

For General Release

REPORT TO:	CABINET 19 November 2018
SUBJECT:	Children's Improvement Plan and feedback from the October Ofsted Monitoring Visit 2018/19
LEAD OFFICER:	Eleni Ioannides, Interim Executive Director, People Department
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT Croydon Corporate plan 2018-22 The recommendations address the following Corporate Plan priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential.• More specifically, the recommendations will contribute to the following commitments under this priority;<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Continue to invest in and improve services for children and young people in need of help and protection○ Champion the interests of children and young people in our care and support care leavers into successful young adulthood	
FINANCIAL IMPACT £10.9m has been allocated to base budgets in 2018-19 to support the drive to improve children's services, in addition to transformation funding.	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO. This is not a key decision.	
1. RECOMMENDATIONS The Cabinet is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 Note that the Children's Improvement Plan has been revised for 2018/19 with a sharpened focus on key areas of priority for improvement1.2 Endorse the Children's Improvement Plan 2018/19, as approved by the Children's Improvement Board1.3 Note the feedback from the fourth Ofsted monitoring visit which took place on 3rd and 4th October 2018	

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the publication of the Ofsted report on children's services in Croydon on 4th September 2017 under the single inspection framework (SIF) the council developed an Improvement Plan which was presented to and endorsed by the council's cabinet in November 2017. This plan was then submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education in December 2017.
- 2.2 Ofsted assess progress against an improvement plan for Councils with an inadequate children's social care judgement through quarterly monitoring visits. The fourth visit to Croydon was on 3rd and 4th of October and feedback from this visit was published on the 26th October 2018. The next visit is scheduled for February 2019. Progress against the plan is also monitored on a monthly basis through the Children's Improvement Board which is independently chaired and has representation from the Department for Education, Camden, Elected Members and key statutory partners (schools, police and health).
- 2.3 The Children's Improvement Plan 2017/18 specified that a review would take place after six months. This process began in June 2018 and concluded in October 2018 in order to respond to feedback from four Ofsted monitoring visits and capture work with our intensive peer support partner, Camden Council. An indicative draft of the 2018/19 Improvement Plan was shared with Ofsted during the October monitoring visit.
- 2.4 This report provides information to cabinet about the revised Children's Improvement Plan 2018/19 (included as appendix 1), highlighting the main changes between the old and new plans. The report also provides feedback on the fourth Ofsted monitoring visit which took place on 3rd and 4th October 2018 and was focused on progress made for children in care, including thresholds and permanence planning.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 When a local authority's children's services are judged inadequate following an Ofsted inspection under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) the Secretary of State is able to use powers in accordance with section 497A (4B) of the Education Act 1996 to direct the council to take certain actions in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.
- 3.2 Following the publication of the Ofsted report on children's services in Croydon on 4th September 2017 the Secretary of State for Education (the Secretary of State) issued a direction to the Council to co-operate with Eleanor Brazil as the Children's Services Commissioner for Croydon (the Commissioner) to support

her recommendations to the Minister for Children and Families (the Minister) on the future of children's services in Croydon.

- 3.3 An Improvement Board was established in September 2017 under the leadership of an independent chair to drive the substantial programme of work required to improve the quality of services for vulnerable children and young people. The initial Children's Improvement Plan 2017/18 was endorsed by the Children's Improvement Board in October 2017 before it was presented at cabinet in November 2017.
- 3.4 A further revised direction published by the DfE on 25th January 2018 required Croydon to agree arrangements for intensive peer support with Camden Council. The Commissioner's contract was extended until 31st March 2018 to broker the support arrangements and provide a view on the appropriateness of these to address the shortcomings in Croydon's performance as identified by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).
- 3.5 The peer support proposals were submitted to the Minister on 20th April 2018 and approved. A revised statutory direction was published by the Secretary of State on 8th May 2018 requiring Croydon to co-operate with Camden Council on the proposals and setting out the arrangements for monitoring and reporting progress against these. The direction also ended the involvement of the Commissioner in Croydon.

4. CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2018/19

- 4.1 The Children's Improvement plan 2018/19 was reviewed between June and October 2018; sharpening the focus to drive actions that are concentrated on the right priorities at increased pace. This has resulted in a simpler, shorter document that is made of four distinct 'work plans'.
- 4.2 The plan outlines the actions that we will take in 2018/19 to address the weaknesses that were identified during the Ofsted inspection and subsequent monitoring visits and to ensure that children in Croydon are supported and protected.
- 4.3 The main changes between the old and new plans are set out below;
 - The plan is divided into four distinct 'work plans' under new work streams;
 - Management & Practice; covering actions to improve management grip and the quality and consistency of social work practice
 - Workforce; covering actions to recruit and retain staff and learning and development activity

