

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 9th June 2011

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PART I **FOR INFORMATION, SCRUTINY AND CHALLENGE**

OFSTED REPORT ON THE ANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Members of the outcome of the Ofsted announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children which took place between April 4th and 15th 2011, and the final report published on June 1st 2011, judging Slough Borough Council's children's social care services as 'inadequate' for safeguarding and 'adequate' for looked after children.

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel is requested to:

- a. Note the contents of the report
- b. Approve the current Recovery Plan

3 Community Strategy Priorities

- **Celebrating diversity, Enabling inclusion**
 - By identifying and prioritising services for vulnerable groups in the Slough population, by targeting support to meet the needs of children and young people's identified needs and by ensuring that we build on the good and outstanding judgements in the Ofsted report and by addressing the areas for improvement.
- **Adding years to Life and Life to years**
 - Through focussing on the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people and their parents and carers in Slough, and providing targeted services through partnership working primarily with the NHS to secure measurable health improvements
- **Being Safe, Feeling Safe**
 - By offering effective support to families to help them do their best for their children so that children and young people are safe in their families and communities
 - By recognising that parents are the main carers for their children, and by offering services that enable them to continue to care for their children successfully so that children can grow up within their own families and communities wherever possible

- By carrying out respective roles across the local authority and partner agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable children in our community are protected from harm and they are enabled to live with their families
 - By carrying out our statutory role as a local authority to provide services for children in need, to safeguard them and look after children whose parents are unable to do so
 - By working effectively with partner agencies so that they also contribute to safeguarding children and young people and demonstrate improved outcomes for those children and young people and their families
 - By ensuring that children and young people who are looked after have the standards of care and life opportunities that we would want for our own children with contributions from all partner agencies
- **Prosperity for All**
 - By offering early education and family support to parents of young children so that they can focus on meeting their children's needs and overcoming personal and family difficulties that affect their ability to care for their children
 - By promoting educational achievement which gives children and young people in care and leaving care enjoyment in learning and increased opportunities for success in adult life
 - By maintaining high levels of Education, Employment and Training (EET) for young people who are looked after beyond 16 years of age.
 - By promoting vulnerable young people's social and emotional development alongside advances in educational achievement
 - By supporting local nursery providers to secure optimum standards so that parents and carers are able to secure economic prosperity/independence for themselves and their family.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

The unprecedented growth in the local population, together with the rise in child protection work and the number of children looked after has led to a budget pressure caused by:-

- the increasing placement costs for looked after children;
- an increase in court ordered contact;
- and the consequent need for additional independent reviewing officer time and administrative support for child protection conferences and children looked after reviews.

Work has been undertaken to check thresholds and rigorously gate-keep all admissions to care, as well as looking at those children who can move to permanent placements through adoption or family arrangements. In 2010-11 this budget pressure was met by one-off savings across Education and Children's Services and is detailed in budget reports to Members. Measures have been taken to ensure that appropriate safeguarding is maintained and to maximise value for money. However, the continued net increase in the overall client base has meant that the Council has had to set aside a contingency budget of £600,000 to meet the rising costs due to the demographic change.

In 2010-11 the Sure Start grant was utilised to bring about a greater focus on vulnerable children under 5, through paying for social work time, services to families

with children in need and those on child protection plans. This helped to reduce any potential overspend on the specific client group within the ring-fenced funding rules that at that time applied to Sure Start funding. The Sure Start funding has now been included in the reduced Early Intervention Grant. Work is under way to allocate the Early Intervention Grant to commission services in priority areas such as children in need and child protection to address the family problems which result in children being in need of protection or coming into care (for example, substance abuse, domestic abuse, mental health); and to fund the 'First Response' service which builds on the successful triage approach to early intervention services.

The draft Recovery Plan will have some funding implications for the council, and these are currently being costed. Some areas of work listed in the draft Recovery Plan are already being funded through the base budget: e.g. recruitment of social workers and managers; some will be funded through the use of the Early Intervention Grant; and some through the use of the contingency fund detailed above. Additional funding required for the Recovery Plan will include the cost of the case file auditors and training and mentoring.

