

Best Value Improvement Board

TITLE	Author	Date
Children's Services Improvement-progress report, Quarter 1 18/19	Charlotte Saini, Children's Services Improvement Manager	17/09/2018

1. SUMMARY

This report provides an update on progress in delivering improvements to Children's Services in response to the report published by Ofsted in April 2017 which rated our services 'inadequate'. The Council's improvement plan aims to achieve a standard of at least 'good' in summer 2019, when it is likely to be next inspected, which is the minimum our children and families deserve. The council has now had four monitoring visits from Ofsted.

The most recent visit, on 15-16 August 2018, focused on Permanency Planning and the Public Law Outline (PLO), ie how the council performs its obligations as a corporate parent. Inspectors evaluated the quality of care planning for children in care, in particular the achievement of timely permanence for all children who are unable to live with their birth parents. They assessed progress since the last inspection and focused on areas of practice that had required significant improvement. The Monitoring Visit letter was published on 10th September.

In summary, Ofsted found that: *"while there has been improvement in key areas since the last inspection, there are still considerable weaknesses in permanence planning and in assessments for children who cannot live with their parents. Overall, the quality of practice with these vulnerable children is improving, but it is still too variable. Senior leaders agree with inspectors' findings. They are determined to accelerate the pace of change and are taking appropriate action to address the significant deficits in the children in care services."*

Some key improvements noted by Ofsted include:

- Decisions about whether children should become looked after are now underpinned by effective and accessible legal advice;
- Improved performance management arrangements mean that senior leaders and frontline line managers are very knowledgeable about service performance;
- Long-term and short-term placement stability is beginning to improve;
- Better sufficiency planning is leading to increasing availability and choice of placements. The revised sufficiency strategy has successfully focused on the development of existing foster carers to increase capacity;
- The recently developed edge of care team (November 2017) has been instrumental in decreasing demand for placements, particularly for older adolescents, and in reducing overall numbers of children in care;

- The head teacher of the virtual school provides strong leadership and a clear strategic vision for improvement across all key stages and for children leaving care.

However, there are a number of areas where improvement is needed, for example:

- Management oversight of the permanence planning process is weak and options for permanence are not considered simultaneously, which prolongs uncertainty for children;
- When children come into care, only 22% of initial health assessments are completed within timescales. This has not improved since the inspection in 2017;
- Assessments for children in care are not updated routinely and too often, when cases are in court, the assessments focus on the concerns about the parents;

Ofsted noted that purposeful direct work with children to help them to understand why they are not living with their parents is improving but is not yet consistently good enough. In better cases, relationship-based direct work is tailored to children's needs and is age appropriate. This is a significant improvement.

Further feedback from this visit is provided in paragraphs 3.11 and 3.12 of this report.

The body of this report includes commentary on progress in the four themes of our improvement plan at the end of the first quarter in the second year of our improvement programme.

Whilst we are making progress in embedding the changes that have been made over the first year of our improvement programme, giving us a firm foundation for improvement, there remain challenges to ensuring that the service improves to meet a 'good' inspection standard and sustains this improvement. This is borne out by the findings from Ofsted at the Monitoring Visit in August, and gives us a clear framework on which to focus going forwards. Therefore, the focus in this final stage of the Improvement Plan (April 2018- early summer 2019) is, in addition to building on improvements made so far, to renew and refresh our focus on key areas which might risk progress.

2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Best Value Improvement Board is recommended to:

- Note the progress made in delivering the children's services improvement programme.
- Note the next steps in the improvement journey which will be updated on in the next report.

DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 In April 2017, Ofsted published its report rating our services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the local safeguarding children board 'inadequate' overall (but with some areas requiring improvement.) Subsequently, Cabinet agreed an improvement plan on 27th June 2017 which was subsequently agreed by the Department for Education and Ofsted.
- 3.2 The improvement plan responds directly to the 15 recommendations identified in the Ofsted inspection report. It is an operational tool used by managers and frontline staff to drive our improvement activity which, crucially, focuses on the impact changes will have on vulnerable children. It is monitored and updated on a monthly basis by the Children's Services Improvement operational board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, and every 2 months by our independently chaired Improvement Board. The Mayor, Chief Executive, Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services meet fortnightly to review and address key issues and challenges. Quarterly updates are reported to Cabinet, Best Value Programme Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This fifth update report details progress made between April 2018 and the end of June 2018.
- 3.3 In July 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) appointed Lincolnshire and Islington councils as our Improvement Partners (IPs). The role of Improvement Partners is to support us in our improvement journey by acting as external expert advisors. They have provided regular reports on progress which are shared with the DfE. The focus of their support included the following areas where they have specific expertise that the council could learn from:
- Early help
 - Legal support
 - Workforce strategy
 - Leadership and governance
 - Commissioning
 - Finance
 - Looked after children
- 3.4 Following the May 2018 monitoring visit by Ofsted, it was agreed, with both Lincolnshire and the DfE, that the improvement support from Lincolnshire (the main improvement partner) would cease. Instead, it was agreed that Tower Hamlets would be able to secure support for specific areas identified as required from relevant authorities on an ad-hoc basis. We continue to receive support from the London Borough of Islington, and we are currently in the process of agreeing with the DfE that Leeds will also formally partner us with regard to the continued development of our practice model.
- 3.5 The council aims to achieve at least a 'good' rating for its Children's Services within two years, by the time of the next inspection (likely to take place from