- Partnerships; covering actions to develop a partnership early help offer, improve partnership working and strengthen the local safeguarding board
- Platforms; covering actions relating to corporate support services including finance, performance, children's recording systems, commissioning and business (administrative) support
- Fewer priorities (11 down to 7) to focus on what matters most, these are;
 1. Strengthening management grip at all levels (Management & Practice)
 2. Identifying, assessing and responding to risk (Management & Practice)
 3. Robust and effective planning (Management & Practice)
 4. Building a skilled and stable workforce (Workforce)
 5. Implementing an all age Early Help Offer, strengthening partnership working and improving the LSCB (Partnerships)
 6. Creating the conditions for social work to flourish (Platforms)
 7. Creating a culture of shared ownership and social work values
- Significantly fewer actions which are higher level to focus on fewer things at a faster pace. These will be supplemented by underlying action and project plans.
- The addition of a new 'success measures' column to ensure that we continue to focus on tracking and evidencing the impact of actions (for example through qualitative data, or qualitative feedback from auditing, children and staff)
- New programme reporting arrangements aligned to our social work practice model, strengthening families, which will focus on answering the following four questions;
 - What's working well? (e.g. key achievements or improvements)
 - How do we know? (evidence of impact)
 - What are we worried about? (e.g. risks, issues and underperformance)
 - What needs to happen, and by when? (e.g. mitigating or remedial actions)

4.4 New internal governance arrangements across the Council have been agreed to support this next phase of Croydon's improvement journey, aligned to the new Improvement Plan's structure. (see Appendix 1, pages 4-5 for more information). The programme approach aims to increase the focus and pace of change and includes:

- A monthly programme board chaired by the Chief Executive until the permanent Executive Director Children, Families and Education takes up post in December 2018. This will monitor and challenge progress across all work

streams and ensure there is sufficient corporate support, focus and resource to drive improvement activity and deliver the plan.

- A monthly task group for each work stream, chaired by the relevant senior responsible officers (SRO's) which will;
 - Hold lead officers to account for delivery of actions through oversight and challenge
 - Report up to the Children's Improvement Programme Board
 - Assess the impact of actions
 - Drive forward underlying action planning and task and finish group activity
- 4.5 The programme board will report directly to the Children's Improvement Board through a monthly highlight report from the Executive Director for Children, Families and Education (DCS).
- 4.6 The Children's Safeguarding Board will continue oversee the development of the early help offer with additional internal assurance from the 'Partnerships' work stream Task Group to ensure that all the actions in the plan are on track for delivery.
- 4.7 These governance arrangements will be kept under review over the next 3-6 months to ensure they are as effective as possible and to allow time to discuss how and when oversight responsibilities for early help will be transferred to the Children and Families Partnership Board.
- 4.8 In addition to this, there will be oversight from Elected Members at Cabinet, Scrutiny and Overview Committee and The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee. The revised Corporate Parenting Panel will focus on improving outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers, as set out in the plan.
- 4.9 There will also be six-monthly 'stocktake' meetings with the DfE and Chair of the Improvement Board to scrutinise and evaluate our progress and the impact of the intensive peer support partnership with Camden
- 4.10 A work plan to deliver priority 7, 'Creating a culture of shared ownership and social work values', will be developed through consultation with the Staff Reference Group. Actions under this priority will include those to improve the culture (e.g.; communication, staff wellbeing and how we listen to and act on the voices of children and young people).

5. FEEDBACK FROM OCTOBER OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

5.1 The fourth Ofsted monitoring visit took place on 3rd and 4th October and focused on progress made for children in care, including thresholds and permanence planning. Inspectors looked at six 'tracked cases'; three children who had recently become looked after and three children who had been in care for more than twelve months, and sampled more cases in the following areas;

- unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- children with a plan for adoption
- children in care who have a disability
- children placed at a distance
- care leavers

5.2 Inspectors provided verbal feedback on the second day of the monitoring visit to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning, Chief Executive, Interim Executive Director, Children, Families and Education and Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care. A letter summarising inspectors' feedback was published by Ofsted on the 26th October 2018.

5.3 Overall the feedback on the fourth monitoring visit is balanced, acknowledging that while the council has made progress in some key areas, including management oversight, this is not yet having the required impact for all children in care and too many children experience drift and delay in having permanency secured for them.

5.4 Examples of positive or more encouraging feedback detailed within Ofsted monitoring visit letter include;

- Progress can be seen in management oversight, with management involvement evident on virtually all case records seen by inspectors
- Improvements to the audit process are assisting senior managers in their oversight of the experiences of children in Croydon
- The core components of effective social work practice for children in care are in place and social workers show a high degree of commitment to the children they work with and are proud of each child's achievements.
- Most children are well placed and benefit from secure, stable placements
- Practice is generally better for children who have come into care more recently, although it is still not undertaken with sufficient urgency
- The service for care leavers is showing improvement, has high morale and is benefiting from the importance that has been placed on it (through the development of the local offer for care leavers)
- The commitment of members was noted in championing the interests of care leavers through the local offer

5.5 Despite this acknowledged progress, inspectors also highlighted the following areas where practice is weaker or requires further improvement;

