

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 15th April 2015

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PART I **FOR SCRUTINY**

SAFEGUARDING IMPROVEMENT PLAN: PROGRESS REPORT

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To report progress in taking forward the actions and the areas for development, identified by Ofsted in its report of the 'Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' that was published in February 2014.

1.2 As required by Ofsted, a document (Statement and Actions) to respond to the inspection findings was sent to Ofsted in May 2014. The Council response was set out under the following 4 programmes:

- Workforce
- Early Help
- Safeguarding
- Looked After Children and Care Leavers

1.3 Work has recently been undertaken to strengthen partnership arrangements and develop a new, single Improvement Plan that will support the next phase of safeguarding improvement. A verbal update on this work will be provided at the meeting.

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

That the Panel:

2.1 Scrutinise the contents of the Progress Report and assure itself that improvements are being made to improve safeguarding arrangements for children in Slough

3. Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Health and Well-Being

Health and Wellbeing priorities are being met in the following ways:

- By identifying and prioritising services for vulnerable groups in the Slough population and by targeting support to meet the needs of children and young people.
- 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

Safer Communities

Safer Communities priorities are being met in the following ways:

- 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.

Economy and Skills

Economy and Skills priorities are being met in the following ways:

- 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.

4. Other Implications

a) Financial

There are no specific financial implications specific to this report. Additional resources were provided by Slough Council in 2014/15 (£0.8m) into core budget and on a one-off basis (£2.4m) to recruit additional social workers and first line managers to meet the demands placed upon children's social care by the increasing rate of referrals and demographic growth and to increase the ratio of permanent to agency staff over a 3 year period.

b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating Action	Opportunities
Inability to recruit and retain permanent, high quality social work staff	Workforce Recruitment and Retention Strategy; recruitment and retention incentives; investment in increased numbers of staff to ensure manageable case loads; learning and development strategy	Opportunity to create a high quality and stable workforce
Insufficient progress made on immediate and priority actions and areas for development	Detailed action plan; focus on important issues; regular monitoring and reporting progress; additional management and quality assurance capacity	To develop and monitor a single improvement plan with partners.
Minister's proposed action to put children's social care out of local authority control will take focus from Improvement actions	As above Recruitment to key posts underway.	The creation of a new organisation, focused solely on delivering good and effective services to safeguard children will attract effective managers and practitioners and ensure that all aspects of organisational delivery are focused on good outcomes for children.

b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights or legal implications arising from this report.

c) Equalities Impact Assessment

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

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1. Slough Children's Services have been subject to an Improvement Notice since 2011 when Ofsted judged safeguarding services to be inadequate. A further inspection in November/December 2013 of 'Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' also judged services to be inadequate and found that 'children's social care services in Slough have not made sufficient progress since the previous inspection'.
- 5.2. The second inspection report acknowledged that the efforts of those appointed to key senior roles was 'beginning to make some improvements in managing a legacy of poor work', but questioned whether there was sufficient senior management capacity to drive improvement.
- 5.3. As a consequence of the inadequate judgement following the second inspection, the Minister wrote to the Council in March 2014, indicating that it was his intention to take Slough Children's Social Care Services 'out of Council control'.
- 5.4. In order to secure an external and independent view of progress since the 2013 inspection, the Council has commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake two 'practice diagnostic' reviews, undertaken by teams of senior sector specialists, primarily focusing on the quality of practice and arrangements in place to support good practice. The first of these 'diagnostics' focused on practice with children in need and children subject to child protection plans ('Safeguarding Practice Diagnostic') and was reported to Education and Children's Services Scrutiny at the meeting of 29th January 2015. The second of the diagnostics ('Care Practice Diagnostic') took place the week commencing 9th March 2015. This second diagnostic focused primarily on practice with looked after children and care leavers. This review also considered how well Slough was implementing the Family Justice Reforms (where children's cases are placed before the Family Courts).
- 5.5. We have not yet received the final written findings of the 'Care Practice Diagnostic' but the headline findings provided in a presentation on the final day of the review are consistent with the findings from the earlier Safeguarding Practice diagnostic.

- 5.6. The LGA team concluded that Slough has made 'considerable progress on its improvement journey' in respect of looked after children, by focusing on getting 'the basics right' (an approach endorsed by the team). That focus has been supported and enabled by the recruitment strategy to recruit more permanent staff, appoint good quality staff, reduce average workloads and improve staff stability.
- 5.7. Overall the team was 'impressed' with the approach taken in Slough to implement the Family Justice Reforms and said that the quality of reports for court is good; that the voice of the child was increasingly well recorded and that there was a good focus on permanency for looked after children.
- 5.8. However, the team concluded, and we would agree, that some of the improvement is recent and there is still more progress to be made to achieve consistently good outcomes for children. In particular, the team fed back that:
- A single, joined up improvement plan would help measure progress
 - The time is right to strengthen strategic relationships with partners
 - Quality assurance is happening in teams but the absence of an overall quality assurance framework does not support consistent practice
- 5.9. These three areas have been the focus of recent detailed work and will provide the focus for a new Improvement Plan going forward.
- 5.10. Arrangements have continued to support the co-location of Children's Social Care duty arrangements with Thames Valley police in Slough police station (from 14th April 2015). This is the first step to establishing a Slough Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). A MASH cannot be fully established until NHS partners have identified resources.
- 5.11. Appendix 1 provides a detailed update on progress since the last Scrutiny Panel in January 2015

6. Conclusions

6.1. The two Practice Diagnostics undertaken by the LGA show that progress and improvement has been made since the Ofsted inspection at the end of 2013 and have provided useful focus on the areas where we should prioritise over the next six months.

6.2. A revised Children and Young People's Plan, strengthened partnership arrangements and a new single improvement plan will accelerate progress over the transition period towards a new organisation for children's services.

7. Background Papers

- (i) Progress Report since January Scrutiny Panel
- (ii) Table showing permanent and agency social work staff
- (iii) Performance Commentary