

Slough Children's Services Trust



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Slough Children's Services Trust Our First Year

An Executive Summary of Achievements
October 2015 - October 2016

Slough Children's Services Trust

Our First Year

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1. Foreword

As a not-for-profit organisation, Slough Children's Services Trust is in a new and unique position to make a difference.

This summary report captures the immediate challenges we faced and our key achievements in our first 12 months.

The report outlines our progress to date and highlights what we've put in place to realise our intention to move children's services in Slough from a starting point of 'Inadequate' to become 'Outstanding' within five years.

We have taken Ofsted's recommendations as our focus and starting point and have worked hard to tackle the identified areas for improvement as well as ways to improve further.

The work we have done over the past year has been to underpin and strengthen our organisation. It demonstrates what we have put in place to introduce new and innovative ways of working, both as a trust and collaboratively with others.

Children and their wellbeing are at the heart of all our decision-making. We have worked hard to better our working practices and, as a result, the outcomes for vulnerable children and their families in Slough.

While Slough Borough Council remains a close - and vital - partner to us, as an independent organisation we have more freedom to be innovative and creative than ever before.

We make no apology for our ambition or our desire to be at the forefront of demonstrating the potential that Trust arrangements such as ours can have on children's lives.

Our organisation is full of dedicated, skilled and professional people who, over the past year, have demonstrated that they want to be here and help achieve our collective vision.



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It has been my job, alongside the board and my senior management team, to embed a culture of excellence and to put the tools in place to ensure that staff feel supported, enabled and empowered to deliver excellent quality social work services.

We have worked hard to create an environment in which professional judgement, trust and new ideas are able to flourish.

We recognise that there is still much for us to do in order to reach where we need to be, but the commitment that I have observed among colleagues, partners and communities in Slough means that we are well placed to continue with our upward trajectory and we continue to strive for excellence.

To do this, we have moved away from the traditional way of delivering social work to a new model underpinned by systemic principles, focused on working with families and networks rather than working with children in isolation.

This is a significant step. We know that social workers cannot work alone and are one part of a broad network of communities and professionals who must - and can - work together in the spirit of collaboration and co-operation order to deliver the best services for children and young people in Slough.

This report outlines our progress that, we believe, is in the interests of all.

Nicola Clemo
Chief Executive

October 2016



2. Background

Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) was established as a not-for-profit trust on 1 October 2015 after intervention by the Department for Education to remove children's services from Slough Borough Council, following a series of 'Inadequate' ratings.

On 1 October 2015, staff working in children's services for the council were transferred to SCST, which took over the following:

Children's Services, including:

- Early Help
- Assessment and Child in Need (CIN)
- Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD)
- Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Child Protection (CP)
- Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers
- Family Placement (Fostering & Adoption), residential and contact service
- The Family Information Service (Resources)
- The Virtual School
- The Children in Care Council (CiC)
- Slough Youth Offending Team (YOT)

Prior to the staff transfer, in July 2015, Nicola Clemo was appointed as Chief Executive of SCST. Nicola joined from Cambridgeshire County Council, where, as Service Director for Children's Social Care, she was instrumental in helping the county council become the first local authority to see its children's services jump from an 'inadequate' rating to 'good' in the space of one Ofsted inspection. In June 2016, she was awarded an OBE for services to children.

Initial actions

- New senior management team appointed, with experience of change management and performance improvement appointed
- Baseline audit of the 1500 cases transferred from SBC
- Comprehensive reviews of performance data, quality assurance frameworks
- Meetings with key stakeholders.

Outcomes:

- Key areas for immediate focus identified
- Clear vision for the organisation established
- Work starts without delay.



Appointment of Board Chair

Elaine Simpson was appointed as Chair of the SCST Board. With more than 30 years' experience in UK education and as a non-executive director on a number of boards, including Birmingham Children's Hospital, Elaine has led the transformation of services and outcomes for children, young people and their families in a range of social and economic settings.

Initial actions

- Appointed a Board of Directors
- Established a Quality and Innovation Committee
- Established a Finance and Resources Committee

Outcomes:

- Robust and transparent governance arrangements
- Oversight of progress, provide scrutiny
- Challenge of ideas and performance.

Eleanor Brazil, the Children's Commissioner, also attends although is not a member of the board. Regular meetings take place with Slough Borough Council to progress contractual issues and key areas of joint interest.

