

For General Release

REPORT TO:	CABINET - 11 June 2018
SUBJECT:	Children's Services (Ofsted and Camden Arrangements) Update
LEAD OFFICER:	Eleni Ioannides, Interim Director of Children Services
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT Croydon Corporate plan 2015-18 The recommendations address the following Corporate Plan priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To help families be healthy and resilient and able to maximise their life chances and independence• To create a place where people feel safe and are safe	
AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON & WHY ARE WE DOING THIS: The Independence and Liveability Strategies 2015-18 set out how the Council will achieve the commitments made in the administration's 'Ambitious for Croydon' election manifesto in respect of independence and liveability.	
FINANCIAL IMPACT £10.9m has been allocated to base budgets in 2018-19 to support the drive to improve children's services.	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO. This is not a key decision.	
1. RECOMMENDATIONS The Cabinet is asked to: 1.1 Note the progress made in implementing the children's improvement plan 1.2 Note the revised Statutory Direction from the Secretary of State for Education directing Croydon to co-operate with Camden Council on peer support arrangements to support rapid, measurable improvement in the delivery of children's services. 1.3 Note that the revised Statutory Direction brings the role of the Children's Services Commissioner for Croydon to an end. 1.4 Note the progress made in developing the peer support arrangements with Camden Council.	

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| 1.5 | Note the outcomes from the second Ofsted monitoring visit carried out in March 2018. |
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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 A revised direction published by the DFE on 25th January 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).
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Ofsted carry out quarterly monitoring visits to assess progress in children's services departments judged inadequate. The second monitoring visit to Croydon took place on 20th and 21st March 2018. Ofsted published the findings of the visit in a letter on its website on 9th May 2018.
- 2.5 This report provides an update to Cabinet on progress made in implementing the improvement plan, the details of revised statutory direction and on the progress made in developing the peer support arrangements with Camden. It also provides an overview of the findings of the second Ofsted monitoring visit and the preparations for the third visit in July.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 When a local authority's children's services are judged inadequate following an Ofsted inspection under the Single Inspection Framework 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 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. Croydon's improvement plan was agreed by cabinet on 20th November 2017.
- 3.3 A Commissioner was appointed by the Secretary of State to advise on the future of children's services in Croydon. Her report was submitted to the DFE on 4th December alongside the children's improvement plan. The Commissioner's recommendation that Croydon should retain responsibility for children's service with support from a Council rated by Ofsted as good was accepted by the Minister.
- 3.4 The Commissioner's role was extended to support and broker the development of an intensive peer support partnership between Croydon and Camden Councils to support rapid, measurable improvement in the delivery of children's services. Following the Minister's approval of the peer support arrangements a further revised statutory direction was published on 8th May 2018.
- 3.3 Ofsted assess progress against an improvement plan for Councils with an inadequate children's social care judgement through quarterly monitoring visits. The second visit to Croydon was on 20th and 21st March. Further visits are scheduled for July and October this year.

4. REVISED STATUTORY DIRECTION

- 4.1 The statutory direction published on 8th May 2018 requires Croydon to co-operate with Camden Council to facilitate the delivery of peer support proposals. This includes Croydon providing access to premises, documents and employees and providing administrative support as necessary.
- 4.2 Croydon Council is also required to co-operate with the arrangements for monitoring and reporting on progress in children's social care performance. These arrangements are set out in an annex to the direction.
- 4.3 The monitoring and reporting arrangements are anchored in the existing children's improvement programme which is overseen by the independent chair of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). Each month the CIB will monitor the contribution of the support to progress against the children's improvement plan. The Director for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding in Camden has joined the CIB bringing deep experience and technical knowledge of children's social care to the monthly meetings.

