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| REPORT TO: | CABINET 20 January 2020 |
| SUBJECT: | Feedback from the monitoring visit in October 2019 by Ofsted to Croydon's Early Help Services Children's Social Care service |
| LEAD OFFICER: | Robert Henderson, Executive Director for Children, Families & Education |
| CABINET MEMBER: | Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education |
| WARDS: | All |
| <p>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/ AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON</p> <p>This report focuses on progress achieved that will ensure that all Croydon's children live a happy, healthy life, free from harm and that they have every opportunity to thrive and become fulfilled adults.</p> <p>Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022</p> | |
| <p>FINANCIAL IMPACT</p> <p>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 of £20m over the same period.</p> | |
| <p>FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: Not a key decision</p> | |
| <p>The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below</p> <p>1. RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>The Cabinet is recommended to</p> <p>1.1 Note the feedback from Ofsted following the seventh monitoring visit to children's social care and early help in October 2019.</p> | |

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report advises cabinet of the feedback following Ofsted's seventh and final monitoring visit to children's services in October 2019.

3. KEY OFSTED FINDINGS

- 3.1 Following the Ofsted inspection in 2017 which judged children's services as inadequate, Ofsted completed the seventh and final monitoring visit in October 2019 and published a letter summarising their findings on 18th December.

The letter is included at appendix 1. Publication was delayed until after the December 2019 general election.

3.2 The visit focused on two areas:

- Services for children who receive support through a child protection plan or a child in need plan.
- Services offered to children who have a plan for adoption

3.3 Inspectors concluded that focused, dynamic leadership was continuing to drive rapid progress in the quality of services for children in Croydon. Improvements were seen in almost all the areas of practice reviewed, and progress previously seen had been sustained and in some areas was accelerating.

3.4 A comprehensive understanding of service strengths and challenges was found to underpin senior managers' plans for further improvements. Regular and extensive audit activity by senior leaders and managers provided a clear and direct line of sight into practice. This meant they were fully aware of the continuing variability in the quality of practice.

3.5 Inspectors looked at a small number of cases of children with a plan for adoption. Recent improvements could be seen in this area, however inspectors noted that more work was needed to secure permanent homes for children as quickly as possible, with more creative, child-centred planning taking place to find families.

3.6 Significant progress in supervision and support for front line staff was reported, and staff spoken to by inspectors felt well-supported, with manageable caseloads that allowed for better quality day-to-day work with children and families.

3.7 Although permanent recruitment of frontline staff continues to be a challenge inspectors found positive signs of progress with a stable, permanent management team leading and supporting the improvements in social work practice with children and families.

3.8 Inspectors agreed with senior managers' assessment of areas that require further improvement, including a determined focus on raising the quality of practice to a consistently good level, and tackling the legacy of drift and delay in casework across the service that has left some children and families subject to statutory intervention for too long.

4. NEXT STEPS

4.1 A standard inspection under the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework is required to overturn an inadequate judgement. This inspection is expected in the first quarter of 2020.

- 4.2 Planning and preparation for the standard inspection has been underway for some time as the programme of monitoring visits drew to an end. Specific readiness activities are taking place at a number of levels, however the most effective preparation continues to be focusing on getting the basics right consistently, talking about and planning for consistently good quality practice, and working with families and children within the systemic framework across the whole service.
- 4.3 Service improvement plans are in place for all services across early help and children's social care, and for the support and infrastructure services such as finance, commissioning, workforce and HR, digital services and business support. Monthly check and challenge meetings are chaired by the Executive Director Children, Families and Education and Executive Director Resources to continue to drive improvements at pace.
- 4.4 Across the council a monthly programme board, chaired by the Chief Executive provides support and challenge across the improvement plan. In addition to this a monthly improvement board has been in place since Autumn 2017 with an independent chair and mixed membership of partners, members, our improvement partner, Camden, senior officers and a DfE representative.

5 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

- 5.1 Although this report has not gone through pre-decision scrutiny, as it is not a decision, the children's improvement journey and plan is subject to regular review and scrutiny in the following forums:
- Child and Young Persons (CYP) Scrutiny Committee
 - Children's Improvement Board (with an independent chair, our improvement partners Camden, and cross party political membership)
 - Children's Improvement Programme Board (chaired by the Chief Executive)
- 5.2 The judgement letter from Ofsted was included in the papers for the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee in January 2020 and has also been discussed at the Children's Improvement Board.

6 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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 the three years since the Ofsted inspection is expected to be £20m (of which £3.2m and £9.8m was spent in 2017/18 and 2018/19, respectively).

- 6.3 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 Kate Bingham, Head of Finance, Children, Families and Education on behalf of the Director of Finance, Investment and Risk and Section 151 Officer

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Head of Social Care and Education Law comments on behalf of the Director of Law and Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer.

- 7.2 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. Since the framework for inspection was published in 2017 it's been updated several times & brought all inspections under the ILACS framework.

- 7.3 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.7.3

8. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 8.1 The work of the improvement board has provided insight and support to the workforce recruitment and retention challenges. The inclusion of the staff reference group's 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

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1 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%).
- 9.2 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 reviewed and updated as required.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 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

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 10.1 None

11. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

11.1 None

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

12.1 Report authors are required to provide a brief explanation of the reasons for the recommendations. These will be incorporated in the minutes of the meeting and the record of the decision.

13. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

13.1 **WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?**

NO

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

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APPENDICES: Appendix 1 – Croydon Children's Services
Monitoring Visit October 2019

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None