In addition, a multi-agency Improvement Board was set up to specifically oversee and monitor the progress of areas of concern identified by the Ofsted Delivery Plan and other areas for development identified locally to ensure standards and the quality of social work practice continues to improve.

The Improvement Board meets on a monthly basis and is accountable to Slough Borough Council Cabinet and the Slough Children's Services Trust Board.



3. Action Plan

With the structure in place, work then started to address Ofsted's recommendations and build a firm foundation for the new Trust.

The Trust quickly established a comprehensive programme for change, underpinned by a simple vision to:

Ensure all children and young 'people in Slough are safe, secure and successful'

The Trust's aim is to provide:

- The best possible service
- The best possible outcomes for children and families by ensuring children and families are the focus of everything we do
- The best possible support to staff to help them to enable families to change and flourish

To achieve these objectives, we have developed the following:

- A 5 Year Strategy for 2016-2021, outlining the Trust's plan to be an outstanding service within the next 5 years, will be published this quarter
- A comprehensive programme of change and a concise and focused Delivery Plan which outlines the specific plans for improving standards within our four themes for improvement (see box on right).

OUR FOUR THEMES FOR IMPROVEMENT

We have Identified four major themes for improvement:

Improving Quality: improving the quality of social work and safeguarding practice in Slough.

Improving Learning: establishing a learning culture within the Trust, ensuring knowledge is shared in order to improve practice and result in a continuous improvement.

Improving Workforce: ensuring there is a stable workforce and leadership team in place to deliver good outcomes for children and families and to drive the programme of change and culture of continuous improvement.

Improving Information: improving the quality and availability of information for staff, partners and communities to underpin the other 3 themes of improvement.

4. Improving Quality

Starting Point

Both the areas of quality and performance were not well understood or transparent, and the information available was not used to drive improvement.

Achievements

A Head of Performance and Quality Assurance was appointed to implement the framework. A long-

term Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) has been introduced ensure the right children and young people in Slough are appropriately safeguarded and that services offered are the right ones, delivered at the right time, are of a high quality and are making a significance difference to their lives.

It is helping Trust staff shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of learning and continuous



4. Improving Quality

improvement. The QAF now underpins all of the Trust's work. While much work remains (to apply the framework in its entirety), a significant amount of work has been delivered:

- The QAF has been shared with Trust staff and with other agencies
- All service areas hold Performance Boards to maintain oversight and review service specific performance and quality; these Boards report to the Trust's Performance Board.

Example:

Significant improvements have been made to performance monitoring systems and practices.

Weekly reports provide detailed information for managers, the aforementioned Performance Boards are now embedded and are used to scrutinise performance and address issues promptly, and the Head of Performance and QA is using regional partnership and forums to share information and best practice.

Both the baseline audit and Ofsted Inspection shaped the Trust's initial Delivery Plan and priority areas for improvement.

Alongside the work to stabilise the workforce and improve performance management arrangements, a new approach to the management oversight of practice was introduced; this involved the leadership team sitting alongside social work practitioners to observe frontline practice and partake in a continuous dialogue in order to translate strategy into operational practice at an individual, child-centered level.

This approach not only provided a detailed insight into inadequate practice already identified and surfaced further areas, it also uncovered a complex set of attitudes and beliefs among staff that had evolved over a lengthy period of time, and which contributed to unacceptable performance.

Ofsted noted that as a result of this approach

case files demonstrated clear evidence of decision making and rationale since the Trust was established.

The scale and depth of the previously unchallenged, inadequate practices over extended periods of time could only have been revealed through this new leadership approach, and explained much of how and why Slough's Children's Services had a history of inadequacy.

A series of immediate, short and longer term priorities were identified for action in order to address deficits in practice quality, including:

- An urgent review of some processes within the First Contact Team
- Increasing the pace of implementation of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Improving the quality of direct work with children and young people and ensuring their voices are captured and considered
- The need to review and update the Threshold Document
- Improving supervision arrangements and support to staff to enable them to make sound professional judgements and improved monitoring arrangements of outcomes.

