

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2019

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROGRESS UPDATE: 2018/19 – QUARTER 2 (JULY - SEPTEMBER 2018)

Summary

This report provides a summary of performance across Children's Services for Quarter 2. It is based on the Children's Strategy priorities agreed by Cabinet in June 2017.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report, and in particular:

1. The continued challenges around demand;
2. The current position in relation to the numbers of children in care
3. The continued high performance around meeting statutory deadlines and timescales

DETAIL

1. This report summarises performance information in relation to the Children's Services Strategy 2017-20. This strategy, agreed by Cabinet in June 2017, sets out the key priorities for Children's Services and the key performance indicators associated with delivery.
2. The update report is in three parts:
 - a. Update on 2018/19 priorities.
 - b. Update on other actions and progress against the wider strategy
 - c. A summary of key points

Update on 2018/19 priorities

3. An update on the key priorities for 2018/19 is provided below:
 - a. **Redesigning the role and focus of children's centres into multi-agency family hubs as part of a 0-19 approach.** Family Hubs have been operational since April 2018. The development of the range of functions operating out of family hubs continues to expand, with public health nursing co-located in a number of venues.
 - b. **More integrated assessment and support in the early years.** We are working towards the implementation of a more integrated assessment by December 2018.

- c. **Work to ensure all schools/academies in Stockton are good or better** – A detailed report on performance was presented to Cabinet in October. A report on the progress of vulnerable pupils is elsewhere on the agenda.
- d. **Develop options for alternative provision and curriculum delivery for 14-19 year olds at risk of disengagement and becoming NEET.** Work has continued to develop options for alternative provision, building on the offer at Bishopton Centre. This also includes the continued development of the careers traded service, which is continuing to expand in Stockton.
- e. **Reshaping family support into a new Family Solutions Service and offer.** We are currently undertaking a review of our approach to family working to identify options for alternative models of delivery which can help support the focus on reducing the need for social care intervention. This will build on the successful implementation of Family Group Conferencing, which will be reviewed, working with an external expert in December 2018 prior to the rollout of the model to early help and for supporting young people leaving care to go home.
- f. **Continuing to develop a ‘secondary prevention’ approach to reduce risk in target communities.** The development of an approach to identify vulnerability is being taken forward as part of the work on early help, with a focus on using data to identify, risk assess and target families more effectively.
- g. **Refreshing our approach to social work training and skills, and the quality of supervision.** A revised workforce strategy is currently being developed to support a long term workforce strategy. Work is also being taken forward on a practice model which takes into account our use of signs of safety and restorative practice. These will be completed by December 2018.
- h. **Tackling key thematic priorities, with an emphasis on domestic abuse, neglect and repeat removals.** Work continues on the delivery of the domestic abuse strategy and action plan. A new social care link post has been created to work directly with social care teams as a means of providing faster support and guidance, and continue to use FGC as a mechanism to work with families impacted by domestic abuse.
- i. **Working to transform support for young people with emotional health and wellbeing needs.** Work continues with the CCG, and building on the People Select Committee’s recent review to design a new approach to supporting children with emotional health needs. Over 30 primary schools are engaged on this work which has been developed through the Future in Mind project.
- j. **Redesigning our support for children with complex needs and disabilities.** This review will consider issues across children’s and adults services to work towards a more seamless approach to building independence.
- k. **Implement a major change programme for social care focusing on capacity, practice, systems, partnership working and models for delivery (S-WORK).** Work continues as part of this whole system review against the ‘Ss’ of the framework (staffing and recruitment; skills and practice; services and partners; systems, structures, spaces). Initial work will be completed by December 2018.
- l. **Developing an enhanced Care Leavers offer to support independence.** This is the subject of a reporting in scrutiny review for 2018/19. An initial report was considered in October, and further consultation events will take place in December, with a final offer being presented to the Select Committee in January and then to Corporate Parenting Board.
- m. **Creative ways of engaging and working with children in care,** working with the Let’s Take Action Group. The ‘More Stuff Like This Please!’ project, working with ARC and Blue Cabin continues, and runs until November 2019. A review of year 1 takes place in December.
- n. **Develop and test new approaches to increase capacity in fostering.** Options for supporting an increase in the numbers of in house foster carers, and the capacity of

in house fostering are being considered as part of the wider work on children in our care

- o. **Implement a refreshed approach to corporate parenting.** The new Corporate Parenting Board meets for the first time in October. A new giving scheme – helping hands’ will be launched in the Autumn.

