

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

**DATE:** 16 March 2016

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR SCRUTINY**

#### **OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS**

**(November – December 2015)**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To set out the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection report published on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016 and plans for ensuring improvements are made in the experiences and progress of our most vulnerable children.

##### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel
- a) Scrutinise and comment on the detail contained within the Ofsted report
  - b) Scrutinise and comment on the governance arrangements as set out in paragraphs 5.8 to 5.13, for improvements to service delivery.
  - c) Scrutinise and comment on the Council's plans for service improvement as set out in paragraph 5.14

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

###### **3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Priorities:

- Safer Communities
  - Carrying out the statutory role of the local authority to provide services for children in need, to safeguard them and look after children whose parents are unable to do so.

### 3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

#### **Outcome 5: Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances**

The establishment of the Slough Children's Services Trust 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

#### (f) Financial

There are no financial implications specific to the recommendations in this report.

#### (g) Risk Management

There are no specific risks associated with this report.

#### (h) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

In September 2015, the Secretary of State issued a Direction transferring various children's services to Slough Children's Services Trust ('the Trust'). Although the Trust performs services on behalf of Slough Borough Council, the Council retains all its legal obligations for the statutory duties.

On 30 September 2015, the Council entered into a contract with the Trust governing the provision of services by the Trust. The contract with the Trust contains various monitoring powers so that the Council can assure itself that vulnerable children in the borough are receiving the best support possible.

#### (i) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of an EIA in relation to this report.

### 5 Background

5.1 The four week inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers took place in November and December 2015. Services delivered by Slough Borough Council and the Slough Children's Services Trust were within the scope of the inspection. The report also comments on the contribution of partners, in particular the local police and health services, to the experience and progress made by vulnerable children.

5.2 The full Ofsted report, published on the 17 February 2016, is attached as Appendix A. The Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of Slough Children's Services Trust provided a briefing for all members of the council on the day of publication. The report found children's services in Slough to be 'inadequate'.

- Services for children in need of help and protection – **inadequate**
- Children looked after and achieving permanence – **inadequate**
- Adoption performance – **requires improvement**
- Experiences and progress of care leavers – **inadequate**
- Leadership, management and governance – **inadequate**

5.3 This is the third report which has rated Slough Borough Council as inadequate in its provision of services to vulnerable children in the borough. Following the inadequate rating in 2013, the DfE put in place new arrangements to transfer children's services from the council to Slough Children's Services Trust.

5.4 A children's commissioner was appointed by the DfE to secure improvement and oversee the change to the Trust, which took over from the council on 1 October 2015. The council remains under DfE direction and the children's commissioner remains in place. The Ofsted inspection took place between 23 November and 17 December 2015. Due to the timing of the inspection the report largely comments on the quality of services before they were transferred to the Trust.

5.5 The report recognised that some improvements had been made over the past two years (since the last inspection) however; the changes have not been fast or wide ranging enough to improve the experiences of children sufficiently. The inspection report also acknowledges that the Trust has already taken decisive action in a number of key areas and the pace of improvement has increased but it is too soon to see the impact of this for children. The report reflects the findings of the baseline audit undertaken by the Trust during October 2016 and shared with joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Education & Children's Services Panel held on 12th January 2015.

5.6 The Ofsted report highlighted some areas of improvement since the last inspection in 2013

- Social work caseloads have reduced.
- Newly qualified social workers are better supported.
- Young People's Service has undertaken effective work with care leavers
- Adoptions are matched quickly with good permanent families.
- When care proceedings commence, they are well managed.
- Prevent partnership is developing well.
- Quality of assessments has improved.

5.7 However, there were many areas of concern, including:

- The trajectory of improvement has been too shallow and the pace too slow
- In some cases children left for too long in situations of risk
- Insufficient services to meet needs of children
- Disjointed service for care leavers
- Council leaders have not been proactive or aspirational enough
- Council has not been a good corporate parent
- Ineffective Virtual School
- CSE/missing children
- Ineffective partnerships
- Continuing high number of agency staff

### **Governance and accountability for improvements to service delivery**

5.8 The outcome of the Ofsted inspection will require considerable action by the Trust, Council and the LSCB to address the identified failings in the service within rapid timescales. Given this, all parties recognise the need for robust accountability arrangements to oversee improvement progress. This will require consideration of

how to achieve this in the context of the agreed arrangements for governance and performance monitoring in the contract between the Trust and the Council to ensure that duplication of reporting and excessive meeting schedules are avoided.

- 5.9 The commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State is required by the Direction to ensure that services specified in the Direction are delivered to the required standard, and to report back to the Minister on this. The Council and the Trust will need to work collaboratively and positively together if services are to improve and outcomes for the most vulnerable children in Slough also improve rapidly. The Trust will be responsible for responding to the majority of the recommendations from Ofsted as they relate to the quality of practice and experience of children in the system. However, the contribution of the wider partnership is critical to how the Trust can deliver those improvements rapidly.
- 5.10 The Trust Board is responsible for over-seeing the development of services it is delivering. The Board meets monthly and has established a Quality and Innovation Committee which will also meet monthly between Board meetings and will focus on detailed service development and performance monitoring.
- 5.11 There is a formal contract between the Council and Slough Children's Services Trust which clearly sets out the key outcomes for delivery. This includes 33 KPI's and targets for these will be agreed between the Council and the Trust based on the findings of the baseline diagnostic undertaken by the Trust and the recent Ofsted report. The contract between the Council and the Trust is monitored through the Strategic Monitoring Board (SMB) which meets on a monthly basis. In addition the contract requires the Trust to report to members at least four times a year.
- 5.12 When an authority is judged 'inadequate' the DFE often require the establishment of a Children's Improvement Board, led by a DFE appointed chair. However, in Slough due to the recent establishment of the Slough Children's Services Trust and the continuing role of the Commissioner an Improvement Board would not be appropriate.
- 5.13 The commissioner, the Council and the Trust have agreed alternative arrangements for the oversight of the improvement agenda. It has been agreed that following the monthly SMB, the Commissioner will chair a meeting, where the Council and the Trust and less frequently the LSCB, will present the progress being made in line with each organisations improvement Delivery Plan. The DFE will also be represented at this meeting. The Director of Children's Services will provide regular reports to Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on the progress being made by the Trust, the Council, and the LSCB to improve outcomes, for the most vulnerable children in Slough.
- 5.14 The Council has already started work on making improvements in the following areas of delivery:
- To take action to fulfil its corporate parenting responsibilities effectively.
  - To ensure all parts of the Council and in particular the Young People's Service, public health and housing, contribute as required to improving outcomes for vulnerable children.
  - To review LSCB arrangements and work with the chair to ensure improvements are made to the functioning of the Board.
  - To review and improve the scrutiny of children's services.

- To actively support the LSCB commitment to improve services for children at risk of child sexual exploitation.

5.15 A detailed delivery plan under each of these 5 headings has been developed and will be subject to an internal project management structure.

## 6 **Appendix**

A - Ofsted Report: Slough Borough Council. Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (24 November – 17 December 2015)