

Non-Executive Report of the: <b>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee</b> Tuesday, 17 December 2019	
<b>Report of:</b> Corporate Director, Children and Culture	<b>Classification:</b> Open (Unrestricted)
<b>Children's Social Care &amp; Early Help – 6 months post inspection update</b>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Richard Baldwin, Ronke Martins-Taylor
<b>Wards affected</b>	(All Wards);

### Executive Summary

Children's Services were inspected in June 2019 under the "Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services" (ILACS) framework. This followed the 2017 inspection where Children's Services were rated as Inadequate.

Following a two year period of intensive improvement work, Children's Services were rated as Good in all areas. This is a significant improvement and an increase of two grades from 2017. This report outlines the progress that has been made since the ILACS and the plans for continuous improvement towards an Outstanding rating at the next inspection.

### Recommendations:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of this report

#### 1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This report is for noting. The committee are not asked to make any decisions at this time.

#### 2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 There are no alternative options as this is a noting report.

### **3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

#### **Background**

- 3.1 In February 2017, Tower Hamlets Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted. The outcome of this inspection was that the services that we provided to children and families were "Inadequate". Following this inspection, a formal improvement infrastructure was put in place including an independently chaired improvement board and increased oversight at the senior level, both politically and corporately. This was put in place to ensure a high level of scrutiny and challenge on the quality of services provided to vulnerable children. We cannot return to the pre-2017 position where the quality of services are not fully scrutinised or held to account.
- 3.2 As part of the improvement process, Ofsted visited for monitoring visits on six occasions which culminated in the eventual re-inspection in June 2019. The outcome of this inspection was that Children's Services in Tower Hamlets were "Good" overall and "Good" in each of the three headings namely
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
  - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
  - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
- 3.3 This was a significant achievement with Tower Hamlets being amongst the quickest local authorities to achieve such a turnaround. While leaders and staff are rightly proud of what has been achieved we now have to consider how we ensure that the progress is sustained and we continue to make further improvements.
- 3.4 Following the ILACS inspection where we were rated "Good" we have developed a comprehensive plan for the continued improvement of the service which has been shared and discussed with Ofsted.

#### **Current challenges**

- 3.5 Significant financial investment was made into the improvement journey. Some of this was as a result of an existing growth bid that recognised that there had been under-investment in Children's Social Care for a number of years. However, there was also money put into the service to support the improvement journey specifically. This money did not form part of the core budget and there is now a process of agreeing a budget that enables the service to continue to improve and perform well, whilst also remaining within its agreed financial envelope.
- 3.6 One of the main risks following a positive inspection is that complacency could set in. Staff worked incredibly hard during the improvement process, often under significant pressure. There was a risk that some of our key performance indicators would show a drop post inspection however while there have been some fluctuations, it is positive that performance has been

largely sustained. We have taken the decision to retain the mechanisms that monitor the level of performance and the quality of practice as a way of ensuring that performance and quality continue to be maintained. These include a Children's Services Continuous Improvement Board, Practice Week, and monthly audit activity and performance surgeries by the Divisional Director.

- 3.7 Staff turnover has been consistent for a period of time and is lower than the council average. It is currently at around 12.6% although we are expecting that this will rise slightly as a result of releasing some of our agency staff, as we are able to recruit social workers to posts permanently. We have encouraged 17 agency staff to convert to permanent positions since December 2017 with a further 19 in the pipeline and have increased interest in experienced staff seeking to join us permanently on the strength of achieving our "Good" status. However we are also aware that following a positive inspection outcome, our staff will be targeted for opportunities elsewhere and we will have to continue to ensure that we are a great place to be a social worker. Sickness rates in Children's Social Care remain stable at just over 8 days. This is below the council average.
- 3.8 The service continues to have a high volume of work coming in through the front door. In the last three months we have had over 3400 contacts of which around 36% progress to referral. We have completed 3477 assessments in the past six months with over 700 being undertaken currently. As an inner London local authority with high levels of poverty and deprivation, this is to be expected.
- 3.9 We remain focused on our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and ensuring that the children in our care receive the high levels of support and intervention that they require. The new Through-care service supports looked after children from age 14 until they leave our care. This was a response to feedback from young people that the transition into the Leaving Care Service at age 17 came at a time when there was already a lot happening to them as they become young adults and they would prefer this to take place earlier. The Through-care service is still relatively new and is being reviewed, however the early indications are that the service is meeting the objectives that it was set up to do.
- 3.10 The Virtual School continues to provide educational support to looked after children and care leavers. This support ensures that they are able to achieve educationally in line with their peers. The quality of this support was highlighted as a real strength during the 2019 inspection.