- 4.4 The direction specifies that progress against the peer support plan will be reviewed through quarterly meetings attended by Camden, Croydon, the CIB chair and the Department for Education. These review meetings will be scheduled after each of the Ofsted monitoring visits.
- 4.5 Formal reviews of the overall improvement programme will be held every six months with the same representatives. These will be supported by progress reports to the Secretary of State from Camden Council and from the chair of the Croydon CIB. Croydon Council are invited to provide their own report or commentary if appropriate.
- 4.6 The revised direction brings the Commissioner's role to an end in Croydon. Her advice, guidance and challenge has made a significant positive contribution to Croydon's improvement journey.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 5.1 Whilst there is much work to do to consistently improve practice on the ground there have been some notable achievements in recent months that lay strong foundations for change. Against the themes in the improvement plan notable achievements include:

Practice

- A new model of social work introduced, Strengthening Families, with almost 500 staff trained to apply the new approach
- Practice Standards for social workers and Managers' Standards for their managers have been launched, setting out clearly expected practice for frontline staff, and for managers how they should be supporting frontline staff
- An Early Help Strategy has been agreed by a multi agency task and finish group. This will underpin work to intervene earlier and prevent problems escalating to children's social care

People and performance

- 'Spotlight Scorecard' performance clinics that allow the Executive Director, People (DCS) and Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care a clearer line of sight and challenge on performance at team and service level.
- A joint housing protocol for care leavers has been launched, providing a more joined up approach to ensuring care leavers can access the right accommodation
- Working with Community Care, a website for social care professionals with a wide reach in the sector, to raise Croydon's profile as a social care employer of choice in the region.

Partnerships

- Around 50 partners attended the Strengthening Families launch event at the end of April from across health, education the police and the voluntary sector to ensure the strengths-based approach is rolled out across services for children in Croydon
- The new chair of Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) is strengthening multi-agency working for the most vulnerable children

Platforms

- Improvements to the case recording system used by frontline staff, including the introduction of a legal workspace to improve our ability to store, retrieve and develop vital information relating to all aspects of Court work
- Additional resources allocated to increase business support for social work teams, freeing them up to spend more time with children and families

6. INTENSIVE PEER SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 The direction for intensive peer support arrangements is unique to Croydon. Of the six directions issued in 2018, two have directed Councils to transfer delivery to independent children's services trusts, two have directed formal contractual arrangements with another council that transfers responsibility for delivery of children's social care and one has had a commissioner appointed. In Barnet, Essex Council have been appointed as Children's Services Improvement Advisers to lead and direct children's social care improvement including chairing the Improvement Board. In Croydon, the Commissioner's recommendations, accepted by the Secretary of State, continue to place responsibility for the improvement programme with Croydon under the continued leadership of the independent chair of the CIB, supported and where necessary challenged by peers from Camden.

6.2 The peer support proposals include five workstreams:

1. Improve the quality of social work practice by strengthening management at all levels
2. Quality assurance of practice
3. Support the rapid development of an early help offer
4. Increase understanding of and planning to address risk factors for vulnerable children and young people
5. Develop the system to create the conditions for rapid, sustainable improvement in services for children across Croydon

6.3 Collaboration on these workstreams began in January, most notably in quality assurance of practice where the positive impact was noted in the March Ofsted

monitoring visit. Detailed delivery plans are now being worked up for each of the workstreams between lead officers from each borough to ensure clarity, pace and grip against each of the areas identified for dedicated, intensive support.

- 6.4 The approved peer support plan covers the period from April 2018 – March 2019. In the final quarter the plan will be reviewed to inform decisions on further development in 2019-20.
- 6.5 The first review meeting will take place in July after the next monitoring visit, with quarterly meetings scheduled thereafter. The first formal review will take place in October.

7. OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

- 7.1 The second Ofsted monitoring visit took place on the 20th and 21st March 2018 focused on services for vulnerable adolescents. As is the practice in these visits inspectors reviewed a range of evidence including electronic case records and supporting documents. Six cases were tracked and further casework was sampled alongside social workers and team managers. A missing children panel meeting was observed and meetings were held with the interim Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help and the Head of Targeted Services. In addition inspectors met with one young person whose case was tracked.
- 7.2 Inspectors were consistently impressed with the quality of the frontline staff they met, stating that they displayed a good awareness of the needs of the children they worked with and a real commitment to ensuring they engaged well with children.
- 7.3 The inspectors noted that senior leaders and managers are progressing well in implementing the improvement plan and have quickly responded to issues identified in the first monitoring visit.
- 7.4 Of key importance were the findings that:
- the Council has continued to invest significant resources to underpin service improvements
 - senior managers recognise the scale of the improvement task and are planning effectively
 - the service is able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the areas that require change
 - there is an appropriate focus on areas of priority
 - the case auditing processes had improved significantly since the December visit and show an understanding of what 'good' looks like
 - Senior managers showed a positive openness to advice, guidance and support including an effective and well-focused partnership with Camden

- 7.5 However, inspectors agreed with Croydon's self-assessment that the quality of work for vulnerable adolescents remains highly variable and too many children receive an inadequate service. Inspectors found that for this group of children risks were understood too broadly. The lack of detailed understanding of risks meant that plans to reduce these were not always clear enough on individual children's records. Management oversight was not sufficiently effective and there was not enough visible presence of middle management on case files or in gripping compliance.
- 7.6 Inspectors found more recent evidence of stronger work in a small number of highly complex cases, showing early encouraging signs of improvement in practice. However, the service recognises that there is still a long way to go.
- 7.7 The service accepts the feedback from the monitoring visit and have begun to address the issues inspectors raised, reflecting the findings and building upon the good practice observed as part of the wider children's improvement programme.
- 7.8 The third monitoring visit on 10th and 11th July will focus on children's plans that are 'stepped up', for example children in need plans stepped up to child protection. Detailed preparations for the visit are in place that build on the successful approach to the March visit. Specific additional actions to address the issues raised in March have been identified, the planned improvement plan actions relevant to the visit focus are being tracked and the casework audits in May focus on the cohort of cases in scope. Direct support from the Quality Assurance lead from Camden will continue to support the quality assurance activities including case work audits.
- 7.9 The fourth visit in October will focus on plans stepped down, including to early help as well as children looked after who return home.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 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
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 Listening and responding to the experiences, wishes and feelings of children and young people is one of the priorities of the improvement plan and will be central to the improvement programme. The plan includes actions to strengthen how the views and experiences of children, young people and their families influence service design. This feedback will also help monitor the impact of improvement activity.

9. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The 2018/19 budget includes growth of £10.2m in the People department (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. The budget report presented to Cabinet in February sets out how this is allocated.

Approved by Lisa Taylor, Director of Finance, Investment and Risk

10. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

- 10.1 The Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects the care of children and young people and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It assesses Council children's services and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.
- 10.2 The inspection of the Council was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) was carried out under section 15A of the Children's Act 2004.

10.3 Ofsted produced its report of the inspection of the Council functions and the review of the LSCB under its power to combine reports in accordance with section 152 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006.

10.4 Powers to direct a Council rest with the Secretary of State under section 497A (4B) of the Education Act 1996.

Approved by Sandra Herbert Head of Litigation and Corporate Law for and on behalf of Jacqueline Harris-Baker, Director of Law and Monitoring Officer.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

11.1 There remains a significant workforce challenge to reduce the high reliance on agency social workers and to attract and retain a directly employed workforce. Review of pay and benefits has supported a new attraction campaign but whilst progress has been made, it is slow.

The Ofsted monitoring visit positively reported on the attitude and contribution of our staff and key to improvement is the retention of these staff. It is vital to continue to connect the work and development opportunities that will make Croydon a positive choice for careers in social work and the drive for improving the lives of Croydon's children.

11.2 Approved by Sue Moorman, Director of Human Resources

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation.

12.2 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%).

12.3 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 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.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

N/A

16. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

N/A

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

Appendix 1 – Statutory Direction to Croydon Borough Council in relation to children's services under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, DFE, 8th May 2018

Appendix 2 – Monitoring visit to the London Borough of Croydon children's services, Ofsted, 9th May 2018