

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 13 July 2015

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Councillor Pavitar K. Mann (Commissioner for Education and Children)

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on children's services performance over the past six months, and the improvement programme as we move towards the establishment of the new children's services organisation in autumn 2015.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

- 2.1 The Cabinet is requested to resolve:
- a) That the new Single Improvement Plan be endorsed; and
 - b) That the progress being made in improving the services provided be noted.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Priorities:

- Health
 - 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 focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable children, young people and their families, and providing targeted services through partnership working primarily with the NHS to secure measurable health improvements.
- Economy and Skills
 - 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 or 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.
- Safer Communities
 - 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 partner agencies.

3b **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances – The improvement programme aims to make Slough children’s services one of the best providers of children’s social care in the country, providing timely, purposeful support that brings safe, lasting and positive change.

4 **Other Implications**

a) Financial

There are no financial implications specific to this report.

b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Inability to recruit and retain permanent, high quality social work staff.	Children’s Social Care Workforce Strategy 2014-2017.	Creation of a high quality, stable workforce.
Insufficient improvement being made.	Focus on key issues, and regular progress monitoring by Improvement Steering Group and CYPFB Sub Group.	Drive progress through single improvement plan, involving partners.
Transition to new organisation taking focus from	As above.	The creation of a new organisation, focused solely on delivering good

improvement programme.		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 from children.
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c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

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

d) Equalities Impact Assessment

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

5 Single Improvement Plan

5.1 A new Single Improvement Plan (Appendix A) has been developed which sets out the priorities for improving service delivery for the next six months (up to December 2015). This new plan has replaced three separate and complex plans that were previously in place.

5.2 The four key priority areas for improvement are: recruitment and retention; quality assurance; quality of practice; and leadership and partnership.

5.3 The plan is monitored fortnightly by the Slough Improvement Steering Group which is chaired by the Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) and includes Eleanor Brazil (Children's Commissioner for Slough) and a representative of the Department for Education (DfE). This new arrangement has provided focused attention and robust monitoring of the most urgent work that needs to be undertaken in order to improve practice and through this, the experiences of the most vulnerable children and families in the borough.

5.4 On the basis of the new Improvement Plan the Interim DCS submitted a bid to the DfE for a grant to support work to increase the number of permanent staff in the service and to make improvements in the quality of practice. A grant of £165K for improvement work was approved by the DfE in June 2015.

5.5 Recruitment and Retention

5.5.1 In March 2015, the permanent/agency staff split within the service was 54% permanent to 46% agency. This was an improvement from March 2014, where there had been 48% permanent staff. A full breakdown of permanent/agency staffing figures is attached as Appendix B. Areas of particular concern are the levels of permanent staff in the Duty, Assessment and Child in need and Protection and Care teams, and these are the focus of the recruitment work set out below.

5.5.2 A part time Children's Workforce Lead has been appointed (June 2015) to drive forward activities related to increasing the number of permanent staff within the service. This post has been funded by the DfE improvement grant.

- 5.5.3 Three national recruitment campaigns have been planned and are underway. The first campaign was in May and further campaigns are planned in July and September 2015. An open day will be held on the 23 July 2015 allowing potential candidates to speak with current social workers and managers to find out what it is really like to work for Slough Borough Council.
- 5.5.4 The first national recruitment campaign has resulted in the appointment of five permanent staff. In addition to the national recruitment campaign, children's services operate rolling recruitment through its website. Since April, five offers of permanent employment have been made through this method and candidates will be taking up their new posts between July and September 2015.
- 5.5.6 The impact of the recruitment through the rolling recruitment and national campaigns over the next three months should improve the ratio of permanent to agency staff. The ambition is to achieve 75% permanent social work staff by December 2015.

5.6 Quality Assurance

- 5.6.1 Since April 2015 the interim DCS has commissioned two audit activities:
- a) a focused deep dive into the effectiveness and impact of the current Quality Assurance Framework; and
 - b) an audit programme (June 2015), funded by the DfE with support from Achieving for Children, looking at: threshold decision making; children subject to child protection plans; domestic violence contacts and case supervision.
- 5.6.2 The audits found that the threshold decision was generally sound, although less secure in respect of domestic violence contacts and that risk for children was well-managed. However, there was a lack of consistency around the application of some standards and most plans were not SMART.
- 5.6.3 The audits have informed a detailed action plan which will be delivered over the next three months:
- improving the quality of Child in Need and Child Protection Plans, specifically focusing on the development of SMART plans;
 - working to strengthen processes within the duty system to support the implementation of an effective MASH;
 - ensuring case supervision is focused and accurately reflected on case records; and
 - additional input to teams around domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation.
- 5.6.4 The Corporate Performance Team has also been asked to undertake work to disaggregate performance information to team and worker level so that Practice Managers can use the performance information more effectively to improve practice and performance.
- 5.6.5 An interim Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance is currently being recruited following the departure of the post holder.