### Early Help

- 3.11 Early Help Services, which were praised in the inspection report, continue to develop positively. Approximately 24% of cases that are referred into the MASH are referred onto the Early Help Hub. This has been a consistent position for a number of months, although this has recently dropped, with the reasons for this being explored.

- 3.12 There are a variety of early help services, provided by a number of different services and teams. This includes the Early Help Hub (EHH), which has staff who work directly with families who do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention or who are being “stepped down” following a period of more intensive support. Most referrals come via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); however there are a number of routes in for this support, including self-referral.
- 3.13 An early help pilot which saw the creation of a geographically based, virtual, Cluster Team based in the North-East of the borough was launched earlier this year. This builds on the current early help services that are being provided in the local authority. The purpose of the pilot was to support local service development and the delivery of interventions in partnership with schools, health and other services in the community in order to improve local access and provide early support for children, young people and their families. Following review, it has been agreed to roll this early help locality model out across the borough.
- 3.14 The Early Help Assessment (EHA) underpins the effective consideration of needs for all referrals to early help services. A review is being undertaken of the EHA following criticism by partners of the complexity of the document and the need to simplify it. This work will be undertaken as co-production piece with stakeholders over the coming months.
- 3.15 Our recent Supporting Stronger Families (SSF) spot check by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government confirmed that our local Troubled Families programme delivery remains strong. During this check partner organisations and lead professionals were met with in order to get clearer understanding of how whole family assessment have been embedded in their day to day practice for front line staff and how our partnerships have developed. The spot check inspectors also met with our quality assurance managers who provided evidence of the five deep dive cases.
- 3.16 The ministry acknowledge that significant progress we made in terms of whole family working, data maturity and Early Help Transformation. The informal feedback from inspection we received was very positive and importantly stated there were no invalid PbR claims. We are currently waiting for the formal letter to the Chief Executive to confirm this.

#### Audit and Quality Assurance

- 3.17 The early focus in our improvement journey was on compliance but once this was embedded, we worked hard on ensuring that the quality of both early help and social work practice continued to improve. Our audit and quality assurance activity across both Early Help and Children’s Social Care confirms that practice is of high quality and continues to improve. We are however not complacent and continue to put support and training in place to ensure that we foster a continuous improvement culture. Recent training includes

Restorative Practice, S.47, Impact of Harm and Analytical Report Writing amongst others.

- 3.18 The Social Work Academy is now fully operational. All the five operational work streams are active and delivering outcomes. The Steps to Success, Restorative Practice and Quality Assurance Teams are operating at full capacity.

### Governance and performance

- 3.19 The independently chaired improvement board and operational group have been disbanded and replaced with the Continuous Improvement Board. This board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services and continues to meet monthly. This board is attended by the Divisional Directors and Heads of Service for Early Help and Children's Social Care amongst others. The Independent Scrutineer of the TH Safeguarding Children Partnership also attends and there are ongoing conversations about how to ensure representation and attendance by staff and service users. The lead member and lead member for scrutiny are also invited and other elected members are welcome to attend.
- 3.20 The Board continues to consider the monthly performance report in full at each meeting. This report provides significant detail about a large number of performance indicators. These are generally discussed by exception; however there are opportunities to highlight areas of particularly strong or improving performance. Monthly performance surgeries continue to take place for each service within Children's Social Care which gives team managers the opportunity to account for performance in their individual teams. Management Information reports are also being developed for the Early Help Service.
- 3.21 A highlight report (see below) is also produced on a monthly basis. This is designed to give senior leaders, members and others who do not require the level of detail provided in the full MI report enough information to effectively understand current performance.
- 3.22 The new Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Partnership has been launched which replaces the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the new Independent Scrutineer has been appointed. These arrangements place more emphasis on the partnership between the statutory partners, the Local Authority, the Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 3.23 The Children and Families Partnership Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children, Schools and Young People continues to meet regularly and has recently launched the new Children and Families Strategy "Every Chance for Every Children" which is built around three key priorities
- Aspiration to Action
  - Healthy Families
  - Safe and Secure