the second quarter of 2019). This is an ambitious undertaking given the extent of failings identified in the Ofsted report and the level of change required. Our improvement plan sets out a three stage journey to achieving this aim. We have now entered the final stage of that journey, which is called ‘continuous improvement to a “good” children’s service’. This stage started in April 2018 and is likely to run until June 2019.

3.6 The table below shows overall progress in the aims that we set for this final stage. This work will ensure that the foundations put in place during stage 1 and embedded in stage 2 are built upon and improvement is sustained over the length of the programme:

Our aim	Progress and outcome
Stage 3 - Workforce has stabilised, permanent posts are filled and turnover has reduced	Workforce stability overall has improved during 2018. The annual rolling figure has reduced from a high of 23.3% turnover and 47 leavers in February to 19% and a further fall at the end of June to 16.9%. Recruitment initiatives have been increased with an acceleration of direct recruits and the conversion of agency workers to permanent staff.
Stage 3- Early Help featured as an aim in the first two stages of the improvement plan. It is proposed that a refreshed improvement plan includes Early Help as it is one of the key priorities identified by DfE, Ofsted, Independent Chair and the LSCB as impacting on progress of improvement	<p>The Early Help Redesign: Phase of one the Early Help Redesign is complete and the Early Help Hub went live on the 31st of July 2018, under the redesigned configuration. Early Help will be running with full staffing capacity from September 2018.</p> <p>Early Help Pathways: The Early Help pathways streams continue to be developed for schools, health (vulnerable families pathway) and youth justice.</p> <p>Early Help Strategy: Is being finalised with the intention to now include outlines of various Early Help pathways; and the Early Help offer.</p> <p>Early Help Enquiry Form: A single Early Help Enquiry Form is being developed by Early Help and it is currently being tested within the Early Help Hub</p>
Stage 3- Performance indicators, audit and dip sampling show continuous improvement in quantitative	Following the work done during stage 1 to improve performance management within the Children’s Social Care service, the use of performance data, case audits and dip samples is becoming embedded as a fundamental part of the service improvement process. The detailed updates below give examples of where

Our aim	Progress and outcome
and qualitative measures	<p>this is taking place to improve our support to children and their families. In their December and May monitoring visits, Ofsted fed back that they could see much more use of performance information by team managers to support social workers and tackle drift and delay. During their fourth monitoring visit Ofsted noted the continued improved use of data and information. For example, they found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved performance management arrangements mean that senior leaders and frontline line managers are very knowledgeable about service performance. • Routine reporting, disseminated effectively to staff and elected members, is augmented by monthly practice clinics which hold managers to account. • Case file audits are completed regularly but more work is needed to sustain the focus on the quality of practice and not just the process. <p>High level performance continues to be reported to CLT and the Improvement Board via the monthly Children’s Services Improvement Summary report.</p>
Stage 3- Focus on specific service and practice areas that have been identified as requiring deeper and/or accelerated improvements	<p>Our refreshed improvement plan will contain specific actions in relation to the Looked After Children’s Service in order to address the key areas where progress is weak or has not yet been sufficient. We are also seeking specific support from Islington and Leeds which will support us with this.</p> <p>The draft refreshed improvement plan will be presented to the Children’s Services Operational Group in September and then the Children’s Services Improvement Board.</p>

Stage 3 Continuous improvement to a ‘good’ Children’s Service.

