


Cabinet 27 June 2018	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Debbie Jones, Corporate Director Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Children's Services Improvement- Quarterly Progress Report (Quarter 4 17/18)	

Lead Member	Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People
Originating Officer(s)	Charlotte Saini, Children's Services Improvement Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	N/A
Reason for Key Decision	N/A
Community Plan Theme	A fair and prosperous community

Executive 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' by April 2019, which is the minimum our children and families deserve. The council has now had three monitoring visits from Ofsted.

The most recent visit, on 1-2 May 2018, focused on vulnerable adolescents. In their feedback, Ofsted noted that:

"Since the previous inspection and the monitoring visit in December 2017, there has been a substantial improvement in the quality of practice with this group of exploited children and their families. The recent co-location of key staff and the creation of a dedicated, authoritative, multi-agency exploitation team is very effective in responding quickly to high risk situations. A renewed focus on children as victims of exploitation rather than criminalising their behaviour is leading to an enhanced understanding of their circumstances and analysis of risk. Social workers now have a better understanding of children's lived experience. Together with partner agencies, they are increasingly diligent in their attempts to work with and support these young people and their brothers and sisters."

Ofsted also stated that while social work practice remains variable across some teams, increasingly, overall vulnerable adolescents receive higher levels of support and intervention. This was noted as a “discernible difference to the previous poor practice and [indicates] a noteworthy change in culture in frontline social work.” This is encouraging, however, we cannot be complacent, and we understand that we need to continue and embed the improvement journey and in doing so address specifically the challenges that Ofsted noted: recruitment and retention and the effective implementation of the revised Early Help strategy.

In summary, Ofsted stated that: “The evidence gathered during this visit has identified substantial, but very recent improvements in the quality of multi-agency and social work practice for vulnerable adolescents and their families. This is extremely encouraging given the particularly complex challenges involved in this work. Political leaders and managers are demonstrating considerable determination and commitment to embedding and sustaining these changes, while simultaneously addressing the areas of poor practice.”

The body of this report includes commentary on progress in the four themes of our improvement plan at the end of the fourth quarter 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. The focus in the final stage of the Improvement Plan (April 2018-April 2019) is to build on the progress made so that further improvement is achieved and sustained.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the progress made in delivering the children’s services improvement programme.
2. Agree the next steps in the improvement journey which will be updated on in the next report.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Corporate and political leadership of the Children's Services improvement agenda is a critical part of ensuring its success. Consideration of this report in Cabinet will support this leadership and help to facilitate public scrutiny of progress.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 There are no alternative options to consider.

3. 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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This fourth update report details progress made between January 2018 and the end of March 2018.
- 3.3 In July 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) appointed Lincolnshire and Islington councils as our Improvement Partners (IPs). The role of the IPs is to support us in our improvement journey by acting as external expert advisors. They provide regular reports on progress which are shared with the DfE. The focus of their support is in the following areas where they have specific expertise that the council can learn from:
- Early help
 - Legal support
 - Workforce strategy
 - Leadership and governance
 - Commissioning
 - Finance
 - Looked after children

3.4 The council aims to achieve at least a ‘good’ rating for its Children’s Services within two years, by April 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. The second stage of that journey, which is called ‘embedding sustained improvement’ and ran until the end of this quarter (March 2018). The third and final stage is “continuous improvement to a ‘good’ children’s service”, starting from April 2018.

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

Our aim	Progress and outcome
Workforce strategy agreed and in implementation	The first draft of our workforce strategy was agreed and an action plan is being implemented. We are in the process of refining this to ensure that our strategy effectively positions Tower Hamlets as an employer of choice for children’s social workers, with advice from Islington Council as our Improvement Partner. Workforce is regularly discussed at the Improvement Board and among the council’s leadership. Further updates on specific workforce related activity are provided under ‘Theme 1’ below.
Early Help changes implemented including commencing commissioning processes for any new services	Following a review of early help services it was agreed that the Early Help redesign will incorporate the principles of working with troubled families in order to engage with families that have two or more of the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents or children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour • Children who are not attending school regularly • Children who need help: children of all ages, who need help, are identified as in need or are subject to a Child Protection Plan • Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion or young people at risk of worklessness • Families affected by domestic violence and abuse • Parents or children with a range of health problems.