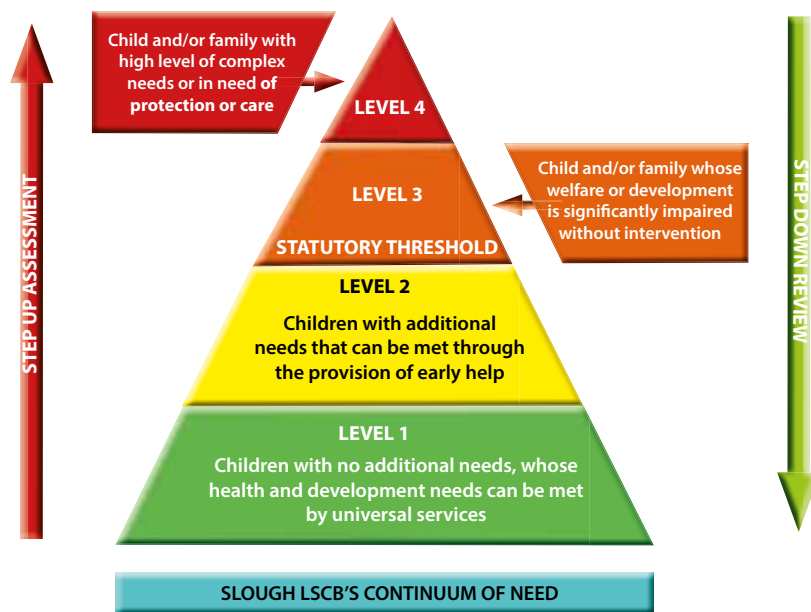
The decision to prioritise quality improvements over performance improvements was deliberate and reflective of the Trust's commitment to effective safeguarding.

The November 2015 Ofsted Inspection confirmed that this decision was the right one; the inspection identified that the quality of social work practice was inadequate and many findings replicated those identified in the baseline audit. Statutory requirements in respect of children and young people at risk of significant harm were ineffective and not being adhered to.

Compliments are now recorded routinely. Alongside complaints, these form an important element of the Trust's ambition to become a learning organisation. At the conclusion of a Hearing, a Family Court Judge was so impressed by a social worker that he intended to 'anonymise a particular section of the report and distribute it to all other judges in the area'.



4. Improving Quality



The new social work model *Safe, Secure and Successful* relies heavily on the Trust and partner agencies' clear understanding of the Continuum of Need and appropriate signposting to the right interventions

The new approach: Introduction of a new social work model

Following a comprehensive consultation with staff and partners, the Trust has adopted an acclaimed systemic methodology to deliver services, which involves professionals viewing families as systems rather than individuals, building on the strengths of the family and recognising that families are part of and interact with a broader set of social systems.

This new model, which takes its name from the Trust's Vision Statement, '**Safe, Secure and Successful**', consists of 18 targeted 'Hubs' of professionals including experienced and newly qualified social workers, child and family workers, a Hub co-ordinator and a clinician providing support to approximately 40-70 children per Hub.

Manageable caseloads are held by each Hub and weekly casework discussions provide all Hub members with an opportunity to apply systemic practice and understand and influence the quality of service and outcomes for children, young people and their families at pace.

The Trust firmly believes that the introduction of the systemic practice methodology will give staff a better sense of coherence and clarity in respect of their practice.

The first Hubs received comprehensive induction

training in July and went live on 1 August 2016. Although more than 70% of existing staff are now working in Hubs, at this early stage it is not feasible to provide a detailed impact assessment.

However, research into the systemic methodology has shown previously that when systemic practice is applied within the context of Children's Social Care, positive outcomes can be achieved across a range of commonly presented difficulties such as childhood physical abuse, neglect, oppositional behaviour and problems with attention deficit.

The Trust recognises the value of research in informing, embedding and enabling decision-making. It not only allows social workers to expand their personal knowledge of social work practice, but also provides benefits to service users.

Evidence-based practice is at the heart of the systemic methodology implemented by the Trust, and the use of research will continue to influence operational practice and strategic delivery. The Trust has commissioned Bedfordshire University to carry out an evaluation of the new social work model and its impact.

The voice and feedback from the child / young person and families is also central to the new model. As the systemic methodology is embedded into everyday practice the voice of the service user will be central to the weekly hub meetings and informing practice decisions and assessments.



5. Improving Learning

Ofsted noted that initial signs that the Trust were taking steps to become a learning organisation were positive and the move to an evidence-based model of systemic practice and improved use of performance information evidenced this.

Since the Inspection, work has continued on developing the key areas of the Trust as a learning organisation, and the leadership team, recognising that whole system change is required in order to drive the improvements required for children and young people in Slough, has used the McKinsey 7s Model to focus the development and improvement work.