3.7 Following a deep dive exercise with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in June we are currently refreshing and re-focusing our improvement plan to focus on key priorities relating to this final stage, to ensure that we continue on our trajectory to “good”. Key findings from that exercise were that progress is evident across a broad range of practice. However, the report does highlight a number of areas which are crucial to our overall

- improvement but where we cannot yet be certain that progress is embedded or of a sufficient level of quality. These areas are; a) How we embed and develop the new “Restorative Practice” model across the workforce (b) The strength of CP Chair and IRO oversight of practice and ensuring that it provides sufficient and appropriate challenge, and (c) The continued development of the Child Exploitation team and its wider agenda.
- 3.8 A plan is being developed based on research undertaken as to the characteristics that would be present in a “good” authority. We are currently assessing our own progress against these indicators and will be developing the next phase of our improvement plan as a result. We are still focused on achieving a “good” rating by the time of the next inspection while acknowledging that this is a significant ambition.
- 3.9 **Improvement Partners:** We continue to utilise the expertise and knowledge of a number of improvement partners who have the support of the DfE to assist us with the overall improvement plan. The London Borough of Islington will continue to offer their expertise in regard to the development of front-line managers and more generalised workforce development. Islington have a strong track record in developing their staff and we will be able to take a significant amount of learning from this partnership. In addition, we are also negotiating with the DfE to involve Leeds City Council in assisting us with the continued roll-out of our Restorative Practice model. Leeds has pioneered much of this work and are seen as a national example of best practice. Their support and guidance will remain valuable in developing and embedding our version of this model.
- 3.10 Our progress is being monitored by Ofsted through quarterly monitoring visits. The fourth of these visits took place on the 15th and 16th of August and focused on Permanency Planning and the Public Law Outline. Feedback was summarised in the Executive Summary of this report, and it is clear that, although there are some clear improvements for looked after children, these are variable, and there are areas requiring a much stronger focus during the final phase of our improvement journey.
- 3.11 Ofsted noted some improvements in the looked after children’s service, including around caseloads, IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) management oversight, enhanced CAMHS pathways, sufficiency and the role of the Emergency Duty Team and Edge of Care Team. Children with Disabilities are more effectively supported by carers following additional training and support. Decisions about whether children should become looked after are now underpinned by effective and accessible legal advice, as clearly evidenced by the weekly focused and well-attended legal planning meetings. This is a vast improvement, as previously too many children, including those subject to the PLO, remained in situations of actual or potential harm for too long. The Virtual Schools Team is strong with has a clear strategic vision and works well with schools and children’s social care. The independent placements overview panel (IPOP), chaired by a senior manager, scrutinises existing placements and considers requests for placement moves and for new placements, to ensure that they meet the needs of the children and young people. The IPOP has assisted in reducing the number of children in residential placements from 30 to 11.

- 3.12 However, there is more work to do around IROs supporting permanence with concurrent planning. In addition Ofsted stated that assessments for children in care are not updated routinely and too often, when cases are in court, the assessments focus on the concerns about the parents. Too many children have not had an assessment for a number of years . More effective management oversight is required. Permanence Planning is not yet systematic and contingency planning is not yet uniformly evident. Adoption is not routinely planned for at the earliest stages. In addition, the PAST and the children's placement team need to work together with the looked after children service sooner to ensure that family finding starts sooner. We need to ensure that there is clear accountability and responsibility for children subject to Special Guardianship Orders.
- 3.13 Our refreshed improvement plan will contain specific actions in relation to the Looked After Children's Service in order to address the key areas where progress has not yet been sufficient. We are also seeking specific support from Islington and Leeds which will support us with this. The draft refreshed improvement plan will be presented to the Children's Services Operational Group in September and then the Children's Services Improvement Board.
- 3.14 Early intervention is a focus for Tower Hamlets and will be a theme in a forthcoming monitoring visit after August, but not until the new Early Help Strategy has been launched.
- 3.15 In addition to the Ofsted monitoring visits, the last report outlined the findings from a DfE Review in February 2018, which broadly tallied with the findings of the Ofsted monitoring visits. Since then, in June 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) has undertaken a Peer Review of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as a whole. Key findings from this review, in relation to children's services, were that the LGA noted the fast pace of improvement to date as detailed in previous Ofsted monitoring visits. The LGA also advised that there needs to be a continued corporate priority around children's services as the council continues its ambitious programme to get to good by the time of its next inspection.
- 3.16 It should also be noted that the DfE will be undertaking its second review of progress in October 2018. This review follows on from the review in February 2018 and findings will be outlined in the next quarterly report.
- 3.17 On 27th June 2017, the Mayor in Cabinet approved our summary improvement plan, setting out the 10 components of a successful Children's Service and our vision of what a 'good' service will look like. To give them focus, the objectives and actions that are being implemented to achieve this vision are grouped under 4 themes that directly relate to the findings of the Ofsted inspection.
- 3.18 Additional capacity was provided to the service to ensure that rapid progress could be made whilst maintaining day to day service provision. An experienced interim Divisional Director for Children's Social Care was appointed to implement operational improvements and provide leadership in our improvement journey. As we move into the final phase, recruitment has now been completed for a permanent Divisional Director of Children's Social

Care and the postholder started in July 2018.

