

Safeguarding Improvement Plan: Progress Report March 2015.

This report provides a commentary on progress since the end of January 2015 and also, where appropriate, distance travelled and impact since the Ofsted inspection of November/December 2013.

The focus over this period has been:

- i. To work with the new interim Director of Children's Services to agree the focus for improvement activity, the resources needed and the content of a new improvement plan to underpin the next phase of improvement during the transition to the new children's services organisation. The feedback from the two 'Practice Diagnostics' commissioned from the Local Government Association (LGA) have been helpful in identifying the priorities going forward.
- ii. Work to support the transition to the new organisation – including engagement and communication with staff, partners and foster carers. This work is important to keep stakeholders informed, committed and on-board.
- iii. Discussions within the service to review performance management requirements and then more latterly discussions with colleagues responsible for the performance management support to the service to look at the support required over the period of transition to the new organisation (see performance commentary)
- iv. Development work and business as usual work to ensure continued improvement under the 4 current programmes

1. Workforce

A. What have we done?

- i. On the basis of the 2014/15 experiences of our two cohorts of newly qualified social workers we have re-drafted the Practice Development Manager Job Description and undertaken a job evaluation. The post is now in the process of permanent recruitment
- ii. Agreed to participate in the next round of Step up to Social Work as part of the Berkshire consortium with an increased number of students. The two current step up to social work students who have had placements in Slough have applied for jobs with us and will shortly start as newly qualified social workers.
- iii. Reviewed and re-designed our offer to newly qualified social workers
- iv. All permanent managers within Children, Young People and Families (except a small number who were on leave) have undertaken a 2 day training programme 'Coaching to Improve Performance' delivered through the SE Sector Led Improvement programme. Those managers who could not attend attended training in May and 3 Slough managers will attend train the trainer training in early March

so that we build sustainability and self-sufficiency. We see this as a step to underpin our priority to develop practice leadership.

B. What is the impact?

The table attached as Appendix 2 to the covering report shows the overall progress in the recruitment of permanent practitioners and first line managers within the social work teams. The following table shows overall progress:

Permanent and Agency qualified social worker staff in March 2015.

(March 14 figures in brackets)

	Total	Permanent	Agency	% Permanent
First Line Managers	16 (14)	11 (6)	5 (8)	69% (43%)
Consultant Practitioners	15 (9 plus 4 vacant posts)	6 (5)	19 (4)	40% (55%)
Independent reviewing officers	7 (7)	6 (5)	1(2)	86% (71%)
Social workers	77 (74)	40 (36)	37 (38)	52% (48%)

The table shows that progress has been made across all types of qualified social worker role in the last 12 months with the exception of the Consultant Practitioner role where the percentage of permanent staff in post has decreased since March 2014. However, a permanent post holder is currently on a year's 'sabbatical leave' and is returning to Slough in June 2015. This will improve the ratio of permanent to agency in this category to 47%.

In addition, another 2 posts have been offered to newly qualified social workers who will take up their posts in May 2015 (which would give a ratio of 54% permanent)

Since January 2014, 14 permanent qualified social workers or social work managers have left Slough and 22 have started. 7 of the 14 staff who left were staff whose performance was being monitored, 3 retired, 1 left for family reasons and 2 for promotion/professional development opportunity. This shows a net gain of 8.

C. Going Forward

- i. We will be recruiting to a new cohort of newly qualified social workers over the next two months.
- ii. We have commissioned a management development programme for first line social work managers and this programme which will be delivered to permanent managers will commence in April
- iii. We plan to run another national recruitment campaign in April/May for qualified social workers

2. Early Help

A. What have we done?

- i. Produced the first Early Help newsletter – distributed across partners
- ii. Reviewed the Early Help Strategy with partners to ensure partners have a shared commitment and understanding.
- iii. Targeted support to schools and engaged schools with the Early Help agenda.
- iv. Continued to identify and support Early Help Champions in an increasing range of services and fully implement the multi-agency Early Help Panel
- v. Launched a pilot in 4 schools for pupils with anxiety, depression and self harm ensuring mental health and wellbeing support is offered at the earliest opportunity
- vi. Further roll out of the Early Help Training programme to partner agencies from January to April 2015.
- vii. Set up and advertised 5 surgery sessions for practitioners requiring advice
- viii. The Early Help Operations group have started a programme of audit of early help assessments to ensure consistent standards across agencies.
- ix. The 'Outcome Star' has been agreed as a consistent measure to be used with families across Slough to measure effectiveness. The implementation of this within the Council will take place from April. Children's Centre are already using this.
- x. Achieved the target set by the Department for Communities and Local Government for turning round troubled families – 260 against target of 248
- xi. Undertaken analysis of troubled families cohort and identified the 12 highest cost families
- xii. An outcomes plan is being agreed across Slough partners to performance manage phase 2 of the programme

B. What is the Impact?

- i. Positive feedback from services about the Early Help training and support has resulted in more assessments being undertaken so children receive appropriate support at an early stage.
- ii. Steady improvement in the number of early help assessments in the system with the Youth Service and Children's Centres now undertaking assessments on a regular basis. Twelve schools are now undertaking early help assessments on a regular basis.
- iii. Young carers have been identified and received support in preparation of the new legislation
- iv. The achievement of the Troubled Families target will secure Slough's entry into Phase 2 of the programme, bringing considerable additional resources to Slough to support multi-agency work to improve outcomes for families