Our aim	Progress and outcome
	<p>The redesign of Early Help is taking place in two phases which will support a quick implementation (phase 1) and which will provide the opportunity to embed (phase 2).</p> <p>The staff consultation for the organisational change in phase 1 was extended to enable us to respond fully to feedback and ended on April 30th. Alongside this work we are developing new processes, guidance and a workforce development programme for staff working in early help services. The new structure and processes are expected to start in July, subject to the conclusion of staff consultation.</p> <p>Arising from the new Early Help redesign children, young people and families will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered support to address needs at tiers 1 and 2. • At tier 2 to be provided with the support from a named Lead Professional who will build a relationship them, assess the needs of the whole family; undertake family planning and co-ordinate interventions. • Empowered to support to help themselves. <p>To ensure alignment with the improvements in Children’s Social Care, the Early Help redesign will offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single front door aligned to the MASH. Which will yield better planning and outcomes for children and young people • Embedded processes in place for “step down” of cases <i>from</i> Children’s Social Care; and “step up” of cases <i>into</i> Children’s Social Care. <p>A range of evidence based interventions linked to parenting support, education, employment, housing, positive activities for youth, domestic violence support, emotional health and wellbeing (pre-Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) threshold) support, adult mental health and substance misuse to name but a few.</p> <p>The changes being made in phase 1 will deliver central capacity for case management and commissioning of early help services ensuring</p>

Our aim	Progress and outcome
	<p>greater consistency, effective targeting of resources to those families that need early help, and the provision of support to effectively meet need. Alongside the organisational change, processes are being redesigned, an outcomes framework is being developed, a commissioning strategy is being identified and an early help workforce plan is being put in place, so that early help professionals are equipped with the right skills to effectively support families.</p> <p>The second phase of the Early Help redesign will bring together multi-disciplinary professionals in locality-based teams to better coordinate support for children and families.</p>
<p>Performance data, case audit and dip sampling is used systematically to show progress and identify areas for further improvement</p>	<p>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 this is taking place to improve our support to children and their families. In their December monitoring visit, 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 third visit Ofsted noted the improved use of data and information, for example, they found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable and effective intelligence gathering processes have been developed to support the sharing of information on a daily basis. This has led to perpetrator disruption activities as well as prompt actions to prevent serious youth violence and other gang related activities escalating • A comprehensive data set is reviewed by the divisional director and this information is shared with the LSCB 'vulnerable children exploitation group'. • Child exploitation screening tools are used effectively to recognise risk. This informs the undertaking of timely risk assessments and the development of coherent safety plans

Our aim	Progress and outcome
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The communication between out of hours and day services is effective with the Emergency Duty Team ‘footprint’ visible on children’s records. <p>High level findings continue to be reported to CLT and the Improvement Board via the monthly Improvement Summary report.</p>

3.6 The next, and final, stage on our improvement journey will be as follows:

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

Between April 2018 and March 2019 we will see a stabilised workforce with permanent posts filled and turnover reduced, and continuous improvement in performance data and qualitative audits towards a good service. This will be a challenging phase given the recruitment challenges faced by all London councils, the high volume of contacts and referrals we are experiencing, and the need to embed improvements across the whole service. A deep dive exercise with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in June will enable us to re-focus and refresh our improvement plan to focus on key priorities relating to this final stage, to ensure that we continue on our trajectory to “good”.

3.7 Our progress is being monitored by Ofsted through quarterly monitoring visits. The third of these visits took place on 1st and 2nd May 2018 and focused on our response to supporting young people who go missing and/or are at risk from involvement in gangs or sexual exploitation.

3.8 Feedback has been summarised at the start of the report. Expanding on this, it should be noted that, in their letter Ofsted commented that previously, the local authority’s relationships with key safeguarding partners were underdeveloped with too many staff, working in silos. Senior leaders across all agencies have recognised that the complexity of issues in relation to exploited children requires a joint multi-agency approach. Consequently, the revised early help strategy is intended to address former weak practice for this group of children. This is now an important priority for the local authority and the safeguarding children’s board.

3.9 The situation for missing children has improved. Arrangements for the completion of return home interviews (RHIs) have been streamlined and are effective. Data demonstrates that the service has improved the timeliness of interventions. Inspectors found that the quality of RHIs has improved. Overall decision making is better and more timely. The daily MASH meeting includes early help. Information sharing is much improved and there is a focus on younger siblings in cases where the older sibling is the focus of much of the intervention. The co-located Exploitation Team has an increased awareness of the multiple and overlapping risks to all children. Although very recently established (March 2018) these alternative methods of multi-agency interventions and engagement with young people are having a positive impact. The team has a good understanding of the Tower Hamlets gang’s profile.