- 3.19 In addition, a new Divisional Director post was created and permanently recruited to which covers children's commissioning, including social care placements and early help, which further adds to capacity at senior management level. Additional capacity has also been put in place at service manager level.
- 3.20 £5.59m growth has been put into the children's budget for 2018/19 (this includes the Mayoral Priority Growth for Children's Services for the year is 0.447m). The total requirement to support children's services improvement over two years (2017/18 and 2018/19) was estimated at £4.2m, with an outturn for 2017/18 of £1.9m. This will need to be monitored as part of the ongoing monitoring and modelling to ensure that there is a sustainable funding position for children's services now and in the future.
- 3.21 The following paragraphs set out in more detail the progress that has been made in each of the four themes of our improvement plan.

Theme 1- Leadership, Management and Governance

- 3.22 The focus in this part of the plan has been to implement a robust governance structure with a supporting performance management framework, a workforce strategy and address sufficiency issues in relation to emergency and unplanned placements. This will contribute to the following components of our vision:
- A whole council vision for excellence;
 - An outward facing organisation and culture;
 - Corporate and political support and an ambition for excellence;
 - Strong member- officer relationships based on trust and constructive challenge;
 - A clear 'golden thread' from the political leadership through to the frontline;
 - Strong and dynamic leadership throughout the organisation;
 - A permanent and stable workforce with capacity and resources;
 - Strong coherent partnerships at strategic and operational level.
- 3.23 Since January 2017, the Mayor John Biggs has worked with partners to reinvigorate the Tower Hamlets Strategic Partnership. The Partnership bring together key stakeholders to improve services and outcomes for local residents. It has been focused on strengthening partnerships and developing a vision and priorities for the next five years. The recently published Tower Hamlets Plan's (2018 – 23) key aim is to tackle inequality by building a strong, inclusive and fair borough. To achieve this aim partners agreed four priorities where partnership work is vital, these include:

- A better deal for children and young people: aspiration, education and skills
- Good jobs and employment
- Strong, resilient and safe communities
- Better health and wellbeing.

3.24 During 2018 – 19 the Chair of the Children and Families partnership, The Lead Member for Children, Schools and Young People, will begin work to develop a new deal for children and young people which will include hosting a Summit in the autumn to help shape and inform future priorities and action including the development of a new Children’s Partnership Plan for 2019-2022. The council and its partners are keen to ensure there are opportunities for children and young people to play an important role in shaping the Summit as well as exploring and developing greater youth voice in decision making within the borough.

3.25 **Governance and performance management** arrangements were put in place as part of stage 1 of our improvement programme and these changes are now firmly embedded , as recognised by Ofsted in their May monitoring visit. Political leadership and knowledge of Children’s Social Care has been developed through two seminars for all Members; including a seminar specifically on child sexual exploitation; practice visits for the Mayor, Lead Member and Scrutiny Lead; spotlight sessions at Overview and Scrutiny Committee; regular discussion at Cabinet and pre-Cabinet meetings; verbal briefings by the Director for opposition Members; and fortnightly meetings between the Mayor, Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Corporate Director, alternately attended by the independent Improvement Board Chair. The Mayor and Cabinet Member have also benefitted from training and mentoring organised by the Local Government Association.

3.26 Given that the elections on May 3rd 2018 have brought in a number of new Members, including a new Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People, we are clear that in order to ensure political leadership and knowledge of Children’s Social Care is sustained, the activities described above will need to be replicated for all new political members, with an enhanced programme of induction and support offered to the new Cabinet Member and any potential new appointments in relation to Scrutiny committees. To date an introductory session has taken place for all members in respect to Children’s Social Care. A further session took place on the 9th August with a focus on contextual safeguarding (gangs, missing children, Child Sexual Exploitation, county lines). Training in autumn around children’s safeguarding, in partnership with the Local Children’s Safeguarding Board, is also planned in relation to the new cohort of Overview and Scrutiny Committee members.

3.27 **Staff recruitment and workforce stability** remains a key priority, and senior leaders have recognised that this is a risk which requires ongoing monitoring during the final stage of the improvement journey. We have put in place a range of strategies and measures which are pointing to an improved picture.

3.28 **Workforce stability** overall has improved during 2018. The annual rolling

figure has reduced from a high of 23.3% turnover and 47 leavers in February to 19% and a further fall at the end of June to 16.9%. Within the teams there are also other signs of positive changes, with a significant decrease of turnover from 75% in January to 20% in June in the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) /Assessment and Intervention Team. This is a very positive picture and reflects the focus on improving practice and support in the team.