The model is based on the theory that, for an organisation to perform well, the following seven key elements need to be aligned and mutually reinforcing: **strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff and skills**. The model has been used to learn and clearly identify what areas need to be realigned in order to improve outcomes for children in Slough and shape the strategies for improvement outlined in this report.

An important and significant element in respect of improved learning identified quickly by the leadership team was in relation to a culture among staff around demographic issues and problems that were widely known about, but not openly acknowledged and therefore entirely absent from social work practice.

A learning culture is one in which constructive inquiry and dialogue is openly fostered and it is safe for people to share openly and take risks; surfacing and naming such issues is part of this culture. The continued development of the Trust into such an organisation is crucial in enabling the staff, leadership team and partner agencies to appropriately safeguard all children and young people, irrespective of the political and cultural sensitivities and barriers that may arise. Improving the workforce will also help this area of improvement.

The QA Framework is centered around processes of self-assessment and learning at both an individual level, and at an organisational level.

LEARNING IN PRACTICE

In line with the Trust's commitment as a learning organisation, the mechanisms, strategies and work in place are subject to ongoing monitoring and review to ensure they are always fit for purpose.

Some of the measures we have put in place include:

- Establishing a learning culture within the Trust, ensuring knowledge is shared in order to improve practice and result in a continuous improvement.
- A comprehensive training offer is in place for existing staff, informed by a set of core skills

Examples of Learning:

1. The number of open cases has reduced from 1834 to 1440. This reflects the Trust's shift from working with a large number of lower risk cases to focusing on more intense work with those who are at real risk. This is an example of the Trust's resources working with those most in need and demonstrates the relationship between QA and performance management information, the learning culture and the application of these to strategy, practice and stakeholder relationships.

2. Audit activity has taken place throughout the year and the key themes emerging from these are used to inform learning. Examples include the identification of poor quality supervision which has resulted in the implementation of strategies to enhance the quality of supervision and the need to improve the quality of direct work with children which was addressed by a "learning through play" event which took place in the summer .



5. Improving Learning

and behaviours for social work practitioners and managers and centred around raising standards. This includes training on life story work and later life letters as identified by Ofsted.

- Embedded the principle, in every aspect of development and implementation, that the voice of the children and young people the Trust work with is one of the, if not the most, important mechanism for learning there is. The Trust has worked with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and with SBC to review and relaunch the Pledge to Children in Care. An action plan is in place, led by the Participation Worker, to support and improve the participation of looked after children at all levels; this includes participation in the decision making processes that are in place as the CiCC have presented information to Council Members.
- Additionally the voice of the child will be embedded in QA mechanisms, including audit. This all-encompassing focus on this area will mean in time the voice of the child / young person will not only be evident at both an operational and strategic level, these voices will inform the next steps about their own lives and practice decisions, and the strategic direction of the service.
- Revised and relaunched the Complaints Procedures (and set up staff training); appointed a Complaints Manager to ensure complaints are prioritised by operational staff and are dealt with appropriately and in a timely fashion; set up staff communication on lessons learned, to ensure that everyone recognises the value and importance of complaints as part of the learning process. Themes identified are used to drive improvement in these areas and will continue to be embedded as part of the broader QA Framework.
- The Trust is working with The Cornerstone Partnership to provide additional feedback from adopters to inform ongoing development of adoption services.

Example of Learning:

The Virtual School Head was invited to attend a Reach Out meeting so young people could learn about the new e-PEP system and test that it would enable their views about their education to be reflected.

The Virtual School Head also meets regularly with schools to hear young people's views and include them in actions to improve this area of support for children in care.

- The Child Protection Conference process provides an opportunity for families / professionals participating in the conference to feed back through an evaluation form. A review of the Child Protection Conference process, led by an independent consultant, has led to a new systemic framework being introduced which incorporates Signs of Safety and strengthening families. The focus of the conference is on the risk of significant harm and places the voice of the child at the centre.

NEXT STEPS

Learning extends beyond the boundaries of the Trust and beyond social care. The establishment of positive multi-agency relationships and development of existing relationships will be strengthened through the systemic approach to social work and work will need to take place with the LSCB to consider how this learning also takes place at a strategic level across the partnerships.