3.24 The Corporate Parenting Board continues to ensure that the local authority is discharging its statutory duties in relation to the children in its care. Ofsted highlighted the strength of our corporate parenting arrangements during the 2019 inspection.

## Children's Social Care Highlight Indicators

This report provides summary overview of KPIs linked to child-centred performance management data being used in support of performance improvement across CSC

Performance measure title and reference		Performance from previous financial year	Performance for current period (either snapshot, YTD or rolling year depending on measure) - plus last six months performance outturns (where available)										Agreed targets (using corporate minimum/upper model)		Trend line for last 6 months performance
Ref	Performance Measure	2017/18	Current Performance										Target		Trend
			Num	Denom	Current	Period	Six Month Trend						Min	Upper	
							May 19	Jun 19	Jul 19	Aug 19	Sep 19	Oct 19			
<b>Management Oversight</b>															
1.1	% cases with Management Oversight recorded in past 8 weeks	96%	2,576	2,658	96.9%	Snapshot	96.1%	94.1%	95.0%	94.8%	96.8%	96.9%	90%	95%	
<b>Cohorts</b>															
1.2	Number of CIN (exc. LAC, CP, Care Leavers)	1,034	n/a	n/a	962	Snapshot	982	1,020	1,003	1,011	985	962			
1.3	Number of children subject to CPP	292	n/a	n/a	321	Snapshot	325	350	355	382	334	321			
1.4	Number of LAC	290	n/a	n/a	328	Snapshot	324	328	322	312	325	328			
<b>Front door / assessment</b>															
2.1	% of contacts completed within 1 day	62.3%	8,317	8,660	96.0%	YTD	96.3%	96.4%	97.1%	96.6%	94.7%	92.7%	90%	95%	
2.10	% of single assessments completed within 45 working days	72.7%	3,133	3,625	86.4%	YTD	79.4%	80.8%	89.2%	88.3%	85.8%	91.2%	90%	95%	
<b>Plans</b>															
3.1	% of children in need with CIN Plan completed	86.1%	825	962	85.8%	Snapshot	84.1%	86.0%	86.7%	89.5%	90.1%	85.8%	85%	90%	
<b>Visits</b>															
3.3a	% of CIN children visited within the past four weeks	83.7%	846	962	87.9%	Snapshot	79.4%	82.2%	80.8%	76.8%	89.3%	87.9%	85%	90%	
4.6	% children on a child protection plan receiving a visit within the past four weeks	94.9%	319	321	99.4%	Snapshot	95.7%	96.3%	94.9%	91.4%	97.0%	99.4%	92%	95%	
5.10	% of LAC Single Assessments not yet completed or out of the one year timescale		58	328	17.7%	Snapshot	9.3%	13.1%	11.8%	8.7%	7.1%	17.7%	10%	5%	
5.11	% of CLA with visits in last 6 weeks	90.9%	134	135	99.3%	Snapshot	96.3%	95.7%	95.0%	97.8%	94.2%	96.6%	90%	95%	
<b>Reviews</b>															
3.2	% of children with CIN Plan with reviews within last 3 months	93.8%	701	825	85.0%	Snapshot	89.3%	86.9%	89.3%	88.6%	83.1%	85.0%	85%	90%	
4.7	% of CP reviews carried out within statutory timescales	96.3%	220	227	96.9%	Snapshot	100.0%	99.6%	98.2%	98.4%	97.0%	96.9%	96.5%	98.5%	
5.18	CLA cases which were reviewed within required timescales	81.1%	302	321	94.1%	Rolling Year	96.9%	97.5%	95.2%	94.1%	93.1%	94.1%	95%	100%	
<b>Care Leavers</b>															
6.1	% care leavers "in touch" (17,18,19,20,21 yr. olds with activity updated within last year)	96.8%	250	265	94.3%	Snapshot	95.4%	94.6%	93.3%	91.9%	90.9%	94.3%	90%	95%	
6.2	% care leavers EET	67.6%	174	265	65.7%	Snapshot	72.2%	71.3%	69.4%	67.6%	65.7%	65.7%	65%	75%	
6.30	% care leavers in suitable accommodation	91.0%	234	265	88.3%	Snapshot	90.1%	89.3%	88.1%	86.4%	84.5%	88.3%	85%	90%	
<b>Audit Activity</b>															
11.13	Overall audit quality score (lower is better)		64	29	0.0	Snapshot	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	