- 3.29 It must be emphasised that reducing turnover is one of most important aspect of workforce stability as it reflects disruption, cost and loss of experience when an experienced member of staff leaves the service. The improvements in the service, a good professional development offer and ongoing support are the most effective strategy to tackle turnover. Analysis has been undertaken to identify the career points at which exits occur and as a result those at the 3 and 7 year employment point are receiving a targeted career interview.
- 3.30 As at the end of June 2018, 61% of posts across the Children's Social Care service were filled by permanent staff. We are adopting a multi-channel approach to the increase in the permanent staff and a reduction in agency workers which is set out below.
- 3.31 Over 2018 we have worked hard on improving **Social Worker recruitment** and this is starting to yield results. Work is underway to ensure that LBTH has the most attractive offer to attract potential candidates. This includes:
- A review of salaries to ensure market comparability
 - A review of benefits
 - A refresh of the dedicated micro-site for recruitment
 - The development of a specific recruitment specialist post to drive the maximum pool of available candidates
 - Dedicated Principle Social Worker to focus on the Workforce Strategy
 - Agreement from the Corporate Leadership Team to use the 'grow your own' approach to developing a stable workforce and to over-establish with agency staff during the development period
 - A clear strategy to manage caseloads and supervision to minimise stress and turnover and maximise retention and reputation
 - On-going recruitment campaigns to maximise the available pool of applicants.
- 3.32 During quarter 1 2018/19, a Social Worker Recruitment Specialist role has been successfully recruited to with the post holder starting in June 2018. This role provides a dedicated resource to children's social care, and has already created a change in focus. We are confident that this will contribute to the more stable workforce. As of July 2018, there are currently twelve agency staff in the conversion process to become permanent worker, this has been a joint effort between the service creating the right conditions for the move and the direct approach of the new Social Worker Recruitment Specialist.

- 3.33 The Children’s Workforce Strategy Group has also met recently to review its membership and Terms of Reference in order to reflect the progress that has been made in this area and to re-focus activity on how recruitment fits with the other Strategic priorities such as the launch of the Social Work Academy.
- 3.34 The council has negotiated a primary role in the forthcoming Community Care jobs fair which includes participation in the panel on county lines and hosting one of the seminars, all of which will contribute to the brand of Tower Hamlets.
- 3.35 The procurement process for the work with agencies to recruit permanent social workers is now complete and the feedback from the agencies is positive regarding the profile of Tower Hamlets, interviews have been set up for the candidates supplied to date.
- 3.36 In July 2018 the Social Work Academy report to the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team set out the forecast timeline for workforce stability with an aim to stabilise turnover at no more than 15% and with an agency workforce of no more than 15%. The three strands of this strategy and the impact on the permanent workforce were set out in the report and are in the table below:

3 Pronged Recruitment Projection Snapshot						
		Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Activity Total
1	Hire Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW)		40	40	40	120
2	Convert Agency Workers to Permanent		6	4	2	12
3	Targeted recruitment of Experienced Social Workers		14	25	25	64
	Total Recruits		60	69	67	196
	Projected Annual Staff Turnover (15%)	50 (19%)	39 (15%)	39 (15%)	39 (15%)	167
	Net Recruits		21	30	28	79
	Total Vacancies (Total posts 262)	114	93	63	35	
	Total Vacancies in %	44%	35%	24%	13%	

- 3.37 The progress set out in the paragraphs above indicated that this should be achievable with the reduction in turnover, recruitment of ASYEs (Assessed Supported Year in Employment), improvement in the number of agency conversions and multi-channel approach to the recruitment of experienced social workers. We currently have 12 agency workers seeking conversion to permanent employees, if they are all successful this will meet the three year target at the end of year one and serves to illustrate that this forecast should be achievable.

- 3.38 Proposals for the development of a **Social Work Academy** were originally considered by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team in March. The Business Case for the new Social Work Academy was presented at Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in July 2018. The aim is to launch a Social Work Academy in partnership with local universities in October 2018 which will be the first programme of its type nationally to include a three-year NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Worker) Programme to ensure newly qualified social workers have a sustained wrap-around service as well as career mobility. The vision is to make Tower Hamlets an attractive place for professionals to seek and remain in employment. The ultimate aim of the academy is that it will cover both Children's and Adults Services, however learning from other local authorities who have attempted to launch in this way indicates that a phased approach is more likely to succeed. Following discussion at CLT a project team has been commissioned to oversee this work and a dedicated project officer has now been assigned. We have now formed a Social Work Academy Board, chaired by the Divisional Director of Children's Social Care, which will oversee the setting up of the Academy and ensure that the tight time-scales are adhered to. The Social Work Academy is due to be formally launched in October.
- 3.39 Our **sufficiency strategy** is driving forward change and the latest data indicates that children are coming into care at a much younger age than previously. This does not negate us from supporting older children and young people but we are responding to their care needs in a more inclusive manner. The Sufficiency Strategy continues to be supported by a dedicated project group and priorities for the next period are to continue to make progress in ensuring that we are commissioning placements in the most cost effective way. We are also moving forward with plans to develop an in-house specialist fostering provision which will be supported by our Emergency Duty Team (EDT), Edge of Care and Psychological Services. This type of placement is currently commissioned from external providers at a significant cost. Changes to EDT have also been implemented which has led to better support to our most high risk children including less placement breakdown. A report detailing progress around sufficiency is due at the Children's Services Operational Group in September.

