

## Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

<b>Report Title</b>	Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) update
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To inform the Committee of the progress being made by CSIB
<b>Is this for information or decision?</b>	Information
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<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<p>The Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) oversees the implementation of the Children's Services Improvement Plan (Building the Best) and the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) which set out the ways in which the Council intends to improve the performance of the service and respond to the Ofsted judgements and recommendations set out initially in the Ofsted Inspection report published on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and subsequent quarterly monitoring visits.</p>	
<b>Recommendations to the Committee:</b>	
<p>To receive the report and note the work of the CSIB to date.</p>	
<b>Financial/Resource Implications:</b>	
<p>None specifically identified in this report other than to note that the County Council continues to provide additional resources to support the delivery of the CSIP.</p>	

## Report

The Improvement Board has been chaired independently by Andrew Ireland since July 18. The Board meets every two months. CSIB is attended by the Leader of the County Council, Chief Executive GCC, Director of Children's Services GCC and other key statutory partners. The Board role is to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Programme.

The Board last met in February, this meeting focused on the Self Evaluation (SEF), key improvement activities, Audit and Performance.

### 1. Self Evaluation (SEF)

- 1.1. It is a requirement to have a comprehensive Self Evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice ahead of full inspection. A working draft has been shared with the Improvement Board.
- 1.2. The Self Evaluation (SEF) should answer three questions:
  - What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice?
  - How do we know it?
  - What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
- 1.3. The structure of our SEF reflects the child's journey. Our strengths and weaknesses and the presentation of compelling plans to address those weaknesses.
- 1.4. We have progressed a number of areas of our Improvement Programme, in particular:
  - Our recruitment strategy has been revised and our package of employee benefits compares well with neighbouring authorities.
  - Workforce stability is steadily improving with ongoing reductions in our agency staffing, vacancy and turnover rates.
  - The Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service cohorts have been settled for some time and 75% of our Team Managers are now permanent appointments.
  - Our objective is for each social worker to have a caseload of 18 children or less. Currently 74% of our workforce is at this target, with 88% having 22 children or less.
  - Senior Leaders, including the DCS are regularly visiting the locality teams and social workers are consistently reporting that case loads are more manageable and that morale is improving and good in some areas.
  - We are seeing a sustained increase in the volume of auditing activity and are increasingly secure in our judgements.
  - MASH is now well established with partners and providing a robust focal point for the receipt and response to initial child safeguarding contacts.
  - The majority of assessments are completed within timescales and are improving in quality, particularly when informed by the Anchor principles which form part of Essentials 2.0 Programme
  - Visits to children in our care, care leavers and children subject to a CIN or a CP plan are timely for the vast majority of children.

- 1.5. Despite these improvements in performance, a number of challenges remain:
- There remains a significant proportion of our case work we judge to be inadequate/requires improvement and this continues to be an area for targeted improvement.
  - Management oversight and supervision is increasingly evident, however, it is not yet consistently focused on outcomes for children and the quality remains variable.
  - The timeliness of our initial response following contact, whether as part of a single assessment or Section 47 enquiry, is a key area of focus within our improvement plans. Performance has gradually improved over recent months; we know more rapid and consistent improvement is needed and we are working hard to achieve this.
  - Performance is not consistent across teams, particularly for those most affected by staff churn.
  - The new Entry to Care process has begun to address shortfalls and enable the gathering of a range of management information to target interventions. More work is needed to embed the process.
  - Our rate of Section 20 is significantly above national average. We have taken assertive actions to identify all children who are S20 and determine whether this legal status is appropriate.
- 1.6. Since the February Improvement Board, we have further developed our SEF and it will continue to evolve until re-inspection.

## **2. Key Improvement Activities**

- 2.1. Since September 2019, we have added improvement capacity and expertise in order to address the legacy of inadequate practice in Gloucestershire and deliver 'good' and better services to improve outcomes for local children and families.
- 2.2. The consultancy assignments focus on the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) practice priorities. The AIP priorities include a focus on recording, visiting, assessment, planning, management overviews, supervision and Essentials Training – which together form the fundamentals of social work practice.
- 2.3. The following activities are taking place:
- Individual coaching conversations with targeted Team Managers (x 18) in targeted Localities to focus on preparing management overviews in accordance with the Essentials Training principles.
  - Roadshows in Localities:
    - Ofsted inspection preparation roadshows: These have been delivered and aimed to provide information about the inspection framework, outlining the key messages and logistical arrangements that will be in place as well as focusing on the practical ways that staff can start to prepare.
    - Neglect roadshows: these promote key practice messages about the identification of neglect, the impact of neglect on children and young people and the ways in which the Tool Kit can help to support direct work with children and families.
    - Pre-birth roadshows: these explore the details of the protocol including thresholds for referral, the pre-birth assessment framework, working

together arrangements and thresholds for intervention and decision making.

- Children in Care roadshows: these focus on health, use of section 20 and unregulated placements.
  - Mobilisation of additional outreach support (from the Principal Social Worker (PSW), Quality Assurance (QA) and Commissioning officers into Localities to help 'land' key messages to support the improvement of practice and performance.
  - Specific work on reviewing use of Section 20, re-referrals and repeat children protection plans. As a result, changes to process / protocols have been agreed and are being implemented to improve management and leadership grip, such as:
    - All requests for a Strategy Discussion/Meeting to be verified by the relevant Team Manager to ensure that they routinely apply the appropriate threshold.
    - For all children who are subject to s47 child protection enquiries, requests to convene an initial child protection conference will be verified by the relevant Head of Service/Service Manager.
    - Within 20 days of the scheduled review child protection conference where a child has remained subject to a child protection plan for 12 months, the relevant Head of Service/Service Manager will review the impact of the support and intervention that has been provided to address the identified risks for the child and reflect on the overall progress that has been made to improve the child's outcomes.
    - S20 guidance for IROs for use at and between reviews and S20 guidance note for team managers and social workers.
- 2.4. In addition, we have secured support from Hampshire (via the DfE) to do some further screening of children who became subject to a repeat child protection plan within two years of the previous plan ceasing (this work will start in March).
3. Performance Monitoring is a separate paper to the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee, as is the update on Quality Assurance framework.