

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 25th October 2017

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE OFSTED 3RD MONITORING VISIT

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Education and Children's Services (ECS) Scrutiny Panel on the findings of the 3rd Ofsted monitoring visit, which took place on 14-16 June 2017.
- 1.2 The 3rd monitoring visit focused on progress made since the full inspection in 2015, with a focus on child protection work.
- 1.3 The letter from the 4th Ofsted monitoring visit, which took place on 20-21 September 2017, will be tabled for discussion at the meeting, as it will be published by Ofsted on 23 October 2017.

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

- 2.1 The Panel is requested to discuss the findings from the 3rd Ofsted monitoring visit.

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

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Priority 1 – Protecting vulnerable children

3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

Outcome 1: Our children and young people will have the best start in life and opportunities to give them positive lives

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

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

(b) Risk Management

There are no risks identified in relation to the recommendation in this report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or other legal implications relating to the recommendations in this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

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

5. **Overview of findings**

5.1 The full Ofsted letter setting out their findings is attached as Appendix A to this report. Some of the key findings included:

Staffing

5.2 There had been a steady reduction in the numbers of agency staff employed by the Trust, and substantial improvement was seen the level of permanent staff in the child protection and child in need hubs, increasing from under 50% in 2015, to 70% at the time of the monitoring visit. In addition to this, the senior leadership of the Trust was now permanent as well. These changes were reducing the disruption and instability for children and families in their contact with the service.

Decisions

5.3 Section 47 decision making was found to be sound, including escalating some cases from early help when appropriate. This provided reassurance that the right cases are entering the child protection system, and therefore not placing unnecessary stress on families.

Evidence-based decision making

5.4 There is a need to set out clear rationale for decisions that are taken, particularly in circumstances where we are closing a child protection plan. This will strengthen the support that is in place for these families going forward. The use of safety mapping (Signs of Safety) is providing a useful tool/framework for social workers, managers and families themselves to understand the challenges that they face.

Management oversight

5.5 Regular hub discussions of cases are taking place, but are not challenging enough of lack of progress, which means there are some delays in tackling complex family difficulties. In follow up on these, the management oversight of consultant social workers (frontline managers) and Group Managers, is not strong enough to drive plans forward, leading to drift.

Public Law Outline

5.6 The use of Public Law Outline should be considered earlier in cases where children have been subject to repeat or long-standing child protection plans.

Children with Disabilities

- 5.7 Children with disabilities are receiving effective support, so children are happier and their outcomes are improving

Innovation funding

- 5.8 The success of the Trust's innovation funding bid has enabled the development of specialist work to be introduced, such as the PAUSE project. The Measuring What Matters research project by the University of Bedfordshire provided positive evidence of families experiences with children's social care.

Context

- 5.9 It is important to be aware of the demand context within which the Trust is currently operating: the normal expected spike during the summer term has been replaced by a continuing surge in referrals throughout the summer holidays. This has been the picture across the country.
- 5.10 In Slough a record number of children (64) are in legal proceedings, with the associated impact of pressure rolling back from the Trust's Court Hub into the child protection hubs. In addition to safeguarding legal proceedings there has been continuous rise in demand for pre-legal social work, often requiring lengthy human rights assessments on families claiming destitution who have been declared intentionally homeless after being placed in Slough by other local authorities. In addition, increasing numbers of age assessments and other activity susceptible to judicial review, including that related to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and families with No Recourse to Public Funds, remains a feature.
- 5.11 New legislation concerning modern slavery has also impacted on the Trust's social work capacity; along with the surfacing issues concerning safeguarding of children living in inappropriate accommodation with their parents.

Response to monitoring visit findings

- 5.12 Whilst addressing individual issues highlighted by the monitoring visit, there were some key themes in the findings from the Ofsted monitoring visit, and improvement activity has looked to target these as a priority, specifically:

Targeting drift in child protection cases

- Looking to strengthen management oversight through the introduction of a new supervision policy clearly establishing expectations of compliance and quality standards within the supervision process.
- Implemented new escalation process for Child Protection Chairs to strengthen challenge of drift in cases.
- Establishment of a new 9 month and re-referral child protection review group so that there is oversight of all long-standing child protection cases.
- Ongoing review of social work and multi-agency capacity, such as that in the hub structure.

Improving the use of Public Law Outline

- We have been reviewing our use of Public Law Outline, with numbers increasing, but this is still a developing area of practice.

- Alongside this, we have been strengthening our permanency planning from the front door with the introduction of permanency planning meetings, chaired by senior officers.

6. **Conclusion**

Ofsted recognised that they have seen evidence of improvements, and that there were areas of strength identified during the monitoring visit in key aspects of the support that children and families received. However, they are keen that the pace of embedding changes needs to happen quicker.

The focus of improvement work since that time has been on putting in place the structures which will lead to improved management oversight over the coming months, as this is an underpinning theme which will impact on a range of practice across all service areas.

The Trust and council are clear that the general strategy to address the required improvements is correct, but that there needs to be a more rapid improvement, with sustainable change evident over the coming six months.

7. **Appendices Attached**

- A - Monitoring visit of Slough Children's Services
(Letter: Ofsted, 14th July 2017)

8. **Background Papers**

None.