Theme 2- A robust model of social work practice.

- 3.40 This theme is the main 'core' of our improvement plan and focuses on improvements in practice within the Children's Social Care service. The service manages all contacts received by the council where there are concerns about a child's welfare through to statutory assessments and interventions for children. This includes the placement and support of looked after children as part of the council's corporate parenting responsibilities. The theme contributes to the following components of our vision:
- A strong model of practice, with good checks and balances;
 - Clear and embedded systems, processes and data.

- 3.41 The council's approach to practice improvement includes greater clarity in practice standards ('what good looks like'), management action on compliance with standards and recording, and the systematic use of data and case audits to lift quality and consistency. The percentage of cases with management oversight has remained relatively stable over quarter 1, just slightly below the upper target of 95%.
- 3.42 In June 2018, the numbers of children in need remained relatively stable and this has been the case over the past three months with a reducing trajectory. This is in line with targeting resources effectively. This is in line with effectively providing services that are tailored to the needs of the child and eliminating drift.
- 3.43 The improvements in case management across the service have resulted in an increase in the proportion of children in need that have a plan in place. This has risen month on month from 51% in June 2017 to 78.1% at the end of December, and as of the end of June 2018 this had climbed to 88.2%, just short of the lower target set. Performance has been consistently improving over the year, and as of June 2018, 96.7% of these plans had been reviewed within 6 months.
- 3.44 This remains a priority to ensure that all children in need have an up to date plan to provide assurance that their needs are being met. Because of the way that our case management system treats cases that are being stepped down from child protection plans, this figure will never show as 100%. At the same time, there has been an improving trend in the proportion of children being regularly visited by social workers.
- 3.45 In light of concerns about our local thresholds for social care intervention, in particular the extent to which these are were understood by partner agencies, a decision was taken through the Local Safeguarding Children Board to adopt the Pan London Child Protection thresholds to bring us in line with most other London boroughs and help to ensure consistency. A new thresholds document was drafted and consulted on in the autumn of 2017, and over 600 staff (including from partner agencies) attended training sessions and gave feedback on the draft thresholds model. The agreed new Thresholds document went live on 5 February 2018. It is evident from the work being completed in the MASH that the new threshold document is embedding and thresholds are being more consistently applied. As of June 2018 97% of all decisions are made with 24 hours of the contact being received and the majority (84%) of children are seen within five days of a referral being received.
- 3.46 Alongside this work, we have completed the first phase of engagement with staff and partners on a new model of social work practice following a decision to move away from the 'signs of safety' model, which had been poorly implemented. Following positive feedback from the introductory sessions, a decision has been taken to accept the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group to proceed with the implementation of Restorative Practice as our social work model. Restorative Practice has a strong international and national evidence base underlining its value. A number of high performing local authorities in the UK have embedded the approach to

best effect including Leeds which became a good authority following an inadequate judgement alongside other local authorities such as Wolverhampton & West Berkshire.

- 3.47 Following the “Big Restorative Practice Discussion” four cohorts of three day training have taken place with a further 8 planned by the end of October. This means that by this time most of our social workers will have received the accredited training. Bespoke training is planned for the Mayor, Lead Member, Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services to ensure corporate buy-in and understanding at a senior level. We are developing plans to ensure that other staff and partners receive the training that they require. The Task and Finish Group has now become a Steering Group, chaired by a Service Manager from within Children’s Social Care rather than an independent consultant, as was the case previously.
- 3.48 Whilst progress has been made across this theme, and the improvements seen during the first phases of our improvement programme have been sustained and built upon, there remain significant challenges in ensuring that social work practice is consistently robust. Although the improvements noted above are significant, and the overall trend is of improvement, including some exceptional performance, some performance is not yet at the level that would be expected from a ‘good’ service. The focus of our work over the next quarter and indeed for the rest of the year, as articulated in our improvement plan, is to ensure that the processes put in place during stages 1 and 2 are used to support continuing and sustained improvements. The work that is ongoing as part of theme 1 to address our workforce challenges will be key to this as they begin to deliver a more stable and skilled workforce.