- 3.10 Ofsted were very positive about the changes in the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), noting that this team is now led by a committed and innovative manager and is delivering a much improved quality service to vulnerable adolescents providing a well-coordinated and timely response when children go missing. The communication between out of hours and day services is effective with the EDT 'footprint' visible on children's records. There is improved professional accountability and responsibility for vulnerable children. Work around Prevent and radicalisation was seen as positive. Strong partnership work to counter the risk to children from radicalisation is having a positive impact. The changing nature of potential threats in this highly complex and sensitive area, continues to be well understood. Work to reduce risk is suitably targeted through strong, effective intelligence sharing with relevant partner agencies and in particular improved communication with police.
- 3.11 In terms of challenges and next steps, Ofsted suggested that the key areas of focus were to continue to embed improvement. The need for a robust recruitment and retention offer is also clear and should be a key focus for the council.
- 3.12 The next monitoring visit will take place on 15th and 16th August 2018 and will focus on Public Law Outline and permanency planning. 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.
- 3.13 In addition to the Ofsted monitoring visits, in February we had a six month progress review by the DfE, which included focus groups with staff, managers and partners. Findings from this visit outlined a clear strategic approach to improvement, evidence of progress to improve workforce stability, commitment from partners to the improvement agenda and better confidence in leadership and use of data from staff groups. Some key areas for development were highlighted including around the ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) grow your own model, and how to incentivise ASYEs to stay after their initial year. These suggestions all tally with activities in the improvement plan in stages 2 and 3, and will be reported back to the Improvement Board in the summer.
- 3.14 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. This report sets out the contribution that our improvement plan and each of its themes is making towards this vision.
- 3.15 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 embedding the improvement agenda, recruitment has now been completed for a permanent Divisional Director of Children's Social Care and an appointment has been made.

- 3.16 In addition, a new Divisional Director post has been 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.
- 3.17 £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 £4.5m, 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.
- 3.18 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

- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 Governance and performance management arrangements were put in place as part of stage 1 of our improvement programme and are embedding well, as recognised by Ofsted in their 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.

- 3.21 Given that the elections on May 3 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.
- 3.22 Staff recruitment remains a challenge, and senior leaders have recognised that this is a risk to the improvement journey. As at the end of March 2018, 33% of posts across the Children's Social Care service were filled by agency staff, with the rate much higher in some teams. This is due to the competitive nature of the market in London for qualified social workers, coupled with the pressure of increased workload and the drive for improvement post Ofsted. Staff turnover has reduced, but recruitment remains a challenge. We are continuing to run a rolling recruitment campaign with our streamlined process and are continuing to work with our agency social workers to encourage them to move into permanent posts to introduce further stability in the workforce.
- 3.23 We have now successfully recruited to all four vacant service manager posts (the final post holder started in April). This completes our permanent recruitment to the third tier leadership team in Children's Social Care. A new vacancy at this level is anticipated through normal turnover. Recruitment to social worker, advanced practitioner and team manager posts continues- as at the end of March, we have 137 posts to fill, with 25 at offer stage. This comprises 21 Social Worker posts and 4 Team Manager posts. Proposals on recruitment options were presented to the Corporate Leadership Team in February and the preferred option is to adopt a grow-your-own model appointing ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) social workers and offering an enhanced programme of support and development. Further work is needed to fully develop the proposal to ensure adequate resources are specified to support the cohort during their first year to ensure that caseloads are appropriate, and to provide appropriate managerial and professional development support and also to develop the offer to retain staff once the ASYE year has been completed. The Principal Children's Social Worker is now working closely with HR to develop these proposals over the next quarter including the development of a social work academy.
- 3.24 Proposals for the development of a social work academy were considered by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team in March. The scope of an options appraisal has been agreed within the context of the Council's overall approach and this will be commissioned in April. Following the launch of our new Learning Management System (LMS) in January, all training is now advertised, booked and monitored through the system. This includes 9 new training courses delivered in March.
- 3.25 Our sufficiency strategy is driving forward change and children coming into care are 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. We are seeing fewer children and young people moving into residential care instead there has been an increase in our internal foster placements. This will start to show a reduction in our overspend.

3.26 The remaining challenges relating to workforce and sufficiency of looked after children are the main focus of this theme in phase 2 of the improvement programme, as we move into implementation of the two strategies outlined above.

Theme 2- A robust model of social work practice.

3.27 This theme is the main 'core' of our improvement plan and focusses 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.

3.28 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.

3.29 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.