Local Safeguarding Children Board's funding contributed by all partners will be used to develop and embed multi-agency audits of child protection processes dealing with children at risk of significant harm, and to examine the steps being taken by partner agencies to implement their regulatory safeguarding responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

(b) Risk Management

| Recommendation | Risk/Threat/Opportunity | Mitigation |
|---|---|---|
| Continuing work to manage rise in referrals, child protection plans and children looked after to ensure that children are kept safe | Rising demand puts pressure on budget, staff and performance | First Response system set up to manage demand for lower level cases. Clear thresholds are in place for all partner agencies. Work with partner organisations to ensure they take responsibility as lead practitioners where agreed. |
| Recovery Plan in place to ensure that all Ofsted recommendations are followed up, monitored and having an impact on outcomes for children and young people. | Focus on Recovery Plan in SBC does not engage all key partners. Focus on Recovery Plan distracts from broader range of outcomes. | All partner organisations across the borough working to deliver the Recovery Plan, monitored through the Improvement Board. Senior representation from key partners on the Improvement Board. All partner organisation across the borough working to deliver the CYPP agreed outcomes. |
| Ensure focus on improving outcomes for children and young people through Recovery Plan | Concentration on process in Recovery Plan distracts from need to improve outcomes for children and young people. | Measures detailed in Recovery Plan need to focus on children and young people, with regular monitoring and challenge by the Improvement Board. |
| Ensure recruitment of new | Potential staff are deterred | Continue with recruitment |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| social workers and managers, and retention of existing staff. Increase skills at all levels through training, mentoring and line management supervision. | from joining Slough because of the outcome of the Ofsted report. Impact of training not immediately obvious in improved outcomes for children and young people. | programme and funding to ensure newly qualified workers are supported. Work with existing staff and managers to ensure take up of training and mentoring and application of learning to improve outcomes for children. |
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(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or other legal implications.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An equalities impact assessment is not required in relation to this information report.

(e) Workforce

At the time of the Ofsted inspection, there were four vacant social work posts in the front line service. Other posts were filled through permanent staff and agency services. A recruitment campaign has been completed. Eight new social workers have been recruited, leaving ten vacancies. These posts are currently filled by agency staff. Seven managers have been confirmed in post.

Social work caseloads were approximately 20 at the time of the Ofsted visit.

Staff are clear about the expectations of their quality of practice and management and committed to using the Ofsted recommendations to improve practice and contribute to the overall work to deliver the Recovery Plan.

5 Supporting Information

5.1 Background

Since 2009, Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel Members have considered reports on the rise in safeguarding activity and in the numbers of looked after children, integrated working, family and parenting, budget implications of the reductions in grant funding and performance reports on children's social care. In January and April 2010, two special scrutiny meetings were held at Members' request, and these are detailed in Section 8. Corporate Parenting Panel members consider reports specifically relating to Slough's looked after children.

5.2 Context

Slough's population continues to rise through an increased birth rate, and inward migration has resulted in a very young population profile, and, therefore, an increased number of children, young people and their families requiring services. This growth in population has recently increased yet further through vulnerable families moving out of London into privately rented accommodation, seeking cheaper housing within the housing benefit allowance. These families have included children already on child protection plans from other local authorities, or families who, on arrival in Slough, are referred to children's social care.

Nationally, the number of children with child protection plans and children looked after has increased over recent years. This follows the media coverage of the death of Peter Connolly in November 2008, and the subsequent rise in public and organisational awareness of safeguarding matters. In 2010, research by the Association of Directors of Children's Services, found that nationally, between 2007 and 2009, initial contacts had increased by 25%; referrals (contacts needing further investigation) had increased by 16%; child protection enquiries had increased by 20%; 33% more children were subject to a child protection plan; and 17% more children started to be looked after. This research was later confirmed by the annual statistical release by the DfE. Research by 'Reconstruct' shows a number of different factors that might contribute to the rise in child protection and children looked after, in addition to sensitivity about child protection since Peter Connolly's death. These include the introduction of the Public Law Outline (a change in the way care proceedings are carried out); changing demographics; immigration; teenage pregnancies; the Southwark judgement (local authorities responsibilities for assessing 16 and 17 year olds in need of accommodation) and the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.