Update on other actions and progress

Giving children the best start in life

4. There are a number of other outcomes and updates to report on:
 - a. Take up of the universal free entitlement to 15 hours of education for 3 and 4 years olds remains at 100%.
 - b. Take-up of the 2yr old offer remains on average around 90%, this equates to approximately 822 children accessing a place.
 - c. In relation to the roll out of the 30 hours of support overall, the Council remains on track to have available the required numbers of places, and to support a gradual increase in uptake. There are currently around 795 children accessing a place and Stockton has an 88.94% conversion rate for parents registering with HMRC and then accessing a place. Current provision includes capacity for around 1990 places, and demand is forecast to rise further as more schools are considering delivering places. Currently 53 (100%) of nurseries, 130 (69%) of childminders and 21 (35%) of schools deliver 30 hour places.

Focusing on schools and learning outcomes

5. Key areas of update for this priority include:
 - a. The recent launch of the Opportunity North East programme which will bring £24m of investment to the North East to focus on: recruitment of teachers; transition; secondary school improvement; careers; progress to higher education and more effective links to business.
 - b. We have developed an action plan to help to manage the pressure on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, which continues to be under pressure, as is the case nationally.

Delivering effective early help

6. Additional activity to report on includes:
 - a. The work to refine early help approaches is continuing, and will result in a new approach being piloted in the new year.
 - b. We are working with the DWP on a reducing parental conflict programme, which will be developed further into specific activity, which will include work on relationships and counselling.
 - c. Following a review of the management of Children’s Services, which commenced in March 2018 and concluded in May 2018, a single Early Help Manager is now taking on responsibility for refreshing the early help offer, including consideration of closer working with schools, the role of a coordination hub, and the further evolution of Family Hubs.

Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable children and young people, backed by outstanding social work practice

7. In terms of key performance data collected and analysed in Children's Services:
 - a. The rate of contacts to children's social care (ie into the Children's Hub) has reduced significantly from the corresponding quarter in 2017/18 – by 21%. This is encouraging and could suggest that there is better grip in early help services, and more appropriate referrals being made. This would correspond with overall intelligence suggesting more appropriate referrals being made to the hub.
 - b. However, the rate of referrals to social care is up by 15% (ie where an initial contact has been deemed to be worthy of social care assessment);
 - c. The rate of single assessments being undertaken is also up by 14% compared to the same quarter of 2017/18 indicating that referrals in the main are appropriate, and warrant assessment.
 - d. 98% of single assessments, despite this increase in volume, continue to be undertaken within the statutory deadline of 45 days
 - e. The rate of children being classed as in need has risen by 13%, but the rate of episodes of children in need ending has risen more significantly, by 31%: although we continue to assess that children need the protection of being a child in need, we are seeing a significant increase in the number of occasions where work with families can be stepped down or closed. The overall rate of CIN therefore is 5.6% down on the same quarter last year.
 - f. The rate of children subject to a child protection plan is 10% higher than the same period last year
 - g. Only 0.7% of child protection plans were in place for more than 2 years (an indicator of potential drift – this rate was 3.4% overall last year, lower than the national rate)
 - h. We continue to see an increase in the percentage of children subject to a second child protection plan. Cases have been audited. There is some evidence in a number of cases of over optimistic decision making, and also of a lack of intensity in the child in need plans developed when child protection plans are discontinued.
 - i. 98% of initial child protection conferences were held within 15 working days of the Section 47 enquiry
8. Case file audits continue to be a key element of the overall quality assurance framework to monitor the quality of social work practice, and a regular programme is undertaken on a monthly basis. The latest audits indicate a continuing positive trend. A peer audit programme is shortly to begin, with groups of authorities working in groups of three as part of the Sector Led Improvement programme across the North east. We will be working with Middlesbrough and Northumberland Councils as part of this programme.
9. We continue to operate a rolling recruitment campaign. As at the end of September 2018 there were 9 Social Work vacancies across the teams.
10. Agency Social Workers are covering maternity leave, sickness, secondments and vacancies until the pending starters commence/the remaining vacancies are recruited to. As at the end of September there were 12 FTE agency workers currently in post.
11. The regional Memorandum of Understanding to cap agency pay rates was launched on 1 September 2017, and the full transfer of all agency contracts onto the new terms began from 1 July 2018. There is increasing evidence of a shortage of agency workers across the region (and nationally).
12. The overall summary position is therefore that:
 - a. We continue to maintain high performance around timeliness and efficiency of our processes;