(C) Going Forward

- i. Agencies will begin to use the Outcome Star evaluation tool so we will then be able to start evidencing impact of individual children and families

3. Safeguarding

A. What have we done?

- i. 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.
- ii. The Lead Member for Children, the interim Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board) and the Assistant Director (as Chair of the MASH Project Board) have written to NHS partners expressing concerns about the delay in identifying the health contribution to the MASH.
- iii. We now have a permanent manager in post for the First Contact Team. This post holder will be the MASH manager once the MASH is established. The new manager has been working with her team to improve the processes within the First Contact Team to ensure that contact and referral decisions are made in a timely fashion.
- iv. Proposals have been drawn up to streamline the sub-structures of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the LSCB in order to strengthen relationships between partnerships in Slough.
- v. Have reviewed the latest data on the rate of single assessments and are undertaking an audit of referrals to children's social care where assessment was requested to form a view about the application of the threshold. A focus has been maintained on the timeliness of assessments.
- vi. Work has been undertaken in the Assessment and Child in Need service to review cases taken to child protection conference to consider whether the case could be managed through a Child in Need plan.
- vii. We have attended discussions taking place across Berkshire with the Reading Court in respect of establishing a Family Drugs and Alcohol Court (FDAC) – such a court would hear cases where parental drug and alcohol use is a significant factor in care proceedings, bringing together a team of 'expert' practitioners to assess and offer support and interventions in a timely fashion. Research evidence shows that this approach is effective.
- viii. We are reviewing our Quality Assurance Framework in the light of the LGA and other feedback and a seminar for operational managers and quality assurance staff has been held to ensure more consistency in the evaluation and grading of case audits..

B. What is the impact?

- i. The timeliness of contact and referral decision making improved in February 2015 (most recent data) from 85.4% in January to 97.2% (contacts) and 63.2% in January to 75.3% (referrals)
- ii. 77% of single assessments have been completed within timescales over the past year (79.5% in February 2015) which is a marked improvement over the position a year ago

C. Going Forward

- i. Focus on reducing the rates of child protection activity in Slough
- ii. Caseloads within the social work teams have risen (20.5 children on average in Assessment and Child in Need service; 21.75 in the Protection and Care service, although they stand at 14.26 in Looked After Children and Care Leavers). We will be reviewing social work numbers and considering what action to take to ensure that average caseloads remain within the 'zone' of our target of 16.

4. Looked After Children

A. What have we done to improve outcomes for LAC?

In the week commencing 9th March, the Local Government Association (LGA) with a team of senior sector specialists undertook a Care Practice Diagnostic – looking primarily at practice with looked after children and care leavers.

The head line feedback from this diagnostic is as follows:

- Clear evidence of progress on your journey – you are aware there is more to be done to achieve consistent outcomes
- Your focus, rightly, has been on getting the 'basics' in place – you now need to communicate your improvement journey more explicitly internally and externally
- Positive and effective action taken to reduce agency staff, recruit good quality staff and increase staff stability
- The quality of the small number of cases reviewed indicated that recent work is of higher standard
- The voice of the child is increasingly well recorded
- Clear evidence of committed staff with good levels of morale
- Better relationships with children, families and partners
- Early years team provide good quality support to LAC
- Lack of one coherent joined up improvement plan with clear timescale is not helping you measure progress
- The time is right to strengthen strategic relationships with partners
- Quality assurance is happening in teams but absence of overall QA framework means practice is not consistent
- The full potential of the IRO team has not been realised – although new team should assist this

We also asked the LGA team to look specifically at our work in respect of the Family Justice Reforms and overall the team were impressed by this and said that our arrangements, procedures, monitoring are working well. There is a good understanding of the Public Law Outline requirements which is supported by a mapping of the process and action taken to address any delays. The quality of assessments for courts is good and social workers and their managers also reported that they received timely legal advice.

March has also seen the start of the 'Team around You' Pilot for looked after children. A number of cases (young people 14 to 18) have been identified to be part of the pilot. The pilot will bring together a range of practitioners working with the young person (or who could offer support to the young person). A key element is

that the young person will be at the centre of the planning with their voice determining the solutions that are built around them. The pilot will last until mid-May and will then inform how we commission help for looked after young people and young people on the edge of care and how we ensure that practice is outcome focused.

We have continued to develop and improve the arrangements and support to improving the education of looked after children. This has included improved monitoring and tracking arrangements, the purchase of an electronic Personal Education Plan system. Much closer working arrangements with Cambridge Education have been established.

B. What is the impact?

- i. 5 young people (care leavers) have recently been offered flats by housing so that they are housed in suitable accommodation.
- ii. Personal Education Plans for Children will become part of the electronic case record and will support the effective tracking of educational attainment and outcomes.

C. Going Forward

- We will continue with the 'Team around You' pilot and use the learning to further improve the young person's experience of being looked after. We will also use the learning to consider developing different, multi-agency approaches to support young people on the edge of care.
- We will roll out new Pathway Plans for looked after children aged 16+ and care leavers.

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