Slough's data shows that there have, historically, been fewer children on child protection plans and looked after than our statistical neighbours. However, the rise in numbers in Slough has mirrored the national picture, but has been more acute because of the rising population of children and young people in the Borough and the average family size which is significantly larger than the national average. In March 2008 there were 59 children on child protection plans and in May 2011, 161. In March 2008 there were 120 children looked after, and in May 2011, 176.

Work carried out into the reasons behind the rise in numbers shows a significant number of younger children coming into care, mostly those from birth to 4 (and particularly those under 1), and from 5-10. The main reason for children coming into care is largely neglect, due to parental substance abuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems.

5.3 Ofsted inspection regime

Currently, Ofsted announced inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children are carried out in every local authority area once every three years. The announced inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers across all the outcome areas. The inspection involves local authority services, the police, health, the voluntary sector and other organisations offering services to children, young people and their families. Inspectors look at every area of the work with children and young people across the local authority area.

Ofsted also carry out an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment annually in every local authority area. Slough's last inspection was in October 2010 and contained no areas for priority action.

The future of the Ofsted inspection regime is under review, following the publication of the Munro report in May 2011. This report was commissioned by government to consider reforms in the child protection system with the intention of making it less bureaucratic and concerned with compliance to one that focuses on effective help for children. Munro's recommendation is that the inspection framework should examine the effectiveness of the contributions of all local services, including health, education, police, probation and the justice system to the protection of children, and she suggests that this is conducted on an unannounced basis. It is not, therefore, clear

whether Slough will be re-inspected by Ofsted under the same regime in a year's time, as would have been the case in the past.

5.4 The Ofsted judgements

Ofsted judged Safeguarding Services and outcomes for children and young people as 'inadequate'; and the Services for Looked After Children as 'adequate'. In total the report has 22 main findings. Of those, 6 were graded as inadequate, 10 as adequate, 5 as good, and 1 as outstanding.

Their report contains a series of recommendations with timescales for implementation. While most of the recommendations concern children's social care services, there are also recommendations for the Local Safeguarding Children Board and health partners.

Ofsted highlighted some areas of good practice, including:

- a) The contribution of children and young people to their own plans and planning services for children and young people is good.
- b) The provision of services to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in Slough is good.
- c) Early intervention and prevention services are good and link well with the statutory social work teams. Sure Start Children's Centres provide very good support for parents.
- d) Health services contribute well to keeping children and young people safe.
- e) Elected Members in Slough Borough Council are well-informed and provide challenge on performance, and councillors have received training on safeguarding.
- f) Services for looked after children were graded as adequate. Children said they had a say in the way in which their needs were met, and that they felt safe.
- g) The report says that looked after children receive good support for their health and are helped to stay in education, employment and training after 16.
- h) Most looked after children and young people make satisfactory progress at school, attend regularly, and no looked after children have been excluded from school.
- i) Organisations have continued to work to improve outcomes for looked after children despite the rise in the numbers
- j) Social work caseloads are manageable

However, Ofsted found that aspects of our service were not up to the standard they and we would expect:

- a) Ofsted carried out an audit of cases through ICS (Integrated Children's System) including children in need, child protection, and children looked after. There are 1177 open cases in children's social care. Ofsted reviewed 51 files across social care and health. They looked at 43 cases in children's social care.
- b) In the majority of cases they found that practice was adequate, however, they focussed on 5 cases involving children under 5 in households where there was a history of domestic abuse and other problems and asked managers to follow up their concerns. In three cases they were satisfied that the children were sufficiently well protected. In two further cases, they asked managers to take immediate protective action. In one case the actions they required had already been carried out; in the other, immediate action was taken to intervene and ensure that the children were safely protected. No children had been injured as a result of the situation they were in, although they were at risk of significant harm

through being exposed to domestic abuse between their parents. Legal advice was taken on all cases, and no children met the threshold for care proceedings.

