

REPORT TO:	CABINET 18 November 2019
SUBJECT:	Progress report from the Independent Chair of the Children's Improvement Board
LEAD OFFICER:	Robert Henderson Executive Director Children and Families Eleanor Brazil Independent Chair
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Fleming Cabinet Member for Families, Health & Social Care
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/ AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON	
The work of the Improvement Board supports the corporate priority and ambitions to making a major contribution to the improvement of life chances for children and young people in Croydon.	

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Investment of £22.2m has been allocated to base budgets in 2018/19 and 2019/20 to support the drive to improve children's services. This is in addition to transformation funding.

FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: not a key decision

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to

- 1.1 Note the work of the Improvement Board in helping drive improvements in children's services.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Improvement Board was set up in response to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection in August 2017. It is multi-agency and independently chaired.
- 2.2 The chair of the Improvement Board works closely with the Council and its partners to oversee actions to deliver the Improvement Plan, and to provide challenge and support. The Chair is required to report every 6 months to the DFE and to the Minister for Children and Families on progress.

2.3 This is the first report to Cabinet informing on the work of the Board, and the progress being made.

3. REPORT OF THE WORK OF CROYDON'S IMPROVEMENT BOARD

3.1 I was the Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education, following the Ofsted inspection that judged children's services in Croydon to be inadequate. My recommendation to the Minister that Croydon should continue to manage children's services with the support of Camden Council was accepted, and an agreed arrangement was finalised in March 2018, and has been in place, since then.

3.2 When the Commissioner role ceased at the end of April 2018, I was retained by Croydon for 6 months to provide additional support and expertise, plus continuity during a period of leadership transition. During this period May to December, I undertook a number of service and case reviews to assist the senior managers on identifying and addressing specific operational and strategic issues. This included the following reviews:

- a) arrangements to support disabled children
- b) quality of practice in respect of looked after children
- c) response to unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- d) Croydon's response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) which included a live audit involving 25 practitioners considering 6 cases of young people who had been identified as at risk of, or involved in CSE.

3.3 This work gave me invaluable insight into practice and policy issues, the way in which matters were being addressed and progressed at the front line, and the impact this was having on children and young people. All my reports contained a number of findings and recommendations which were followed up by the DCS and Director of Early help and social care and the independent chair of Croydon's LSCB.

3.4 A general theme across the board was the evidence of some good examples of direct creative work, but a much greater proportion of poorer practice with intervention hampered by too many changes in social workers, lack of management oversight and clarity on what the social work intervention should be. From January onwards the changes in leadership and management has brought a much more determined focus on addressing these issues.

3.5 The Improvement Board was set up in August 2017, immediately following the Ofsted inspection. The previous chair of the Improvement Board, Edwina Grant, took on the role shortly after the conclusion of the inspection in August 2017. She resigned in December 2018, having been appointed to a DCS role in the north of England. The Chief Executive, asked me to become the independent chair in view of my knowledge of, and involvement in, Croydon's children's services.

3.6 In the third Statutory Direction issued to the Council in May 2018, there is a requirement to hold formal reviews by the Department for Education (DFE) of the overall improvement programme every six months – attended by Croydon, Camden, the Improvement Board Chair and the DFE. The Direction states that these will be supported by reports to the Secretary of State from Camden and

the Chair of the Improvement Board, with Croydon invited to provide their own report/commentary if appropriate. My first report was submitted in May 2019.

- 3.7 When I took over as the independent chair in January 2019, Ofsted had completed their 4th Monitoring visit. At that time the key challenges in the service were high caseloads, the sufficiency of staffing teams, low staff morale, addressing drift and delay across services, and the need for increased progress on pace in terms of quality and consistency in case work.
- 3.8 The Improvement Board (IB) meets monthly, and is well attended by the Council and its partners. When I took over as chair, I suggested that the chair of scrutiny was been invited to attend. This has ensured better links between the work of the Board and the Scrutiny committee.
- 3.9 Since February the IB has operated a different format with the first part of the meeting focussing on performance and over-view of progress. The second part of the meeting is an opportunity for an in-depth consideration of a key aspect of the improvement journey. To assist with this, front line professionals from the Council and partners have been asked to attend the Board and provide their own perspective on how well things are working and what can be improved. The areas the IB has focused on have been:
- What is it like to be a child in Croydon's care? (February)
 - What is it like to be a care leaver in Croydon? (March)
 - Building a skilled and stable workforce in Croydon (across all partners, early help and children social care (April)
 - How do we know children get the right service at the right time? (focus on front door and assessment) (May)
 - What is it like to be a child with disabilities in Croydon? (June)
 - How are vulnerable young people and their families supported with a particular focus on child exploitation? (sexual and criminal)
 - How effective has the Board been in driving change and improving outcomes for children and families? (August)
 - How effective is Early Help in improving outcomes for children and families (September)
 - What is it like to be an unaccompanied asylum seeking child in Croydon (October)
- 3.10 This process has allowed better understanding for the Board of issues across the partnership. Areas for improvement have been identified, with clear allocation of responsibility for follow up. Examples of issues that have been discussed and actioned include: improvements made to housing arrangements for care leavers, developing closer working between CAMHS and looked after children social workers, establishing a lead for young people engagement to improve co-ordination and the need to strengthen the corporate parenting panel.
- 3.11 The improvement team keep a record of all actions and this has assisted in the review of the improvement plan in August, and to the development of the new plan for improvement which came to the Board in October for final sign off. The one page summary of the plan is included as appendix one.
- 3.12 Two representatives of the staff reference group attend each Board meeting and provide feedback from staff perspectives on developments in the service and on