This ensures that learning from all of the Trust's formal and informal QA mechanisms is used effectively to influence service development, target resources and improve quality and outcomes for children and young people who need it.



6. Improving Workforce

Ensuring there is a stable workforce and permanent leadership team in place to deliver good outcomes for children and families and to drive the programme of change and culture of continuous improvement is essential if the Trust is to succeed.

Since the inception of the Trust there has been a significant shift in the robustness of performance management, underpinned by the behavioural framework and values which have been developed with the workforce and implemented.

The behaviours and values we have adopted along with the performance management framework are now permeating the organisation and are seen as an integral part of our business process rather than being a separate process.

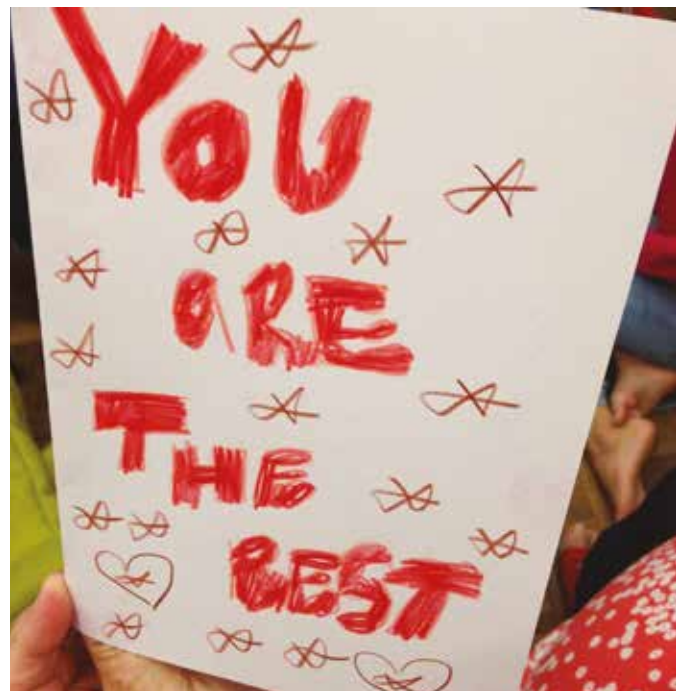
Performance management is both a strategic and an operational issue for the Trust. At a strategic level the Trust is concerned with setting achievable goals and objectives across the organisation and developing the competence and capability of our workforce to achieve these goals and objectives.

We firmly recognise that, if the goals/objectives are not matched to the organisation's capability, no amount of employee cajoling will achieve them. At an operational level it means creating an environment in which people are motivated to excel and exercise their talents. It involves managing relationships, monitoring and reviewing performance, and taking action to improve it and finding better ways of getting the best out of our workforce.

The Trust has established very clear and much higher standards than existed previously about the calibre of staff required to work in Slough.

While most of the existing staff and managers transferred to the Trust, there have been some significant changes. Progress has been made in establishing a secure and permanent workforce.

At the point the Trust was established there was a high level of agency social workers in place due to previously unsuccessful national recruitment campaigns to attract permanent social workers to Slough. Staff turnover rates were high, which



impacted negatively on children and young people and, despite the launch of a new supervision policy in April 2015, supervision files were substandard and the training offer was inadequate and unappealing.

We have strategically addressed these issues and, while recognising there is still much to do to improve standards and working practice, listed below are some of our achievements to date.

Progress so far

- The Trust is establishing a Workforce Development Plan underpinned by a Behaviours Framework, which outlines clearly what is expected of staff and what is in place to enable them to achieve the standards required. This will develop and implement workforce interventions that will:
 - Promote and develop the safeguarding and Integrated Working agendas by building a qualified and skilled children's workforce across the Trust that will embrace new ways of working
 - Develop and support the external market to respond to new demands on its workforce
 - Provide a framework to enable engagement with a range of strategic



6. Improving Workforce

partners for remodelling the workforce based on high quality current and future intelligence