- c) The 'risk of significant harm' referred to in the report is mostly connected with children living in households where there is domestic abuse between their parents, and their home circumstances are not ideal for them. Domestic abuse is a feature of many children's lives, and it can affect them emotionally and psychologically if they witness it, particularly over a long period of time. All children on child protection plans receive regular visits from a social worker, at least every two weeks, and if concerns were reported, the child would receive an immediate unannounced visit. The children's child protection plans are regularly reviewed, and, again, if there was cause for concern, legal advice would be requested straight away on whether there were grounds to remove the children.
- d) In their analysis based on the cases they audited, Ofsted identified the need to improve practice in risk assessment, contingency planning, care planning, the quality and use of assessments, and health notifications for vulnerable children and young people.
- e) They flagged up the lack of systematic management oversight in identification of risk, decision making and management supervision and commented on the need for considerable improvement in our quality assurance systems.
- f) From the work carried out during April and May to check the Ofsted findings, this does not appear to be a systemic failure of the child protection system, but about fine judgement by practitioners and managers in some specific cases; and insufficiently robust and challenging oversight and quality assurance by managers to ensure that contingency plans were in place. Work with staff started immediately the Ofsted inspection finished to review current cases and ensure that practice and management changes took place immediately and are embedded in the long term.
- g) The underlying reasons for the practice and management concerns which led to Ofsted's criticisms are:
 - i. High demand on services as outlined in 5.2 and 4 a)
 - ii. Turnover of staff and the need to recruit and retain high quality managers and social workers
 - iii. Insufficiently robust and challenging management oversight and quality assurance in children's social care
 - iv. A combination of incomplete assessment and lack of robust analysis which reduced focus on children's needs in favour of their parents.
 - v. Recording that is insufficiently analytical and where the outcomes for children and young people are not as explicit as they need for effective monitoring to take place in future.

Current Situation

5.5 Current performance management systems

Information on children's social care performance is gathered through the Integrated Children's System (ICS). All social work records are held on this system. Effective monitoring and analysis of performance information is essential to improving outcomes for children. In Slough it takes the following forms:

- a) High level performance information required by the DfE which is reported regularly within Education and Children's Services, to the Children's Partnership Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board as well as to Members through

Scrutiny panels, Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet. This high level performance information shows that Slough has good performance in the highest quartiles in all the required national indicators. The report is used within Education and Children's Services to focus on areas where performance needs to be examined in greater detail with corrective action as necessary.

- b) In Social Care, quality assurance information includes regular management oversight of casework, audits of children and young people's case files to check individual outcomes and work being carried out to required standards, and regular supervision of staff. This is carried out within children's social care, but also applies to partner agencies and is checked through a 'Section 11' audit for all partners within the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- c) Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 lays down the obligations of all the agencies' responsible for making arrangements to safeguard and promote children's welfare. These arrangements are generally audited by LSCBs.
- d) Additional sources of information on service quality include complaints, and the resolution of those complaints, feedback from children, young people and their parents on child protection plans and for those children who are looked after; from staff in all organisations working with children, young people and their families, staff exit interviews, and managers and elected Members spending time with social work staff to observe front line practice and talk with staff.
- e) There is also a requirement in 'Working Together' which is the national guidance document for all partners working in child protection, to ensure that LSCB members learn lessons from Serious Case Reviews in their area and nationally.

In best practice, the outcomes from the performance and quality assurance work listed above is used in service improvement to improve outcomes for children, to consider themes arising from practice and work which needs to be carried out, and to develop new ways of working.

In Slough, while the high level performance management system detailed in a) has worked well and been used to inform practice, the Ofsted inspection shows that in recent months the management oversight and quality assurance systems detailed in b) have not been used sufficiently consistently and robustly to improve practice.

5.6 Actions as a result of the Ofsted judgement

As a result of the inspection, work has concentrated on rapid changes in practice and management to make sure that the necessary improvements are in place. The work carried out to date demonstrates the determination of managers and staff to drive the necessary improvements; and to continue that based on the draft and final versions of the Recovery Plan.

