct work and engaging partners to provide joined up interventions as part of the child in need or child protection plan. It also requires stronger management oversight and leadership. **[LW 4]**

We need to improve our systems and processes including intelligent data sharing to ensure we have effective joined up responses to young people in danger outside the family home from threats such as CSE, missing from home or school, radicalisation, gangs and criminal activity. We have a strong youth offending service which has developed effective partnership working that engages vulnerable young people and their families which children's social work can learn from.

We have high numbers of older teenagers entering care and we recognise that we need to offer such young people and their families a service focused on mediation and support and learning ways of managing difficult behaviour and emotional regulation. We are developing a short-term intensive 'Edge of Care' service for October 2015.

We are committed to reducing timescales in care proceedings through more engagement with families to bring about change pre-proceedings and a reduction in specialist assessment requests. We have developed a good relationship with the Birmingham & Solihull Family Court and CAFCASS, recognising that we all have to work together as we are facing the same challenges.

Children in care

We are making sure **children in care** get more timely reviews and better care planning, and there have been improvements to the fostering and adoption service. However, children in care planning and care leaver pathway plans remain an area of weakness that requires more attention – e.g. we have 126 children on placement orders waiting to be matched with an adoptive family (down from 150 in April). **[LW 9]**

We have also brought into place improved **corporate parenting and children in care council** arrangements. We are developing ways to more actively listen and learn from the children and families we work with to improve services for them. **[LW 9]**

Our **Independent Reviewing Officer Service** (IRO) has been managed by Cafcass since November 2014 and a better performing service has returned to Council management in October 2015. We are now tracking children in care more systematically to reduce delays in their care journey and IRO are providing more constructive challenge and support to social workers. **[LW 8]**

We need to improve our services for care leavers, with better pathway planning that supports more young people in education and employment and reduces the percentage of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). **[LW 9]**

We have a substantial programme of improvement in Fostering and adoption which includes the bringing in-house of foster carer, adopter and SGO assessments and a substantial recruitment of foster carers and adoptive families to improve quality and reduce our reliance on expensive external agencies. **(LW9)**

Leadership and Management

Working with the Department for Education (DfE), University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) we are exploring possibilities of an alternative approach to **assuring safeguarding**, via a commissioned separate and independent audit body with the tools and authority to hold agencies to account.

We have a **senior management team** in place made up entirely of permanent appointments - ending the cycle of leadership change and failure to drive effective practice change which has characterised Birmingham's recent history. Senior managers are being held to account for their leadership and performance and action is being taken when deficits are apparent. **[LW 4]**

We have introduced new reflective **supervision policy and arrangements** for social workers and a new outcomes-focused, much less bureaucratic appraisal system in 2015. We are actively developing a culture of challenge and support and learning and accountability at all

levels supported by a workforce plan that is about practice learning. This includes tackling poor performance without letting issues drift. **[LW 4]**

There is agreement to replace the CareFirst data and case management system with a more modern and fit for purpose system that will be much easier for social workers to use and thus free them to spend more time in direct work with children and families.

There is strong **political commitment** to improving outcomes for children in Birmingham and supporting children's services with resources and the tools to deliver these outcomes. Collectively the Leader, Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services maintain regular **oversight** of the improvement plan; there will be a stress test of the DCS/Lead Member arrangements at the end of 2015/16 to be reported to the Full Council. And there will be a resources test as part of establishing the 2016/17 budget. **[LW 1]**

The Future Council programme, and in particular the work around the vulnerable children's cohort, is very timely as it brings the children's services improvement plan into the Future Council programme. A number of 'cases for change' in the vulnerable children's cohort add detail and development potential to what has already been agreed in the improvement plan and the proposed new operating model. This recognises that "early help and children's social care" is a whole system and improvement can only be sustained and demand effectively managed if attention is made to ensuring the system is a coherent whole. The overarching case for change shows how the whole system, incorporating and developing the vulnerable children's cohort of cases for change, will manage demand and deliver savings over the next three years, whilst continuing to improve the quality of service to children and families. **[LW 6]**

Partnership working around children's services has been poor for some considerable time. Over the last year the introduction of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and challenges from Lord Warner as Commissioner, have combined to create some momentum to different partnership structures and ways of working. **[LW 7]**