Fig 1 – October 2019 Highlight Report

## Next stage of the improvement journey

- 3.25 As part of our drive for ongoing improvement, a “Continuous Development Plan” has been drawn up. This iterative document outlines the key areas that we want to focus on as we look to the future. It is built around six key themes
- Workforce development
  - “Right-sizing” budget
  - Development of operational priorities
  - Audit and quality assurance
  - Further development of the social work academy
  - Further development of Restorative Practice
- 3.26 The ongoing development of the workforce is a significant priority. It is important that we retain a skilled and experienced workforce and are working hard to ensure that Tower Hamlets is an employer of choice for social workers. We are continuing to recruit social workers, both experienced and newly qualified. We are also working with our agency staff, some of whom have been with us for a long time to encourage them to convert to permanent contracts.
- 3.27 Building a more permanent workforce is cornerstone of agreeing a budget that will take us forward. We greatly value our agency staff but there is no avoiding the fact that they cost more than permanent staff. We have been successful in converting a number of agency staff to permanent contracts but there needs to be more work done.
- 3.28 Agreeing a budget to take us into the medium term is always going to be difficult. Projecting future demand is not an exact science and as much of the work is statutory we are limited in what we can do when it comes to managing spikes in demand. We therefore need to ensure that we have sufficient staff to manage within the caseload recommendations that we have agreed. Investment in early help services is one way to do this, however any non-statutory services are vulnerable in any round of budget setting.
- 3.29 Our Sufficiency Strategy which outlines our approach to identifying placements for looked after children has been refreshed and we are using our in-house placements much more effectively. There is still scope for more effective commissioning, particularly on a cross-borough basis which could lead to achieving better value for money.
- 3.30 In the past year, we have had a focus on domestic abuse and neglect as two of the key issues that lead to children and families coming to our attention. This was supported by the development of a new “neglect toolkit” which supports social workers and other practitioners to recognise and understand when neglect is present. Exploitation remains a significant focus of our work. Our Exploitation Team which is staffed jointly by social workers and police continues to achieve significant results in the disruption of criminal and sexual exploitation. This work was highly commended during the Ofsted inspection earlier this year and is considered as a model of best practice. This area of

work is highly complex and involves working with some of our highest risk and most vulnerable young people.

- 3.31 We continue to improve our audit and quality assurance processes. While it was very important in the early stages of our improvement journey to focus on compliance, we are now confident in the high quality of our practice. We have launched a new audit tool which enables us to capture some of the information pertinent to a specific service. It also aligns more closely to the four ratings that Ofsted use. We have strengthened feedback loops and are working to ensure that the outcomes from audit clearly feed into future learning. We also capture information from families which provides some of the most powerful evidence of the impact of our work.
- 3.32 We have a number of social workers and teams nominated for this year's Social Work Awards which is a testament to their hard work and dedication during this period. The Exploitation Team is also nominated for a LGC Award in the category of Public/Public Partnership.
- 3.33 The ongoing development of the Social Work Academy will lead to Adults Services joining. We also have our first Social Work Academy Conference and Awards planned.
- 3.34 Restorative Practice is the model of social work that staff have told us best represents the way that they wish to practice. This is a model that is based around "high challenge, high support" and has been successfully implemented in good and outstanding authorities such as Leeds.