- a) During the Ofsted visit, managers compiled an immediate improvement plan (attached) to make sure that social workers and their managers were changing practice based on the messages delivered by Ofsted during the inspection process. Ofsted commented that the immediate actions identified needed to be further prioritised and sufficient resources identified to secure the necessary improvement without impacting on stretched front line services. However the actions in the immediate improvement plan are all under way, and staff and managers have been working on them since April 15th.
- b) Work to review current practice and ensure that required actions are under way, for example:

- Audit of all case files of children under 5 on child protection plans and taken legal advice where necessary on cases where parents need to be reminded about their responsibilities to keep their children safe.
 - Audit of other potentially high risk cases, continuing as part of regular work on auditing files
 - Briefings for staff and managers about expectations of the quality of their work and putting training in place to make sure the shortcomings flagged up by Ofsted are dealt with
 - Checks to make sure that management oversight and quality assurance are focussed on children's needs, rather than their parents; and in child protection conferences with parents, being even clearer about what will happen if the parents do not follow the child agreed protection plan
 - Continuation with the recruitment of social work staff and managers which had been in hand before the Ofsted inspection.
 - The LSCB and Children's Partnership Board are meeting on June 16th and will be building the Ofsted recommendations into their plans for 2011-12
 - Health have submitted details of their actions to be included in the Recovery Plan.
- c) Additional experienced staff have been brought in at managerial level to oversee the service and drive the improvements.
- d) Work is under way to assess the capability of staff at all levels in achieving the necessary changes and build that into targets, appraisals and personal development plans.
- e) Bringing together a group of people to oversee the improvements, including external experts, and ensuring that our partners also fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities and assist in driving the necessary improvements.
- f) In addition, while the focus in the Ofsted report is on children's social care, an examination of the underlying causes demonstrates, for example, that the highest proportion of referrals to children's social care and the First Response (triage) team are from the police, who refer over six times more cases than any other agency or individual. Discussion is currently under way with the police to understand the nature of the referrals (mostly domestic abuse cases) and what assistance Thames Valley Police can offer children's social care in identifying and working with domestic abuse cases that affect children. Work is also under way to review current domestic and substance abuse services and their impact on addressing problems with families who have levels of need that present risks to their ability to parent their children. The Early Intervention Grant is being used to commission work based on these priorities.

5.6 Next steps

Senior officers, the Lead Member for Education and Children and the Chair of the LSCB had a meeting with officials from DfE who were impressed with the progress to date on the immediate action plan and the first stages of the Recovery Plan, and saw this as an indication of the Council's ability and willingness to learn and change. Nationally new systems are being put in place to support local authorities and partner organisations where an Ofsted inspection results in an inadequate judgement. The system will involve the DfE Intervention unit and sector-led improvement. DfE's role is to monitor progress against the Recovery Plan. The sector led input is through other local authorities, and experts in safeguarding offering challenge, advice and support on the Recovery Plan.

The likely next steps are:

- a) An intervention notice from the Minister, compiled in conjunction with the DfE, the sector-led improvement programme and Slough Borough Council.
- b) Oversight of Slough's draft improvement plan carried out by the sector led improvement team.
- c) The establishment of an Improvement Board, possibly chaired by an external expert to oversee the delivery of the plan and assist with DfE's monitoring responsibilities.
- d) An Agreement about the focus of the sector led improvement work.

6. **Conclusion**

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel is requested to note the contents of the report and approve the current Recovery Plan.

7. **Appendices Attached**

Ofsted report on the announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services April 2011.

Draft 'Recovery' Plan.

Immediate Action Plan with details of progress.

8 **Background Papers**

Special Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on 13th January 2010.
Agenda item 2: 'Safeguarding in Slough: the Work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board'

Special Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on 22nd April 2010.
Agenda Item 2: 'Safeguarding in the Health Service'
Item 3 'Child Protection and the Independent Reviewing Service'

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny on 23rd June 2010. Agenda Item 8
'Implications of the Rise in the Numbers of Vulnerable Children 2008-10'

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny on 25th November 2010: Agenda Item 3
'Ofsted inspection, Contact Referral and Assessment Arrangements October 2010'.
Agenda Item 4 'Safeguarding in Slough – Update on the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board'.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny on 25th January 2011: Agenda item 3:
'Ofsted Annual Children's Services Assessment 2010'.