- Provide services that are value for money and make the best use of available resources.
- We have introduced an assertive and coherent recruitment and retention strategy to attract and retain the highest quality staff in Slough. This Includes:
 - Ensuring staff have the necessary qualifications, experiences and skills and can demonstrate that they meet the Trust's behavioural framework.
 - Interview panels for social workers include children and young people in care and children of foster carers to ensure their voice is heard in all areas of the business.
 - Attracting and supporting newly qualified social workers in Slough to future-proof the workforce
 - Building a workforce that is reflective of the Slough population; this includes recruiting young social workers, male staff and increasing the proportion of staff with a disability.
 - Streamlining the recruitment process to ensure desired applicants do not experience any bureaucratic or procedural delays; this includes rolling recruitment campaigns to ensure vacancies are filled promptly and the use of agency staff is reduced.
 - Providing an employment offer to potential staff that is competitive.
 - Working with local educational establishments to support the supervision of student placements and research opportunities; this can be an effective source of recruitment for new staff.
 - Researching innovative solutions for recruiting and retaining staff, including developing a bank of appointable candidates, grow your own schemes and developing a Trust Agency.
- New roles have been introduced to manage the implementation of specific areas of improvement;



these include a Head of Performance and Quality Assurance, a new Virtual School Head, two new Leaving Care teams to work alongside the social work Hubs and an Improvement Manager to manage the programme of improvements required.

- The **Safe, Secure and Successful** model offers practitioners opportunities to become highly skilled while retaining practitioner status and joint working promotes shared practice and learning
- The Trust has been hugely successful with its recruitment to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. The Trust received 119 applications from up and down the country and interviewed 26 candidates; all 13 available posts were appointed to, and the Trust could have easily appointed more from those interviewed.
- An in depth training needs analysis will be undertaken in the coming year which will inform future training and development plans, including regular evaluation of the quality and impact of the training in place for staff and partners.



6. Improving Workforce

■ Work has also started on an agile working project, with an investment in portable technology for Trust staff. New devices, applications and processes are currently being rolled out and will continue next year. This investment will yield an array of benefits and drive service improvement including increased staff morale, better engagement with children and families – particularly with hard to reach areas and groups for example by enabling workers to overcome language barriers, financial and environmental benefits, improved credibility with partner agencies and enabling processes such as placing a child to be more efficient and simple. Additionally technology will contribute to the broader strategic initiatives of the Trust such as recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

Leadership

Ofsted was highly critical of the historic leadership arrangements and decisions during the years that Slough Children’s Services were graded inadequate. It was clear that the issues around poor quality of leadership had been long-standing and endemic.

The Trust’s permanent Leadership Team has now been established and, as outlined on Page 5, a clear and effective governance structure has been developed to ensure that the Trust and other responsible agencies have sufficient and robust oversight of safeguarding in Slough.

The Leadership Team within the Trust is more visible and accessible to frontline staff, partners, children and young people than before, and has worked to

Example of Improved Leadership:

Partners and staff have openly acknowledged improvement in the leadership of the service since the establishment of the Trust.

A recent staff survey (conducted by DfE) support the view that the new arrangements have had a positive impact on staff. 69% of the 175 staff who completed the survey stated the senior / strategic leadership of the service had either greatly or somewhat improved and 53% noted an improvement in the culture at work. 79% noted an improvement in the strategic vision of children’s services and 85% agreed (either somewhat or strongly) that they had a good understanding of the Trust’s vision and goals. This demonstrates that staff are engaged with the strategic direction of the organisation.

establish a culture of transparency and openness with staff.

Practices such as revised audit arrangements, observation of frontline and full and meaningful consultation with staff about key developments such as the new **Safe, Secure and Successful** model of social work have resulted in a significant shift in the culture and performance of the workforce.

7. Improving Information

Good communication and information sharing, both within the Trust and with our service users and partner agencies is essential.

This was – and continues to be – a priority area for the Trust. Huge steps have been taken, as demonstrated in other sections of this report,

to improve the quality, speed and effectiveness of essential information needed to ensure the safety of vulnerable children, young people and their families in Slough. In addition to - and to strengthen - existing measures taken to improve practice-related information, a new, permanent Head of Communications, with extensive experience



7. Improving Information



of multi-agency collaboration and change management has now been appointed to the Leadership Team.

This role will enhance the work already done to embed the new approach to delivering children's services in Slough beyond the confines of the Trust.

But appropriate information sharing and good communication is everyone's job. There is a recognition of the need and a desire for the Trust to work closely with communities and partners in Slough to deliver services on a multi-agency basis.

This is a long-term ambition but excellent progress has been made during this first year; the establishment of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for example has improved information sharing, decision-making and responses to safeguarding issues already. As a broader range of services join the MASH, this improvement will be further strengthened.