- 3.35 One of the particular benefits to approach is that it can be applied for how staff interact with each other as well as the families they work with. We are therefore working on the next stage of our implementation which is about embedding this across the service and gradually the wider partnership.
- 3.36 As we are now a "Good" authority we do not expect a full inspection for at least two years. Under the current inspection framework the next full inspection it will be a shorter inspection than the most recent as we are a

“Good” authority. We will also receive a focused visit or Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) between now and the next full inspection. A focused visit takes place over two days and is led by two inspectors. It will be themed, with a focus on particular areas of work. JTAI’s are undertaken by Ofsted, HMI Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the Care Quality Commission, and HMI Probation and focus on a particular theme in depth. While a focused visit is the most likely, we are also considering how we prepare for a forthcoming JTAI.

- 3.37 Ofsted also visit for an “annual engagement meeting” which is a temperature check and our opportunity to outline progress and areas of focus for the coming period. The intelligence gathered by Ofsted during these meetings and visits will be used to inform the timing of any forthcoming inspection.
- 3.38 Following the inspection our long term aim is to become “outstanding”. However in the short and medium term we are focused on ensuring that we provide high quality and responsive support to those children and families who need it, whether that be in the form of early help or statutory support.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 This report outlines how we are responding to our statutory duty to provide support to vulnerable children and families. Our services have to be responsive and work with families from across our community. We have a diverse workforce, who are well equipped to understand and respond to the needs of different families in the borough.

#### **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report details how we are responding to our statutory duties to safeguard children.

#### **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 6.1 One-off investment funding of £4.2m via the Council’s Transformation Reserve was used in 2017/18 and 2018/19 to support the implementation of the improvement plan. Children’s Social Care (CSC) received £3.7m of this funding and Governance the remaining £0.5m.
- 6.2 An additional £0.5m has been reserved as a further one-off funding from the Transformation fund in 2019-20 to cover additional costs leading up to the final 2019/20 inspection.
- 6.3 There has also been a one off investment of £1m for the Social Work Academy. This investment will reduce over the following 2 years (£0.6m in 2020/21 & £0.4m 2021/22). The successful implementation of the Academy

will assist in reducing year on year spend on Agency Social Work staff and reducing the level of staff turn-over

- 6.4 CSC has undergone major changes and improvements to successfully achieve a 'Good' rating in the 2019 inspection. In order to continue this standard of service delivery, CSC has requested in the 2020-21 MTFS, a growth bid of £1.6m to increase their frontline social work establishment by 25 posts. These 25 posts were previously funded via the Ofsted Improvement plan. The request is to maintain the current staffing levels which have delivered the significant improvements seen over the past two years and endorsed by the recent Ofsted judgement of "Good".
- 6.5 The CSC placement budget is currently £15.8m with a projection of £1.8m overspend. The sufficiency strategy has had an impact on the numbers of older young people reducing within the high cost placements and younger children placements increasing. Initial bench-marking data and exercises indicate that our current unit spend on Children's Social care sits towards the bottom of our statistical neighbours. We are currently ranked 11th out of 16 in terms of funding. Therefore in terms of unit cost many of our comparator LA's now spend more on Children's Social Care than LBTH. CSC has proposed a growth bid of £1.8m in order to realign their placement budget.
- 6.6 The Early Help service is partially funded by the Trouble Family Grant. For 2019-20 the maximum grant claimable is £1.365m. This consists of £0.350m for the Service Transformation element of the grant with the balance of £1.015m income dependent on attachments (identified families) and payment by results (families turned around). The service is forecasting to claim £0.598m against this element of the grant

## **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'). The current ILACS framework, "Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services", was introduced in November 2017. It is essential that
- 7.3 The plans for continuous improvement towards an Outstanding rating at the next inspection are consistent with the Council's duty to secure continuous improvement in its functions.
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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- List any linked reports
- 
- State NONE if none.

### **Appendices**

- 2019 Inspection Report

### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

N/A