

For general release

REPORT TO:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee 18 June 2019
SUBJECT:	Update on the Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement Programme
LEAD OFFICER:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Rob Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families & Education

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

[Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022](#)

The plans and recommendations in this report focus on ensuring 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.

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This item is contained in the Sub-Committee's work programme.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	To consider the progress update of the Children's Improvement Programme.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Improvement Programme in children's services, including:

- A progress update on the Improvement Plan as at May 2019
- An update on the preparations for the sixth Ofsted monitoring visit on 10th and 11th July 2019

2. Progress update on the Children's Improvement Plan

2.1 In November 2018 the Children's Improvement Board agreed a simpler, shorter Improvement Plan with a sharper the focus on the right priorities at increased pace.

2.2 The plan is made up of four workstreams overseen by task groups, reporting to a programme board, chaired by the Chief Executive, to 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.

2.3 The workstreams are:

1. Management & Practice covering actions to improve management grip and the quality and consistency of social work practice
2. Workforce covering actions to recruit and retain staff and learning and development activity
3. Partnerships covering actions to develop a partnership early help offer, improve partnership working and strengthen the local safeguarding board
4. Platforms covering actions relating to corporate support services including finance, performance, children's recording systems, commissioning and business (administrative) support

2.4 Underpinning these is a priority to create a culture of shared ownership and social work values, which is developed and overseen by the Staff Reference Group.

2.5 Overall progress as at May 2019

The Senior Leadership Team is now complete and in place although several posts are interim – a plan to permanently recruit is being worked up. Performance and capability management have been a key focus although the bulk of this is now coming to an end and will be business as usual.

Key partnership priorities continue to focus on the recommissioning of health visiting and school nursing for 2020, aligning the SLaM SPOC and Children's Services SPOC and establishing a multi agency co-located team for Children Looked After and Leaving Care, including SLaM.

Service reviews have been commissioned in relation to SPOC, Assessment, Children with Disabilities UASC and Fostering. Camden are involved in 4 of these.

Nick Pendry is working closely with his management team to develop and communicate a shared understanding of what good looks like, and our systemic leadership development programme has commenced with the senior leaders cohort, including myself.

I have also been talking with staff from across the department about our ambitions for Children, Families and Education in Croydon and working with

Heads of Service and finance colleagues to understand what resources we need to get there. This will include significant transformation activity over the next 2 years and much closer working with our partners at a local level to build a system that identifies and responds to need at an earlier stage to de-escalate risk e.g. through Early Help and a robust edge of care offer for children aged 12-17 to prevent young people from coming in care as teenagers wherever possible.

Key achievements and areas of improvement are set out below. However, it should be noted that significant challenges still remain including a high vacancy rate across assessment and care planning, inconsistency in the quality of practice and reflective nature of supervision across the service and underperformance in some indicators.

Key achievements and what's working well

- Significant interest in service manager roles with over 20 application for three posts and a number of leavers (social workers) choosing return to Croydon as word spreads about our improvement journey and the opportunities on offer here to learn and progress
- Heads of Service are meeting with individual frontline practitioners to create a reflective space for staff to discuss a case they are working on, which is helping leaders to understand quality of practice on the ground
- An increase in % of children's cases which have been subject to supervision in timescales, a positive sign of improving management oversight
- Slight improvement in timely CIN visits and reviews, although this is still below target
- We are starting to see the impact of the LAC health multi-agency improvement activity (driven through a multi-agency plan) with improvements in the % of children in care for at least 12 months for whom health assessments are up to date and the % initial health assessments requested from health service within 3 working days of date child becomes looked after.

What we are worried about and actions we are taking to address this

- Recruitment & retention including high vacancy/agency rates in care planning and assessment services, and average caseloads beginning to rise in the assessment service and corporate parenting

Actions:

- Executive Director (DCS) leading a fortnightly task group on recruitment to take decisions quickly and progress actions at a greater pace
- 2 x campaigns planned for May and June for assessment and care planning
- Ongoing efforts to convince locums to become permanent members of staff with over 30 conversions to date

- Establishment of regular recruitment panel to streamline process and ensure that we have consistently high standards for new appointments
- Inconsistent responses to missing children across children's social care, including our looked after children

Actions:

- Head of Adolescent Support to launch weekly Complex Adolescence Panel and circulate updated guidance on missing risk assessments and strategy discussions
- Head of Children in Care to review all outstanding tasks from missing meetings fortnightly and ensure these are actioned. Will be monitored against action plans – ongoing
- Underperformance in the following areas;
 - Timely visits to looked after children
 - Timely visits to foster carers
 - % of LAC with an up to date PEP, although this continues to improve from a low base

Actions:

- Addressing underperformance in LAC indicators in performance clinics and through management action
- PEP action plan in place to drive up performance and improve data quality

3. Preparation for the Ofsted monitoring visit

3.1 The sixth monitoring visit on 10th and 11th July will focus on:

- The front door for children's services, SPOC and assessment
- The children with disabilities service
- Children who are privately fostered

3.2 The following recommendations from the July 2017 inspection will be tested in the visit:

- Strengthen management oversight and supervision
- Establish a stable workforce; provide targeted training for frontline staff and managers so that they have the right skills and knowledge; ensure the workloads of social workers are manageable

- Improve plans and planning including support for children returning home
- Improve the understanding and application of thresholds
- Strengthen the provision of early help support, early help strategy and thresholds

3.3 Cases in scope

Monitoring visits now follow the approach for inspections of children's services. The cases to be scrutinised will be drawn from a number of standard case lists that local authorities are expected to maintain, including contacts and referrals to children's social care, child protection enquiries, and assessments, all of which will have come through the single point of contact over the previous 6 months. Following assessment cases transfer across the service, so the inspectors are likely to be sampling cases held in a number of teams.

In addition inspectors are likely to ask for the caseload for the children with disabilities service which includes child in need, child protection and children in care cases as well as those receiving family support.

Two-weekly circulation of the case lists to Heads of Service commenced in mid-March flagging up gaps in compliance with our social work practice standards. Heads of Service are leading work through their management teams to get case records up to date and close compliance gaps. Team and service managers will use the opportunity to focus on the quality of work being completed, as well as compliance with service standards.

3.4 Preparatory work

A monitoring visit preparation group was reconvened in March. Chaired by the Executive Director the group meets every three weeks to track the actions required to prepare for this visit, directing remedial actions as necessary

Mock inspections completed jointly with Camden colleagues have taken place in SPOC the children with disabilities service. The recommendations and resulting actions have fed into service improvement plans which are being worked up by all Heads of Service.

The Director and his leadership team have developed service-wide best practice guides on the key elements of high quality assessments, plans, interventions and supervision which are being cascaded through the management structures through to engagement with front line staff.

3.5 Assuring the quality of practice

The May bi-monthly case audits focused on the quality of social work practice across the service with an emphasis on assessment, planning, management oversight and reflective supervision of casework. In addition, from March team managers are completing monthly dip sample audits against the 'Croydon Five' – an up to date case summary, a chronology, good quality assessment leading to a SMART a plan and an up to date visit. These are being monitored in the fortnightly case list summaries and actions taken by managers to drive up compliance.

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Background Documents: None

Appendices to this report: None