Improving the quality and availability of information relating to what we do will also facilitate better co-working and build relationships between social workers and communities, and at a strategic level between partners and the Trust's Leadership Team.

A range of policies and practices have been introduced within the MASH to help agencies to work together in a constructive and effective way.

This includes:

- a joint set of operating procedures
- an Information Sharing agreement
- better information sharing forms
- Improved SLSCB Multi-Agency Threshold Guidance, which has been in operation since April 2016. This includes clear guidance about

step up and step down arrangements and ensures a consistent levels of understanding and application of thresholds at all levels across all agencies (see the Slough LSCB Continuum of Need diagram on page 8). Practice audits have demonstrated an improvement in the application of thresholds since the launch of the documents; the introduction of Hub weekly meetings, which will involve partners at appropriate points, will further help this.

- Work has also taken place around raising awareness of the MASH. A communications strategy and plan, centred on transparency and open communication has been developed, and is focused on promoting engagement from stakeholders, children, young people and communities in relation to safeguarding children. Leaflets, posters and 'cue cards' have been produced as part of this work, which will continue as the MASH is embedded.
- Better analysis has uncovered continued poor recording on our social care recording system and there is significant ongoing activity to address this. We are working to identify and correct issues through regular data quality meetings, as well as through staff training and better communication about issues as they arise.
- A Communications Strategy and associated annual plan is in development. Below are some of the areas it will cover:
 - New, improved and accessible website
 - Improved, more accessible intranet
 - Better service user information materials
 - Targeted information for partner agencies
 - Improved visibility of the Trust and its offer.



8. Other Improvements



Below are other areas of our organisation where significant progress has been made:

Corporate Parents

The Trust immediately recognised the need to become better Corporate Parents to Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers; this view confirmed by Ofsted who identified a spectrum of inadequacies in respect of Corporate Parenting, and the quality of care provided to children and young people on the edge of care, looked after children and both care leavers and those returning home from care.

Progress so far

- Since October 2015 the Trust has been funding, and will continue to fund any other support required for care leavers and looked after children placed out of borough.
- The Trust is funding Slough Borough Council's Young People's Service to conduct return home interviews for children who go missing from home, school or care; this helps us monitor repeat instances of missing children to gather

Examples of improved Corporate Parenting:

The Virtual School recently complimented an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for their work and "positive advocacy for children in care"

An IRO commended a Social Worker for excellent and expedient work in care proceedings

The Chief Executive wrote to praise and thank a foster carer about their work following receipt of a letter of thanks from a birth parent where the child had recently been placed in their care.

intelligence about systematic issues of abuse like Child sexual Exploitation (CSE).

- Following the appointment of a permanent Headteacher in June 2016, there has been good progress made in terms of educational support to LAC and care leavers by the Virtual



8. Other Improvements

School. By the end of the 2015/16 academic year Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion rates had drastically improved; 93.75% of looked after children had at least one PEP within the year (compared to less than 1% previously)

- Additional temporary staff have been appointed to raise standards and ensure young people receive the help they need. Longer term, the needs of Slough's care leavers and looked after children will be met through the Trust's new **Safe, Secure and Successful** social work model
- 2 Leaving Care teams for young people aged over 16 are being established alongside 2 LAC Hubs for younger looked after children
- Additional capacity has been purchased from Slough Borough Council's Young People's Service to ensure all looked after children in Year 11 are visited
- The Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel have been revised
- Young people attend the Corporate Parenting Panel to share their views and priorities
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy has been revised and agreed with partners
- A Joint Parenting Panel has been established across Slough Borough Council and the Trust to fulfil the statutory duties of both
- A new 'Looked After Children's Pledge' was completed by Reach Out Children in Care Council (CiCC) and approved in April 2016
- LAC and Care Leavers have been afforded increased opportunities to meet face to face with senior officers and members to give feedback on services
- A weekly report for managers is now being produced so that managers are aware of the regularity and frequency of visits to LAC and Care Leavers and take appropriate action
- The Trust has published a Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After 2015-18. This Strategy outlines the Trust's plan to secure sufficient, affordable good quality accommodation that is responsive to the needs of, and facilitates the best outcomes for, Slough's children and young people
- A new Commissioning Team will be in place from late Autumn 2016 to deliver this new strategy and approach, and provide clarity about commissioning roles and responsibilities



- The Pathway Plan format has been revised and, in accordance with young people's wishes and Ofsted's recommendation, has been made shorter and more accessible.