- b. There is evidence that referrals are increasing appropriate, but this is leading to an increase in referrals and assessments being required
- c. and assessments is evidence that the rising levels of demand we have experienced in the past 2 years may be slowing down;
- d. We have been successful in reducing the numbers of children on child protection plans, but we continue to monitor the rate at which children require additional child protection plans

A consistent and relentless focus on better outcomes for children in our care and care leavers

- 13. There were 504 children in our care at September 2018, a rate of 113/10,000 children and young people. The rate has remained stable in this quarter. Regional comparative figures are not yet available, but will be assessed shortly.
- 14. A specific programme of work has been established to identify and prioritise solutions. This project is exploring prevention; decision making; sufficiency of placements; opportunities to expand our approach to reunification; and a review of out of borough placements. .
- 15. Adoption Tees Valley was established on 1 May 2018. The first review report will be presented to Corporate Parenting Board in February 2019.
- 16. In terms of key performance data, for quarter 2:
 - a. The rate of children in care has stabilised, though is significantly higher than quarter 2 in 2017/18 (13%);
 - b. The proportion of children in our care with three or more placement moves is low, at 2%
 - c. 67% of children have been in the same placement for 3 years or more
 - d. The percentage of looked after reviews held in timescale remains high – 97.8;
 - e. 91% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation;
 - f. 55.6% of care leavers are in employment, education or training compared to last year’s rate of 40%;
 - g. All residential care homes remain good or outstanding.
- 17. In summary:
 - a. Our rate of children in care remains high, and continues to be a significant area of focus.
 - b. We remain efficient in terms of timeliness.
 - c. Despite the high rate of children in our care, we remain high performing around placement stability.
 - d. There are signs that the rate at which we are bringing children into care is slowing, and is now below regional average.

Leadership, management and governance

- 18. An update on progress includes:
 - a. Further sessions on safeguarding and corporate parenting for members will be delivered this year.
 - b. In line with the agreed regional approach and the formation of the regional Improvement Alliance, the Council will undertake a self-assessment across Children’s services which will be peer challenged and reviewed by two other Councils before being considered as part of a regional improvement plan. Both the LGA and the Department for Education are also involved in this work.

- c. The proposals for the new safeguarding partnership to replace the LSCB is the subject of a report elsewhere on the agenda.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

19. There are no specific community impact implications arising from this report. Implications were considered in the Cabinet report to agree the strategy in June 2017. However, the focus in the strategy on ensuring the best start in life, the focus on tackling disadvantage and the emphasis on supporting children in our care and care leavers are all associated with the approach of prioritising the needs of more vulnerable groups.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

20. There are no specific financial implications. The management of budgets has been included in the Children's Services Strategy as a key priority and is therefore subject to the oversight process for the strategy as a whole. The key financial implication arising from the costs associated with out of borough placements, and this is subject to additional oversight through the Children's Multi Agency Panel process. Overall demand pressures in Children's Services continue.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

21. There are no specific legal implications arising from this update report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

22. There are no specific risk implications from this report. Key risks remain the extent to which the Council can continue to meet the demand for placements for children in care.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

23. The issues and updates provided in this report have specific relevant to all of the Policy principles:

Policy Principles:

- Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention – Children's Services plays a key role in the identification and assessment of the needs of children, young people and families.
- Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention – Children's Services works proactively through early help to support families who may be in need of specific, and often time-limited support to be able to access the same opportunities as others.
- Developing strong and healthy communities – Children's Services works with a range of partners to support healthy choices, and promoting wellbeing. A specific focus is on the emotional health and wellbeing of children, through work in schools and in partnership around the delivery of services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- Creating economic prosperity – Children's Services working in partnership with schools supports young people in benefitting from a high quality education and in receiving support to enter the labour market and live independently.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

24. The specific actions in the strategy around children in our care and care leavers are focused on the delivery of corporate parenting and help to fulfil the priority in the Children's Services strategy of a relentless focus on better outcomes for children in our care and care leavers.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

25. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been consulted.

Name of Contact Officer: Martin Gray
Post Title: Director of Children's Services
Telephone No. 01642 527043
Email Address: martin.gray@stockton.gov.uk

Education related? Yes

Background Papers – Children's Services Strategy 2017-2020

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: None specific

Property: No specific implications for assets and property.