3.30 Activity in the fourth quarter has focused on improving our practice in relation to children who go missing, are at risk of sexual exploitation and involvement in gang related activity. We have appointed a new Missing Young Persons co-ordinator to oversee activity in this area. The initial focus was to ensure that we have good quality data so that we have a thorough understanding of why children are going missing and are able to respond to emerging patterns. Significantly, since January 2018 there has been a vast reduction in 'reasons unknown' category with only 5.1% recorded in this way. Importantly we have been able to establish major reasons for children running away. To have contact with family and friends was recorded as the primary reason in 46.7% of cases in January, the risk of CSE was quoted in a further 34.3% of cases and because of gang affiliation in a further 6.6%. Each statistic underlines powerfully the reasons why we are focussing with persistent rigour in these areas.

3.31 In recent months significant improvements have been made in identifying children who are at risk of exploitation. All types of exploitation are currently being considered when assessing young people. For example we are making good progress in beginning to identify patterns and trends in relation to children at risk of crossing "county lines", criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and children who are regularly missing.

3.32 Management oversight across the service has continued to improve and at the end of March 95.7% of cases had management oversight recorded in the last 8 weeks (up from 87.9% at the end of December). This is now above the upper target of 95%. March saw a further reduction in numbers for children in need, children subject to child protection plans and children in care. This is in

line with targeting resources effectively. Rates per 10,000 are considerably below comparators.

- 3.33 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 from 51% in June 2017 to 78.1% at the end of December, and further again to 86.1% at the end of March. Performance has been consistently improving month on month, with 93.8% of these plans being reviewed within 6 months. 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.
- 3.34 The review of our early help services was concluded during stage 1 of our improvement programme. We are now implementing the findings of this review, changing the way we support families before they need help from social care services, to prevent problems from escalating and manage demand in the social care system. These changes will see the implementation of a 'single front door' and multi-disciplinary teams to ensure that the right families receive the right support in a timely way and that resources are properly targeted to areas of need. Phase 1 of these changes is due to start in July 2018.
- 3.35 In light of concerns about our local thresholds for social care intervention, in particular the extent to which these were understood by partner agencies, a decision was taken through the Local Safeguarding Children Board to adopt the Pan London child protection thresholds and 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. The increasing proportion of children receiving assessments and services as an outcome from referrals indicates that thresholds are becoming better understood by referring agencies, and there has been positive feedback on the model from staff, although it is noted that there is more work to do with some partners to ensure that they are engaged with the new model.
- 3.36 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.

- 3.37 On the 19th April, Tower Hamlets held the “Big Restorative Practice Discussion”. This was attended by 300 staff from Children’s Services as well as a number of representatives of partner agencies. This was an important step on the journey and included a commitment from senior staff including the Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services to attend the Restorative Practice Training. Training started in early May with 11 cohorts planned. The aim will be to upskill our own staff to deliver this training on an ongoing basis. Partners from within and outside of the council are invited to attend these training courses and there is currently consideration of whether to arrange specific training sessions for partners.
- 3.38 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

- 3.39 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.
- 3.40 Since the last report, Management oversight has improved again, and at the end of March 2018, 95.7% of cases had received management oversight in the past 8 weeks (up from, 87.9% in December 17). This is a significant improvement from 60% in April 2017 and, following management action focused on teams which were impacting on the overall performance, we have now met our 95% target. 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.
- 3.41 To ensure that our services identify and respond to all children who go missing and those at risk of sexual exploitation we have developed, with the police, health and education colleagues, a co-located team based within

Mulberry place. The team comprises 1 Sergeant, 7 constables, the CSE coordinator, the missing coordinator, a health nurse and an education worker and the police missing persons (MISPER) unit. The referral pathway and information sharing protocol are currently being developed between agencies.

Theme 4- Quality Assurance and audit

- 3.42 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.
- 3.43 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.
- 3.44 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 is planned for the week of 11th- 15th June, and will be completed with our Improvement Partner, LB Islington.
- 3.45 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. 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.
- 3.46 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 March, 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 is now in progress. The results of this review and recommended next steps were presented to DLT 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

3.47 Cabinet will receive a further update on progress in three months' time. The key priorities for the next monitoring period, will be:

- Supporting the permanent Divisional Director, the new Cabinet Member and newly elected members with relevant induction and training
- Continuing work on our recruitment and workforce development strategy;
- Developing our training and development offer, including consideration of a social work academy;
- Completing the implementation of phase 1 of the new model for Early Help services;
- Embedding the sufficiency strategy;
- Consolidating and building on the improvements we have made in performance and quality across the social care service;
- 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.

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.