The new **Children's Strategic Leaders Forum** signals strategic and high level attention to improving children's outcomes. The forum is able to consider children's issues within the wider context of families' experiences and the opportunities and challenges presented by the city. It will take an overview of the systems working to support children and families in the city so that they are all aligned and working together to deliver that intention. The forum will challenge gaps in coordination and delivery and ensure that the vision for services is stretching and ambitious. **[LW 7]**

The **Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership** oversees the delivery of the Early Help strategy and the shape of multiagency working to meet the needs of children and their families from universal to specialist, including locality working in hubs, districts and areas and central processes such as the MASH. This is co-chaired by the City Council and West Midlands Police. The co-chairs and members will be visible champions of a "whole system" approach, and getting the right Health and VCS representation (amongst others) will be key to that. This partnership will also develop models for more local partnership working in each of the City's three Areas. **[LW 7]**

The **Children's Joint Commissioning Partnership Board** enables the NHS and the Council to align finance and jointly commission a series of services to children. Where these have been agreed, this group has the responsibility to design ways in which the identified needs of children will be met and for monitoring and evaluating the success of these interventions. The board has recently supported and accelerated progress in relation to 0-25 mental health services and the special education development plan. **[LW 7]**

The **Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP)** is a school-led organisation, working to build a robust and ambitious system of continuous improvement, building on existing strengths amongst Birmingham schools and school leadership. BEP will ensure that school improvement is in the hands of school leaders, and that no school is isolated or unsupported. This will be achieved through a school-led system of continuous improvement, informed by intelligent use of data. BEP will also have a developing safeguarding role and will work with early help and children's social care to improve the whole system. The City Council has commissioned BEP to deliver the school improvement function from September 2015, aligned with the development of strong local partnership and engagement, including with children and young people. **[LW 7]**

Commissioning

We have established a 'Commissioning Centre for Excellence' across the People directorate and embarked on a programme of review of externally commissioned services, with a greater focus on targeted services, impact and value for money. This involves developing new more integrated contracts as existing arrangements come to an end.

We have tendered for the externalisation of 5 children's homes and are evaluating the responses.

We have embarked on a substantial and complex new commissioning of early years services, seeking to amalgamate health visiting, children's centres and other under 5s services on a district model, offering more targeted focus in areas of greater deprivation.

Improvement Support

We have had two positive and helpful improvement visits from Ofsted, looking at MASH (January 2015) and the Assessment function (September 2015). Future visits looking at child protection and children in care are planned over the next 6 months. **(LW8)**

The DfE have appointed Essex CC Children's Services as our improvement partner. We have agreed a programme of diagnostic peer/self-assessments in front-line teams followed by practice learning seminars between October and July 2016. This programme can be extended. Essex will report back to us on issues of quality, practice, management oversight and leadership. Essex will also report progress to DfE. **(LW8)**

Councillor Brigid Jones
Cabinet Member, Children's Services

Appendices

Appendix A: Lord Warner's remit

Appendix B: Summary risks, assurances and headline actions

Appendix C: Budget

Lord Warner's remit

1. To ensure that the Authority establishes an effective **accountable body** to oversee and drive improvements in children's social care in Birmingham.
 2. To ensure that the Authority has a single coherent plan for the improvement of children's services in Birmingham ("the **improvement plan**") with a particular focus on the first three years from the date of this direction.
 3. To ensure that the Authority explores and resolves the problem of children who are at risk but who have **not yet been identified as at risk** and ensure that all children at risk of harm progress swiftly through the child protection system.
 4. To review and improve **senior management and social work capacity and capability** at the Authority.
 5. To oversee the production of an **itemised budget** for children's services which reflects and aligns with the needs and timescales identified in the improvement plan.
 6. To oversee work to identify future strategies for the **commissioning** of children's social care services in Birmingham and to make recommendations on further steps to be taken in my final April 2015 report to the Secretary of State.
 7. To ensure that the Authority improves systems between itself and its local **partners**
 8. To ensure that the Authority builds ongoing **independent review and challenge** into all of its systems for safeguarding and looking after children.
 9. To improve the effectiveness of arrangements for **children in care** (this addition to Lord Warner's original remit featured towards the latter part of his year in Birmingham).
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Summary risks, assurances and headline actions