Children who go missing or who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board (SLSCB) has developed a Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy which links to Missing & Child Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan 2015-17, and a Multi-Agency Missing Strategy and Action Plan 2015-17.

Other progress includes:

- A multi-agency CSE Risk Assessment Tool has been launched
- The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) has been commissioned to provide a range of services including return home interviews
- A joint funded CSE Co-ordinator has been appointed to focus on the strategic development and improved delivery of CSE training
- Training on CSE has been provided to partners, including bite-size CSE 'awareness raising' sessions within the Trust.

Foster Care and Adoption

The national increase in the number of children becoming looked after is mirrored in Slough and the Trust has recognised and responded to the need



8. Other Improvements



Foster carers at the recent (October) dinner/dance and award ceremony. The Trust recognised the need to hold events to thank foster carers and to acknowledge their support and dedication and awards were given for both long-service and for going 'above and beyond'

to retain and recruit more in-house foster carers with the right skills and experience to ensure that fewer children are placed outside of the Borough (and away from their social networks).

The Trust has developed an improved and enhanced offer to new and existing in-house carers; additional funding has been available through a successful invest to save bid which has resulted in the appointment of a permanent, dedicated Fostering Recruitment Manager and additional social workers.

Progress so far

- The Cornerstone partnership has been commissioned to undertake additional recruitment work.

This additional capacity and focus has allowed the Trust to implement the following strategies and activities to diversify and improve the offer to in-house carers:

- The introduction of an out of hours telephone advice and support service
- The increase of the 'refer a friend' scheme up to £500
- Rewarding existing carers with an additional £200 following positive annual reviews
- The introduction of an annual foster carers' celebration and awards event (see picture above)

- The Trust has engaged with the Fostering Network Mockingbird Project; "an alternative method of delivering foster care with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, foster carers". The Trust is only one of nine agencies in this scheme and has appointed a Mockingbird Co-ordinator to support the delivery of this project
- We have engaged The Cornerstone Partnership to assist with marketing and recruitment work required; 30 events are currently scheduled.
- A 3 tier fostering scheme will be introduced from October 2016
- A training programme has been expanded and a dedicated Training Officer Role has been introduced; this includes the introduction of an external training programme and a new level of qualification for tier 3 carers
- The appointment of 5 Fostering Ambassadors from within our own pool of foster carers.
- Introduced a Foster Carers Board, and separate Adoption Board
- Introduced a 'Foster Carers Drop In' session with the Head of Service, and Permanence Drop Ins and Performance Surgeries
- Gained our first positive lead for potential foster carers for unaccompanied minors as a result of a dedicated social media and marketing campaign.



8. Other Improvements

Examples of improved Foster Carer recruitment

Between April 2015 and October 2015 the Borough Council approved 2 new families as foster carers. Between October 2015 and August 2016, SCST approved 5 new Foster Carers, and at the time of writing, 15 assessments of potential new carers are in process.

Other services

The Trust assumed responsibility for a range of services including the Youth Offending Team, Special Educational Needs Assessment Team and several early help services such as family information and Families First. The focus for these teams has mirrored the journey with children's social care with a relentless ambition to improve service delivery and to harness the benefits of being part and parcel of the Trust.

9. Future Priorities

We will continue to focus on the priority areas for delivery and improvement. These include our governance and oversight arrangements.

Our Delivery Plan outlines the way we will address immediate, short and medium term areas for improvement (0-18 months).

Our Five Year Strategy 2016-2021, due to be launched this quarter, details our plans for delivering excellent services by 2021.

We will continue with a programme of ongoing internal review and monitoring of the

mechanisms, strategies and work we have put in place to ensure they are always fit for purpose and that we are focused on the priority areas for delivery and improvement.

Ofsted has recently launched new guidance for inadequate children's services, including a programme of quarterly monitoring visits, to report on the progress made. It will conduct the first monitoring visit of the Trust in November 2016.

We are fully committed to this process and will be co-operative, transparent, open and honest.

NOTES:

The Trust's Financial Report / Strategy is provided separately.

The Ofsted inspection report (Nov 2015) can be found at:

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/slough/052_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children's%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf

The earlier, full inspection report can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/329780/Slough_childrens_social_care_services_report_to_DfE.pdf





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