the themed issue for discussion. It is encouraging to hear positive comments on key issues affecting staff, for example reduction in caseloads, improved morale and welcoming of the new senior leadership.

- 3.13 Anne Turner, Director Children's Social Care and Safeguarding in Camden, attends the IB which ensures a clear link to the work undertaken by Camden as part of the agreed partnership arrangement. This agreement was reviewed in March and the priorities for support updated. Camden provides important additional capacity and expertise to Croydon and has helped improve auditing, early help, front door, management development and with specific reviews of parts of the service.
- 3.14 As the Independent chair of the IB, I have been invited to attend the feedback from the Ofsted inspectors on the second day of the 2 day monitoring visits. In October the 7th and final visit took place with the focus on work with children in need and those subject to child protection plans, and on adoption. Since the 4th monitoring visit a year ago, Ofsted have judged that services for children in Croydon continue to improve. Over this period they have seen improvements in staff morale, reduction in caseloads and a gradual improvement in the quality of practice. Increasingly they have seen that their findings are in line with the Council's own self-assessment, and that the findings from audits are much more consistent with those of Ofsted.
- 3.15 The feedback from the recent visit was very encouraging. The inspectors commented positively on the leadership of the service which is continuing to drive progress at a sustained and rapid pace resulting in services for children consistently improving. They reported that in their view children receive at least a reasonable level of service and some practice is strong. Work with children is increasingly positive and purposeful, and staff are very positive about working in Croydon.
- 3.16 Performance issues have been commented on throughout this report. The IB receives improved data and analysis at each meeting, and has seen gradual progress. The Board also has reports on the quality of practice from the audit summaries and from recent practice week. Each focused discussion is informed where possible by feedback from children and young people. The over-view of performance reported to the October meeting is included below.

GOING WELL OR BETTER

- Numbers of children with CP plans (587) and CIN (579) have fallen by over 100 cases each in the last 3 months
- Timeliness of CP visits has improved to 96%
- The percentage of children on second or subsequent CP plans remains below target, current performance is 17%
- 100% of CP Plans were reviewed within timescale
- The number of cases in proceedings/PLO continues to fall
- 94% of Care Leavers are in suitable accommodation
- Caseloads are below target across all service areas, except Adolescent Support Teams, which slightly over target but reducing
- Supervision timeliness in Social Work with Families Service has risen by 30% in the last 6 months

ONES TO WATCH

- The percentage of CLA placed less than 20 miles from home (83%) remains below target
- Timeliness of Foster Carer visits (85%) and reviews (77%) have improved on last month
- 89% of Care Leavers are “In Touch” a decrease of 5% on last month
- Timeliness of CLA visits (92%) and CLA reviews (93%) remains slightly below target
- 61% of CLA in care for more than 12 months with the same social worker for 6months or more, is below target
- 88% of CLA had their review Health Assessment within timescales

THINGS TO DO BETTER

- 44% of Children’s Social Care workforce are agency staff –comparisons with previous months should be treated with caution as the establishment figure changes regularly following reorganisations of services
- Timeliness of CIN visits (79%) remains below target
- Timeliness of CIN reviews has fallen for the third month running to 67%
- Timeliness of CLA Care (84%) and Pathway (74%) planning remains below target
- Initial health assessments delivered within 20 days for new CLA has fallen back to 44%

3.17 In conclusion, in the time that I have chaired the IB, Croydon has continued to make good progress, though there remain challenges in ensuring a consistent good quality of practice throughout the service, and a greater reduction in the use of agency staff. New Heads of Service and Service Managers, with the DCS and Director of Social Care, and with the support from the wider Council, are clearly determined to take the service forward quickly and well, and this is well received by staff and partners. The IB has played its part in helping drive forward improvement and in providing support and challenge.

4. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

4.1 This report has not gone to Scrutiny. However the plan for Children’s Improvement went to Scrutiny on Tuesday 5 November 2019 and was very well received by members of the Scrutiny Committee.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Significant additional resources have already been identified as part of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 Children’s Social Care budgets; in particular total additional growth of £22.2m addressing pressure in a range of areas, most of which feature in the improvement plan. This is in addition to £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.

5.2 Additional one-off investment funding via the Council’s Transformation Reserve is also being used to support the implementation of the Children’s Services improvement plan. The estimated cost of this plan over two years is expected to be £10.2m (of which £4.2m was spent in 2018/19).

5.3 The level of one-off funding is based on a detailed assessment of the costs associated with the improvement plan and the improvements that will be achieved as a result of the investment have also been identified and are regularly

monitored.

Approved by Lisa Taylor, Director of Finance, Investment and Risk and Section 151 Officer

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The Head of Social Care and Education Law comments on behalf of the Director of Law and Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer.
- 6.2 The framework for Ofsted inspections of Children's Services is set out in sections 135-142 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 ('the Act') and associated Employment and Education Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007 ('the Regulations'). Croydon was inspected from 20th June to 13th July 2017 under Ofsted's "Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Reviews of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards" ('the SIF'), which sets out a single assessment framework for assessing local authorities during inspections conducted under section 136 of the Act. Local authorities are graded outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate in each of the areas inspected. Ofsted introduced a new "Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services" in November 2017 ("the ILACS"). This is a more flexible regime and uses information held about each local authority to inform decisions about how best to inspect that authority. All inspections now come under 'the ILACS' framework as set out in 'Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services'.
- 6.3 If the outcome of the subsequent re-inspection is better than inadequate, Croydon will then begin to follow the pathway for local authorities which either require improvement or are graded good.

Approved by Doutimi Aseh, Head of Social Care and Education Law on behalf of the Director of Law and Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 7.1 The work of the improvement board has provided insight and support to the workforce recruitment and retention challenges. The inclusion of the staff reference groups representatives has been a positive source of feedback and a strong sign of the value placed in our workforce to be a key stakeholder in change.

Approved by Sue Moorman, Director of Human Resources

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1 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%).

- 8.2 An equalities analysis was completed in January 2019 to underpin the review of the Children's Improvement Plan over 2018-19. The analysis has been reviewed as part of the current improvement plan refresh. It is still a live document and as such not all actions have completed. The analysis continues to provide guidance to ensure that equality and diversity considerations are part of the process in delivering improvement work. The analysis will be reviewed and updated as required.
- 8.3 One issue identified in the January 2019 analysis was that social workers' planning and recording in relation to inequalities had been inconsistent, which can result in plans for children's care not fully reflecting their needs. The recently adopted systemic practice framework for early help and children's social care places an explicit responsibility on staff to consider stresses such as poverty, racism, homophobia, sexism, and additional needs such as disability in their work with families. The last monitoring visit (October 2019) noted some measurable improvements, with many children benefiting from thoughtful and persistent child-centred work that is making a difference to their lives. Children's views and voices were found to increasingly inform the work undertaken. However, inspectors also noted that this is not yet consistently good across all areas.
- 8.4 Our own quality assurance activity also tells us that practice is improving but that there is more to do to improve consistency. Learning and development for front line managers including Team and Assistant Team Managers will draw on our systemic framework to focus on their role in overseeing casework and guiding staff to achieve the best outcomes for children. The framework includes consideration of the social 'GRACES' such as gender, race, age, ability, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation and spirituality, amongst others, and how these must be considered when planning interventions with children and families. These will be monitored on a twice-yearly basis as part of Practice Week.

Approved by Yvonne Okiyo, Equalities Manager

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1 None.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 10.1 None.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

- 11.1 Note the work of the Improvement Board in helping drive improvements in children's services

12. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

NO

12.2 HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?

NO

There is no individual or confidential information contained within the report.

Approved by: Robert Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families and Education.

CONTACT OFFICER:

Eleanor Brazil, Independent Chair

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

Appendix 1 – Plan for Improvement on a page

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Statutory Direction to Croydon Borough Council in relation to children's services under Section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 (25 January 2018)

Report into children's social care services in the London Borough of Croydon by the Children's Commissioner (25 January 2018)