Risks	Direction of travel	Rating
Children protected from significant harm.	↑	
Workforce capacity and capability.	↑	
Governance systems.	↑	
Partnership systems.	↑	
Senior management stability and capability.	↑	
Adequacy of resources.	↑	

Assurances

Sustain Quartet oversight for further 2 years.	In place.	
“Normal service” of accountability of DCS / Lead Member.	Completed and made explicit.	
Stress test of DCS/Lead Member arrangements end 2015/16.	Initial test completed. To be reported to full Council.	
Resources test with 2016/17 budget.	Timetabled for 2016/17 budget approval process.	
Continued Chief Executive Risk Assessment.	Scheduled.	

Headline actions – Lord Warner strongly supports the improvement and commissioning plans of the Council and implementation of these is being carefully monitored by the Quartet. Some other key areas are set out below.

Stabilise MASH.	Early Help and Right Service Right Time aligned; partnership commissioning of MASH in place. Plan to enhance MASH around CSE and Prevent. Current change proposals being worked out around assessment function after MASH.	
Improved management capability.	CSWO arrived. More collaborative team now in place. Senior managers beginning to perform better.	
Sustained performance monitoring.	Improvement Board, Quartet, Lead Member, DCS – mainstream.	
Credible recruitment and retention strategy.	Initial focus is newly qualified social workers and team managers. Strengthened HR capacity. Continual work around reputation building	
Long term IT strategy with staff.	Devices to be rolled out and CareFirst replacement at early planning stage	
Financial stability through the commissioning plan.	Requires significant recommissioning activity.	
Implement Corporate Parenting Action Plan.	Children in Care – externalisation of internal residential care; improved care planning, foster care recruitment and faster adoption; development of a fostering and adoption business unit model by end of 2016.	
Sustain work on partnerships.	Strategic Leaders Forum June 2015; LSCB proposals to DfE May 2015. EH&SP July 15.	
IRO.	Annual IRO Corporate Parenting report to be presented to BSCB. CAFCASS have handed service back to BCC (Oct 15). Better IRO engagement with each child and support and challenge to social worker.	
LSCB development.	Consideration of separate independent audit body with the tools and authority to hold agencies to account.	
Practice improvement.	CSWO annual report on outcomes, QA and performance of Early Help and Children's Social Care, to be published.	

Appendix C

The Council has made children's services its top priority and has invested much-needed money into the service to support the improvement plan as shown in the table below:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	£000	£000	£000
Investment	<u>14,400</u>	<u>21,500</u>	<u>26,200</u>

The 2014/15 additional investment of £14.4m supports:

- A one-off sum of £8.2m to fund a baseline of 1830 Children in Care (CiC) at April 2014.
- £6.2m to increase the numbers of qualified social work posts to reduce caseloads and develop a career progression pathway to retain qualified and experienced staff.

The 2015/16 further investment of £21.5m supports:

- £8.2m to make permanent the one-off additional funding in 2014/15 – (1830 CiC).
- £11.65m to fund an increase in the CiC population to a base line number of 1933 at April 2015 but with anticipated further in year growth in numbers.
- £1.65m to establish an Edge of Care service to work with children and families offering support to prevent the need for children becoming looked after.

The 2015/16 Early Help and Children's Social Care net budget (including £21.5m growth) is £149.2m. Based upon information at the end of July there was a forecast overspend of £3.4m which is predominantly due to there being more children in care than budgeted and because of the additional costs of agency social workers and team managers.

A number of actions and improvements happening within the service continue to impact and reduce the cost pressure (down from £3.4m to £1.6m at Month 6) and it is anticipated that the service will achieve a balanced budget by the end of the financial year. Such actions are:

Stronger area resource panels

Reduction in caseloads

Improvement in single assessment timescales

Early Help services in place

Work being appropriately directed to Early Help at MASH front door

Children in care and Child Protection numbers becoming more stable

Improved recruitment of foster carers

Reduced staff turnover and new Agency master vendor

Edge of care teams being established.

The funding commitment into 2016/17 underpins the actions identified in the agreed Improvement Plan and which are now being implemented.