Risk Implications

- 5.3 There is significant risk in failing to deliver a good children's service.
- 5.4 As part of our governance and programme management arrangements, risks are being identified and managed.
- 5.5 The following table shows the high level risks that have been identified, and how we are managing them through mitigating actions.

Ref	Description	Mitigation / Resolution
1	If the staff culture at all levels in the organisation does not change to address the problems identified by Ofsted, improvement in children's services will not be achieved.	Robust corporate governance to ensure clear ownership and accountabilities for improvement. Sustained management focus on compliance with practice standards. Robust communications with staff and partners.
2	If progress and improvements are not sustainable in the long term, the service may become inadequate again	Robust financial planning to ensure that the service is sufficiently resourced. Investment in workforce strategy to ensure that there is a stable and highly skilled workforce with long term plans to sustain this.
3	If leadership capacity and permanence are insufficient, the improvement plan may not be successfully implemented and/ or improvements may not be sustained.	Review of leadership structure to ensure capacity is sufficient. Workforce strategy to address recruitment, retention and development of leadership capacity.
4	If transition plans are not in place when experienced senior interims leave, the service may experience a period of instability and a loss of momentum in the improvement programme	A robust transition plan has been developed to ensure a seamless transition from interim to permanent senior staff
5	If the Children's Social Care service is not sufficiently resourced in line with a high and increasing volume of casework, it will not be possible to achieve a good standard of practice	Robust financial planning as part of corporate budget processes to ensure that there is sufficient budget for current and future service need. Ensure that temporary resources are only used for one off improvement activity and that any permanent budget requirements are identified separately and planned for.
6	If the service response is inadequate, then children may come to significant harm.	Robust monitoring and oversight of casework. Effective performance management and quality assurance framework, and robust governance. Staff development to ensure correct skills level.
7	If skilled and experienced staff leave the organisation as a result of rapid change activity, then there may be capacity issues within the service and multiple changes in social workers for children and families	Ensure that staff are supported through change. Provide effective workforce development opportunities. Recruitment and retention strategy put in place.

Ref	Description	Mitigation / Resolution
	to cope with.	
8	If new staff cannot be recruited, then there may be capacity issues and financial pressures within the service.	Recruitment and retention strategy: ensure pay and benefits are competitive and robust approach to recruitment advertising targeted in the right areas, and coupled with effective 'grow your own' scheme to develop newly qualified workers.
9	If there is low level compliance with the TH model of social work and statutory requirements, then children may come to significant harm.	A training programme has been put in place for all staff to ensure there is a clear understanding of the TH model of social work, and statutory requirements.
10	If the pace of progress in implementing the improvement plan is not fast enough to meet the requirements for 'good' by April 2019, then Ofsted may subject the service to additional measures and/ or intervention by commissioners.	Ensure sufficient resourcing of improvement plan; Rigorous and systematic monitoring of improvement plan; performance management and quality assurance framework
11	If the quality of the data is poor, then it may result in inaccurate performance monitoring and analysis, and ultimately risk to children.	Data cleansing of existing data; Implementation of robust use of child level data by team managers; data quality reports; action by managers to ensure that data entered into case management system is accurate
12	If the council's political leadership across all parties are not fully engaged or aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to children's services, then there may be a lack of appropriate scrutiny and accountability.	Continuing training and development for elected members including new members following the local elections in May 2018. Ongoing regular meetings with the Mayor, Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Corporate Director. Support for Overview & Scrutiny.
13	If partners are not fully engaged or aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the improvement activities, then some improvement actions may not be achieved.	Senior leadership from key partners are members of the Children's Services Improvement Board to ensure they are involved in the strategic development and oversight of their agency's involvement. The LSCB has strengthened its leadership structure and focus.
14	There is a risk that ICT infrastructure problems prevent access to systems and/ or management information undermining improvement progress	Contingencies are in place to access child data in the event of ICT outage. Social work staff have been prioritised for access and support as required when systems experience issues. Improvement plan in place to ensure improved reliability within 12-18 months, and short term improvements have been made to improve recovery in the event of system outage.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 It is acknowledged that the implementation of the Children's Improvement Plan will only be achieved by Council leadership providing the financial resources required for its delivery.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Council leadership is also committed to providing one-off investment funded via Transformation Reserve to support the implementation of the improvement plan. The estimated cost of the improvement plan over 2 years is expected to be £4.2m and would be reported to Members as part of the Council's normal budget management reporting mechanism.
- 6.4 The level of the one-off funding sought will be based on detailed assessment of the costs associated with the improvement plan and the demonstrable improvements that will be achieved as a result of the investment.

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.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- NONE

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A