5.7 Quality of Practice

- 5.7.1 The Practice Standards for Casework (Appendix C) were revised and simplified in May 2015 in order to consistently promote good practice within the service. These have been rolled out across the service with an expectation that all staff will consistently apply these standards and managers will be supported to challenge poor practice.
- 5.7.2 There is a focus on strengthening the Consultant Practitioner role and this will be supported by an interim appointment (Practice Improvement Head of Service) to work with Consultant Practitioners to drive forward improvements in practice.
- 5.7.3 All permanent Practice Managers are undertaking a comprehensive management development programme to develop their personal and professional effectiveness. The programme is designed to skill frontline managers to support their staff to deliver high quality practice. The 'Building Managers for the Future', programme was launched in April 2015 and is validated by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

5.8 Leadership and Partnership

- 5.8.1 The recent audit programme identified the need for a fully operational Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), with all partners engaged to strengthen collaboration in assessing the risks to children. In particular it would help to mitigate some of the issues identified where the Duty Team was restricted in its ability to make informed decisions due to the lack of detailed information.
- 5.8.2 Co-location of the Slough Borough Council Duty Team and Thames Valley Police has taken place the Slough Clinical Commissioning Group has agreed to provide a virtual, part time dedicated resource to the Slough MASH and for the effectiveness of this arrangement to be reviewed after three months. Once there is a health presence within the current arrangements, this will formally become the Slough MASH. Discussions have also taken place with probation and the Youth Offending Team who have agreed to support the MASH with 'virtual' arrangements
- 5.8.3 The Children and Young People's Partnership structure was rationalised in April 2015 in order provide focused attention on the most urgent partnership improvement activities for the borough. The review of existing arrangements also helped to reduce the number of groups and meetings and provide greater transparency and accountability for the work of partners. The Partnership now includes a Children's Services Improvement Sub Group which provides the opportunity to improve the engagement of partners in the improvement agenda, with schools, health and the police all represented. This Partnership, alongside the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), improves our ability to support the most vulnerable children in the borough, and partner involvement and engagement is a fundamental part of this.
- 5.8.4 Alongside this, a new Children and Young People's Plan was approved by the Partnership in May 2015 and covers the priorities for the partnership for the next 18 months. Each Sub Group under the main Partnership Board (Children's Services Improvement; Health; Early Help; and Achieving) will develop an action plan to deliver the agreed priorities.

6 **Summary of current performance (figures from dataset, April 2015)**

6.1 What has improved

- a) We have seen a steady improvement in the timeliness of decision making on contacts and referrals. In April 2015 we met our target for contacts (100%) and improved to 80.1% for referrals from 65.6% the previous month.
- b) Our referral rate per 10,000 local children is now in line with the national average for 2013/14, and repeat referrals (19.6%) are also in line with statistical neighbours and the national average
- c) The timeliness of our decision making on single assessments has also improved at 80.4%, with the year to date values climbing towards our agreed target of 90%+, and 'in month' performance approaching or exceeding this in recent months. The focus going forward will be to complete more assessments within a shorter timescale.
- d) The percentage of child protection plans reviewed within timescales meets our target of 98%, with a consistent performance level in the preceding 12 months.
- e) Our number of looked after children per 10,000 local children at 52.3 has risen slightly but remains lower than comparators (61.4)
- f) Our long term placement stability has improved significantly from 61.5% in May 2014 to 75% in May 2015. This is above statistical neighbour and England average performance
- g) We continue to perform well on securing a high percentage/volume of adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO), with 21.9% of looked after children in care for six or more months adopted from care or granted an SGO (May 2015).

7 **What do we still need to focus on**

- 7.1 We generally initiate a higher volume of section 47 enquiries (244 in year to date per 10,000 under 18 population) than our comparators (139), and almost double the national average (124); this may indicate an issue with decision making at the front door, but the results of audits in this area suggest that this is not the case, and further investigation is, therefore, taking place.
- 7.2 Our rate of child protection plans per 10,000 local children has reduced from a high of 71.8 in May 2014 to 51.8 as of April 2015; bringing us much nearer to statistical neighbours at 45.
- 7.3 There is a revised campaign of recruitment for foster carers, with the aim of recruiting 10 additional foster carers within the calendar year (ending March 2016). The campaign has received a very positive response, particularly in relation to media engagement; and there are currently seven potential families at different stages of assessment. The campaign includes the launch of a new two-tier fostering scheme to attract a number of carers with relevant experience who would be able to take on more difficult to place children, and area of particular need in the borough. In addition, as part of a wider, corporate response to the campaign, all emails going out from Slough Borough Council for a designated period will include a related strapline.
- 7.4 There is a continued focus on improving the educational achievement of looked after children, particularly in terms of their results at Key Stage 4, through the strengthening of the Virtual School arrangements, supporting for example:
 - involvement in placement planning, monitoring of school performance with a ban on placements at 'inadequate' schools;

- the procurement of an ePEP which is due to go live by September 2015;
and
- development around post-16 education planning and support.

7.5 The embedding of the Practice Standards and implementation of the action plan from the audit programme (see paragraph 5.6.3) will provide the tools for driving improvement in the areas for focus identified.

8 **Conclusion**

8.1 The development of the new Single Improvement Plan has provided a new focus to the improvement programme, increasing the pace of change and providing an ongoing check on changes and new approaches to ensure that they are having the expected impact on the quality of services being provided. The pace of change and improvement is expected to increase significantly with the establishment of the new children's services organisation in autumn 2015.

9 **Appendices**

- A - Single Improvement Plan
- B - Permanent/Agency Staffing Breakdown (March 2015)
- C - Slough basic standards for case work/intervention within children, young people and families (May 2015)

10 **Background Papers**

None.