Theme 3- A sufficient and skilled workforce

- 3.49 This theme focuses on improvements in management oversight and supervision across all services, and in our management of private fostering cases which were highlighted as an area of concern by Ofsted. It contributes the following elements of our vision:
- Strong and dynamic leadership throughout the organisation;
 - A strong model of practice, with good checks and balances;
 - A permanent and stable workforce with capacity and resources.
- 3.50 Since the last report, Management oversight has reduced slightly from March’s figure (which saw 95.7% of cases having received management oversight in the past 8 weeks) to 94.8% in June 2018. This is still above the lower target and a significant improvement from 60% in April 2017. Training for managers was delivered as part of our ‘back to basics’ programme, further supporting improvements in the quality of management oversight to ensure that it supports the delivery of consistently high quality social work practice.
- 3.51 As referenced earlier in this report (paragraph 3.37), Tower Hamlets is launching a Social Work Academy in partnership with local universities in October 2018 which will be the first programme of its type nationally to

include a three-year NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Worker) Programme to ensure newly qualified social workers have a sustained wrap-around service as well as career mobility. The vision is to make Tower Hamlets an attractive place for professionals to seek and remain in employment.

Theme 4- Quality Assurance and audit

3.52 This theme supports the following components in our vision:

- Clear and embedded systems, processes and data;
- A strong model of practice, with good checks and balances.

3.53 Our quality assurance and audit programme was fully launched in August 2017 and we are continuing to use audit activity systematically to inform our improvement activity under theme 2. Ofsted commented in their second monitoring visit that the use of audit was becoming more embedded although they felt that some improvement was needed in its effectiveness to support the improvement journey. In addition to the full audit schedule, dip sampling continues to take place to support the understanding of social work delivery for children.

3.54 In reviewing the audits and moderations, specific themes emerged- some good and some requiring improvement. The learning from both will support CSC in developing practice. In addition, re-training is planned with staff in order to support the QA process and help people understand what “good” looks like.

3.55 During the course of the improvement journey so far, there have been areas which have shown **considerable improvement**, though taking away that there is still more to do. Those areas include:

- The pre-proceedings episodes, tracked from the legal planning meeting, have significantly reduced and are within the minimum range of the Children Act guidelines (12 – 16 weeks).
- When partner agencies support the family plan prior to and during the PLO process the outcome for children has been the most positive.
- In regard to ongoing work: in only a few cases, partners failed to work together effectively
- Management understanding and oversight is visibly recorded in case notes and reflective group supervision and 1:1 supervision is held regularly.
- A child’s diversity is explored and understood in most cases.
- There is clear evidence of sustained improvement around compliance to statutory time-scales and processes. The majority of Audits and Moderations in June 2018 focus on the quality of care plans and have assessed cases as ‘does not meet good’ where the plans are not SMART and outcome focused.
- The voice of the child and direct work, is evidenced in most cases audited.

- It is evident that in the last 6 months the correct intervention is in place on a CP Plan, appropriate referrals are being made to partner agencies and assessments to understand his needs and how to meet them are underway.
- IRO oversight in relation to 'mid-way monitoring' and care planning is showing signs of improvement across the board, but coming from a low base.

3.56 There are some areas which require further improvement:

- The use of chronologies varies and there is not always a consistent standard maintained. Where they are present, they are not always updated or complete. In practice this means that themes and patterns in the child's journey are not identified and this has a direct impact on the quality of assessments and planning.
- Both of the pre-birth cases that were audited this month indicated training needs for CLA managers and social workers around pre-birth assessments, planning and CP procedures
- Delays in permanency planning were also identified as a concern and the need to consider at an earlier stage in the child's journey long term permanent plans.
- Notifications to IROs of children who move placement is largely absent. This has meant here is a lack of challenge to operational teams where children move. The Group Manager for the service is already working on an automatic notification process to allow for IRO scrutiny to be improved.

3.57 The above findings were borne out by the recent Ofsted visit, where inspectors noted that Case file audits are completed regularly but more work is needed to sustain the focus on the quality of practice and not just the process.

3.58 As part of embedding Quality Assurance at all levels, Ofsted recommended that we take forward "Practice Week", where senior leaders spend time with frontline social workers reviewing cases and shadowing their work with children and families in order to better understand their day to day experience. Practice Week takes place on a quarterly cycle, with the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services taking part, alongside the Mayor, lead member for Children's Services and lead Overview and Scrutiny member for Children's Services, the divisional director and the LSCB chair. This includes attending social work visits, meeting student social workers, spending time with social work teams and observing professional meetings about children. These observations are informing our improvement activity going forward. The next Practice Week will take place in Autumn 2018, supported by the London Borough of Islington, and with a focus on the looked after children and leaving care service.

3.59 The council has embarked on a complete replacement and upgrade of its ageing IT infrastructure to provide a fast, flexible and reliable service for all service users. Over £16 million has been committed to deliver this extensive programme. The Corporate Leadership Team agreed moving from Frameworki to Mosaic is a corporate priority under the Frontline Services

workstream. Recognising that effective and reliable IT is critical for the Children's Services Improvement journey, Children's Services has been prioritised in the replacement and upgrade programme. Whilst this replacement programme is underway, short term actions have improved the availability and performance of IT to Children's Services. This continues to be reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board and will continue to be monitored at the highest level.