- A perceived lack of urgency in ensuring that children's placements are formally matched to achieve permanence for children
- Drift and delay for some very young children with a plan for adoption; taking too long to find an adoptive family
- Life story work is not yet fully embedded as a necessary part of permanency planning for all children
- Family group conferences are slow to be arranged, meaning early opportunities to explore permanence options within the wider family may be missed
- Morale was generally found to be lower in the looked after teams within the Corporate Parenting Service with some staff finding their caseloads hard to manage, despite averages being lower than other services
- The extent and quality of management oversight remains variable
- Case transfers between services (e.g. poor handovers) mean that some social workers are playing catch up to complete work

5.6 The feedback from this and prior monitoring visits has led the development of new and revised actions in the Children Improvement Plan 2018/19 (for example, actions relating to permanency planning for children set out under priority 3 of the plan). In addition to this, senior managers are working closely with our intensive peer support partner, Camden Council, to learn from best practice, (Camden's adoption service has been graded 'outstanding') to identify and implement improvements to the adoption service at pace.

5.7 The next monitoring visit will take place on the 19th and 20th February 2019 and will focus on cases that are 'stepped down', including child protection to child in need, child in need to early help, and looked after children returning home.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 A communication and engagement plan has been developed to underpin the improvement activity, with the following objectives:

1. To communicate how we are improving children's services in Croydon over the next two years
2. To inform our staff, stakeholders and partners about our improvement plan – progress, key decisions, activities and dates

3. To encourage staff, children and partners that they are a vital part of the journey and the solution and to create confidence in them that we can run an effective and safe service – we are people focused.
 4. To help create the environment for effective culture change through communication and engagement
 5. To help in the recruitment and retention of key children's service staff – by showcasing Croydon as a great place to work through creating a strong 'We are Croydon' brand
- 6.2 A Council staff reference group has been established and feeds into the improvement board through the chair and vice chair of the group, two social workers, who sit on the board bringing practitioners' perspectives.
- 6.3 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is central to social work practice and service improvement. Croydon has a range of mechanisms to engage and consult with children, young and their families. This includes the Youth Engagement Strategy which sets out a number of initiatives to ensure that children and young people have a voice, and the Children in Care Council.

7. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The 2018/19 budget includes growth of £10.2m in the People (Children's base budget) and £0.7m in Resources (Business Support base budget) to ensure the staffing structure and budget support both the level of demand being experienced and also the areas of focus for improvement.
- 7.2 The Medium Term Financial Strategy approved at Cabinet in September 2018 assumes a further investment in Children's Social care of £7m in 2019/20 to fund the continued growth in demand and complexity of need.
- 7.3 Approved by Lisa Taylor, Director of Finance, Investment and Risk

8. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

- 8.1 The Solicitor to the Council comments that there are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report
- 8.2 Approved by: Doutimi Aseh, Head of Social Care & Education Law for and on behalf of the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 9.1 It is recognised that in order to improve outcomes for children in Croydon we need to attract and retain a skilled and committed workforce with manageable workloads and good management oversight. This is a key priority outlined in the Children's Improvement Plan 2018/19 (see priority 4) and the actions that we will take to ensure this happens are set out under the Workforce work stream of the plan (see appendix 1, pages 17 to 19)
- 9.2 Work is continuing to utilise all available options to maintain the successful recruitment of permanent staffing and plan for turnover of both permanent and locum staff. This is showing signs of progress but remains challenging and we continue to use high levels of locums. The investment in newly qualified social workers and the revision of the learning and development offer for staff aligns to workforce planning and development priorities for the service
- 9.3 Approved by Sue Moorman, Director of Human Resources

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 10.1 The Children's Improvement Plan aims to ensure that all children and young people in Croydon who require it benefit from high quality social work, regardless of disability, gender, religion, race or sexual orientation. An Equality Analysis on the plan will be undertaken by 1 December 2018 to consider any disproportionate impact on people sharing one or more protected characteristics. For underlying actions within the plan that relate to service design or other structural changes (e.g. staffing changes), individual equality assessments will be undertaken in line with council-wide procedures.
- 10.2 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young people are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.
- 10.3 Croydon has a diverse population of children and young people. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 57%, compared with 30% in the country as a whole. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language across primary schools is 44% (the national average is 18%).
- 10.4 Social workers' planning and recording in relation to inequalities is inconsistent, which can result in plans for children's care that do not reflect their needs. The improvement plan addresses the additional work which needs to be done to

ensure that children's diversity and identity needs are accurately and consistently identified, inform assessment and so met through their care plans.

10.5 Approved by: Yvonne Okiyo, Equalities Manager

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

11.1 There are no direct implications contained in this report.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

12.1 There are no direct implications contained in this report.

13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

13.1 N/A

14. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

14.1 N/A

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:	Appendix 1 – Croydon Children's Improvement Plan 2018/19 Appendix 2 – Ofsted Monitoring Visit 4 feedback letter
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:	None