

Report to:	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services
Date of Meeting	10 October 2019

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

1.1 To inform the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the progress and implementation of developments within the "Getting to Good" Journey for Children's Social Care.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1
- To note the contents of the report and to ensure that current work continues to meet statutory obligations, is delivering change in Children's Services and that work to prepare for external inspections continues.
 - To continue to meet statutory monitoring, challenge and support obligations.
 - To identify any further information and actions required.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 For members of the Scrutiny Committee to be fully informed as to the day to day work of the Children's Services Directorate and have assurance that Blackpool is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for future inspection requirements.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options considered:

Services are subject to national and statutory frameworks.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is:

- Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Children's Social Care Performance Overview at Month End – September 2019

Responding to and assessing concerns for children and families

In August 2019 Children's Services had its first monitoring visit from OFSTED. The outcome of the first monitoring visit is not published, but a summary of the feedback received, which has been shared with partners, is attached at Appendix 7(a).

The inspectors asked for information in advance, reviewed case audits and case files and during their visit sat with workers and managers from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Assessment and Planning teams. Overall, they saw improvements in the way the work of the front door is managed since their last visit, though they share the view of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) that further work is required with the partnership to ensure that the service is as effective as it can and should be.

As part of the work of the Getting to Good board, partner representatives from Health (Clinical Commissioning Group and Provider) and the Police were formally asked to commit to actions which will be tracked by the Getting to Good board for implementation and impact.

Demand for Children's Social Care assessment remains very high. During the past six months, 4,200 children and young people have been the subject of a reported concern to children's social care. In the same period 2,000 assessments have been completed by Children's Social Care. Issues remain concerning the quality of the referrals received from partner agencies, with particular reference to seeking parental consent; and the impact this has on our ability to take decisions within 24 hours (the expected timescale). Time taken seeking consent is time not spent gathering further information to inform decision making.

Internal analysis confirms that many of the assessments undertaken do not result in on-going engagement with Children's Social Care – for example, less than a third of all those children and young people newly assessed in June remained open to Children's Social Care by mid-September. Additional investment in capacity to address the presenting demand has led to a more robust, resilient system for assessment (something confirmed by Ofsted in their recent monitoring visit), which performs well in terms of timeliness. However, it still represents a large amount of work completed which led to relatively little on-going work with children and families.

Strengthening and Supporting Families

The total number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care in Blackpool remains slightly over 2,000 at the end of September – similar to the level in March 2019. More of those children and young people are subject to child protection plans (up 60 on March at 450) or in care (up 20 on March at 590). The steady increase in the number of children in care is putting pressure on placement stability and there has been an increase in placement breakdown and in the number of children and young people living in high-cost placements.

Supporting Our Children

“Placement stability” or having a safe place to live that does not change is a key area of attention for Blackpool. Ensuring that all our children are living in environments where they feel safe and well cared for, and where they are able to stay even through periods of challenge is an area for further development. Many of our children stay in the same home while they are in our care, but a small number move multiple times. Children's Services are working on a new Commissioning Strategy which focuses on the development and maintenance of relationships with providers of services for children and families, supporting them to build stable relationships with our children. Expanding our internal fostering provision and strengthening our relationships with residential providers in Blackpool are ongoing projects for us and we are working together with provider representatives to share our aims and improve outcomes for those young people who most need our help.

331 Bispham Road is temporarily closed while a review takes place, with staff deployed in valued roles across the service and using their skills to work directly with children and young people.

5.2 Recruitment and Retention

Children's Services and Human Resources and Marketing continue to work closely together to ensure that the opportunities for Social Workers and Social Work Managers in Blackpool are visible and attracting the right candidates. Along with other authorities across the country the recruitment of highly skilled and experienced social workers remains a challenge. Recruitment of newly qualified Social Workers and support for current employees to gain a social work qualification is positive and working well.

New arrangements are being made to further streamline the recruitment and application process and to target the potential workforce with key information that research tells us will be of interest to them and help Blackpool develop a reputation

as a great place to work with children and families.

Qualified Social Workers recruited externally to Blackpool since January 2019 – 19 in post, 13 recruited awaiting start. 32 in total.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

Appendix 7(a) OFSTED Summary

8.0 Legal considerations:

8.1 None

9.0 Human Resources considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Equalities considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Financial considerations:

11.1 At Month 3 (as reported to the Executive):

An overspend of £8,063k is forecast. Children’s Social Care is forecast to overspend by £7,789k, due to ongoing pressures relating to Looked After Children (LAC). When budgets were set £3,570k was earmarked to cover the forecast overspend. Since that time, there has been an increase in LAC numbers and an adverse change in the mix of LAC placements, resulting in an additional pressure of £3,497k.

In addition to this, an amount of £3,936k is included in the forecast relating to the Directorate’s Ofsted Improvement Plan, which was developed and implemented following the recommendations outlined in the Ofsted report published in December 2018. This figure includes the cost of a number of ongoing interventions which were put in place immediately following the review, but also reflects the outcome of a detailed evaluation of the service model, which has taken place in the early part of the current financial year and which has resulted in the introduction of a new staffing structure for the longer term. The new structure represents a fundamental shift in the management of Children’s Social Care in Blackpool – a shift from managing the problems to addressing the source of them. It proposes additional capacity to enable social workers to spend more time with children and families, to build better relationships and have more effective interventions, building on the strengths within each family and thereby preventing escalation.

Independent analysis suggests that the approach should result in a long-term reduction in the number of cases open to Children's Social Care at any one time and through the year. It will also reduce the number of children on child protection plans or in the care of the Local Authority. In addition to the cost pressures described above, there is a forecast shortfall of £356,000 against the Troubled Families' £1m income target. By June 2019 LAC numbers stand at 580.

12.0 Risk management considerations:

12.1 None

13.0 Ethical considerations:

13.1 None

14.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

14.1 None

15.0 Background papers:

15.1 None