- 3.60 Ensuring that care leavers have up to date and reviewed pathway plans is another subject of this theme. Whilst the proportion of care leavers with a pathway plan has dropped slightly from 96% in January to 93% in June 2018, and the cohort has increased, we are still within the target range. There remains concern about the quality of pathway planning and a review of our support to care leavers has now concluded. The results of this review and recommended next steps were presented to the Children's Social Care Directorate Leadership Team in May 2018, following consultation with Leaving Care and Children Looked After Teams. The voice of young people who are in or have left care has been strengthened at the Corporate Parenting Board and is helping to shape this work, including the ambition to develop a post-16 service.

Next Steps

- 3.61 The Best Value Improvement Board will receive a further update on progress in three months' time. The key priorities for the next monitoring period will be:
- Ensuring stability and ease of transition of responsibilities from the interim Divisional Director to the new permanent Divisional Director. This is already underway and progressing.
 - Developing a refreshed improvement plan to take forward the key areas of work as identified in this report and outlined below:
 - i. Taking forward actions and strategies to ensure consistent high quality support and planning around looked after children
 - ii. Continuing work on our recruitment and workforce development strategy;
 - iii. Developing our training and development offer, including the development of a social work academy;
 - iv. Embedding the implementation of phase 1 of the new model for Early Help services;
 - v. Embedding the sufficiency strategy;
 - vi. Consolidating and building on the improvements we have made in performance and quality across the social care service;
 - vii. Implementing our new model of social work practice;
 - Delivering short, medium and long-term improvements to the council's ICT systems to ensure it is robust and reliable for social care staff.

- 3.62 It is likely that there will be two further monitoring visits, including one which re-focuses on the Looked After Children Service and Leaving Care and one in spring re-focusing on early help and the front door services. Re-inspection will then take place within six months of the final monitoring visit.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Ensuring that we are providing good services to vulnerable children and their families will ensure that some of our most disadvantaged children are effectively supported to maximise their life chances.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Safeguarding children is a core focus of the improvement plan.
- 5.2 The Ofsted judgement rated our local safeguarding children board 'inadequate.' Work is underway to address this finding and improve the work of the board.
- 5.3 Work is ongoing to develop new safeguarding arrangements consistent with new regulations as set out in *Working Together 2018*.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 Significant additional resources have already been identified as part of the 2017-2020 MTFs; in particular total additional growth of £5.2m addressing pressure in a range of areas, most of which feature in the improvement plan.
- 6.2 Additional one-off investment funding via the Council's Transformation Reserve is being used to support the implementation of the Children's Services improvement plan. The estimated cost of this plan over 2 years is expected to be £4.2m (of which £1.9m was spent in 2017/18)
- 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.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 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'). Tower Hamlets was inspected in January 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.

- 7.2 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. This sets out that Ofsted will usually re-inspect an inadequate local authority using the same framework under which they were judged inadequate. However, Ofsted may also take a decision to re-inspect under the ILACS framework.
- 7.3 Local authorities previously found to be inadequate will be subject to quarterly monitoring visits. These visits will be followed by a re-inspection under the framework that their inadequate judgement was made. The duration of the fieldwork and the size of the team will be informed by the progress evidenced in these visits - the full SIF is four weeks as before and the post-monitoring SIF is two weeks in length. This truncated version will be deployed in local authorities that have made significant progress during monitoring. Ofsted will inform inadequate authorities if they no longer plan to undertake monitoring visits meaning a re-inspection should take place within six months. If the outcome of the subsequent re-inspection is better than inadequate, that authority will then begin to follow the pathway for local authorities which either require improvement or are graded good.
- 7.4 In respect of the recommendations contained in the report, the Council has a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness by virtue of section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. This is known as its Best Value Duty.
- 7.5 The recommendations that the Mayor in Cabinet should endorse the progress made in delivering the children’s services improvement programme and agree the next steps in the improvement journey, are consistent with the Council’s duty to secure continuous improvement in its functions. Failure to make the necessary improvements to children’s services could result in the Secretary of State appointing a Children’s Services Commissioner or removing service control from the Council.
- 7.6 Changes to the organisational structure are carried out in line with the Council’s procedure. If changes are required as part of the restructuring to the employees’ roles or terms and conditions, as well as creating new opportunities this may also create redundancy situations if suitable alternative work is not available for these employees.
- 7.7 In carrying out its functions, the Council must also comply with the public sector equality duty set out in section 149 Equality Act 2010, namely it must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those

who do not.