


Cabinet 19 December 2018	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Debbie Jones, Corporate Director Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Children's Services Improvement Programme – Quarterly Progress Report (Quarter 2 2018/19)	

Lead Member	Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People
Originating Officer(s)	Nazma Rabbani Children's Services Improvement Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	30 October 2018
Reason for Key Decision	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities;

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

Where Were We?

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 'good' in summer 2019, when it is likely to be next inspected. This is a bold aspiration but we believe the minimum our children and families deserve.

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.

Ofsted highlighted some particular areas of focus which they will expect to see progress in by the time of their next visit in December. These are:

- Permanency Planning – we must make decisions for the long term placement of children in our care at the earliest possible stage. This will often include pursuing multiple options at the same time so that there is no delay in achieving a positive, long term outcome for all children.
- Assessments – there are a number of children in the Looked after Service without a recent assessment. It has been made clear to all staff that the expectation is that all looked after children have an updated assessment at least annually.
- Through-care Service – the implementation of the new Through-care service will be prioritised to ensure that we are providing the best service to our older looked after children as they transition to adulthood.
- LAC Medicals – we are working closely with colleagues in the CCG in order to improve performance this area.

The overall level of progress over the past 18 months has been strong, however the August monitoring visit highlighted that the rate of progress previously seen other parts of the Division were not as strongly embedded and evident within the "Looked After" Children's service.

We have agreed with Ofsted that the fifth monitoring visit (11th-12th December) will again focus on Looked After children, with the addition of also looking at practice for Care Leavers. We expect one further (and final) monitoring visit in March/April 2019 which is likely to re-visit the practice at the front door. The full re-inspection will take place at any point within the six months following the final monitoring visit. Ofsted have also recently confirmed that the re-inspection will be a two week inspection under the new ILACS inspection system.

3.1 Our key areas of improvement/challenge

- a) Exploitation
- b) Staff retention and workforce stability
- c) Permanence
- d) Quality Assurance/Performance
- e) Consistency of thresholds
- f) Children “missing”
- g) Sufficiency and quality foster placements for looked after children.

PROGRESS UPDATE

3.2 Staff Recruitment and Retention

In February 2018 48% of Social Work staff were agency staff, this was the highest across London. Our work to provide better working conditions and caseloads, along with the development of the SW Academy has been able to reduce this reliance on Agency staff to 32% (September 2018). The Inner London average for agency Social Workers is 27.7%.

We have also reduced staff turn-over from a high of 23.3% in February 2018 to 15.7% in September 2018, which is now slightly lower than the London average of 16%.

Although it is positive that we have made progress in stabilising our workforce, there are still a number of challenges and initiatives that we need to pursue. These are;

- Conversion of Agency staff to Permanent positions (Divisional Director’s event for staff is scheduled for late November)
- Review and streamlining of HR recruitment processes to “fast-track” SW applications. A Task and Finish Group has recently been set up to undertake this work.
- Commissioning of a specialist recruitment agency to source experienced SW’s interested in joining Tower Hamlets.

3.3 Social Work Academy

The creation of the Social Work Academy is also one of the key ways we are seeking to establish stability within our workforce and reduce staff turn-over. This 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 now live, with the majority of the first year cohort starting in October and November. Further, smaller intakes are due to start in January. The Academy will be officially launched at an event on 5th December 2018. The three strands of the Children’s Workforce strategy and the impact on the permanent workforce 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%	

3.4 Restorative Practice 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. 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. 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.

Following the “Big Restorative Practice Discussion” a rolling programme of training on the Restorative Practice model has continued throughout the summer, ten cohorts of training courses have been delivered, with approximately 216 staff trained across Children’s Social Care by the end of September. We begin a further round of training in October/Nov, and this round of training will now include partner agencies. This will ensure that the model has a multi-agency approach and that families can experience a consistent model of intervention and planning. Senior Leaders undertook their first training

session on the 11th October 2018. It has been agreed for Leeds City Council to become one of our improvement partners. Arrangements are now in place for a visit to Leeds in January 2019.

3.5 Single Assessments

The August 2018 monitoring visit highlighted that too many assessments of our “Looked After” children were not sufficiently up to date. This meant there was no up-to-date analysis of their needs, views and how the foster placement might support the young person towards the best possible outcomes.

At the time of the visit there were 186 Single Assessments that were over 12 months old, which was felt to be sufficiently out of date. Since that time we have updated all of these Single Assessments, as well as developing a tracking system for managers that now alerts them to future assessments. That will require updating so that we can remain on top of this process and ensure that all CLA young people now have a relevant assessment of their needs and how we plan to support them.

3.6 Permanency

New guidance on permanency decision making has been developed and issued to staff. Training on permanency has been delivered to staff by the Royal Holloway College. Work has also been undertaken to change workflows to ensure all permanency decisions are now endorsed via a reconfigured Permanence Panel. This has been followed up by audits and dip samples of cases in order to monitor the impact on practice. It's clear from these audits that planning for permanency and ensuring that decisions are taken concurrently require considerable more work in order for them to become fully embedded. This will mean continued focus on permanence within our future audit activities.

3.7 Initial Health Assessments

We are working very closely with colleagues at Barts Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group to address this very important issue. At the point of the August Monitoring visit our performance was at 22%. In October and September our performance had improved to 40%. Although there is still some way to go with regard to improving this figure it is clear that performance is continuing to improve and the work has engendered some positive cross partnership working.

We have undertaken to ensure that paperwork is provided to colleagues at Barts Health in a much more timely fashion to ensure that they have as much time as possible to arrange and complete the Initial Health Assessment. We have amended some of our internal processes and ensured that all social workers, team managers and service managers are placing a high priority on ensuring this is done. This has resulted in paperwork being sent much more quickly and on many occasions within our four day target with performance continuing to improve. Early indications are that more children are having their health assessments within the 28 day timescale.

3.8 Audit Culture

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. 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.

In September we audited and moderated 35 cases, and in October we audited and moderated 30 cases. These cases will be provided to Ofsted inspectors in December so that they can randomly select a group of 15-20 cases to inspect.

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 has been delivered to staff in order to support the QA process and help people understand what “good” looks like.

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. Management oversight is now consistently recorded at between 95%-99%
- 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 September 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 we have now seeing sustained good performance in relation to the frequency, timeliness of visits, assessments and reviews. The challenge within phase two of the improvement journey will be to build on the consistency and quality of direct practice and written work.

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 there 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.

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.

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 Corporate 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 week commencing 19th November 2018, supported by the London Borough of Islington, and with a focus on the looked after children and leaving care service.

3.9 Remaining Challenges

Social Work Academy – Retention and reducing costs we are currently in the process of introducing new ASYE's into Teams and therefore are beginning to reduce the number of agency social workers. This will need to be undertaken with care.

Through Care Service Launch the Leaving Care service will move into Mulberry Place by mid-November 2018. A fresh round of consultation with staff

and the Children In Care Council has also taken place. A task and finish group to plan transfer of cases are scheduled to commence in December 2018.

Preparation for the Ofsted re-inspection

As part of the new ILACS Inspection Framework, each local authority hosts an annual engagement meeting with senior officers from Ofsted. Our meeting will take place on the 20th November. We will present a summary of our current position in the form of three questions.

- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
- How do you know it?
- What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

We are in the process of creating a presentation that will be delivered during the meeting.

Focus groups for Social Workers and Managers have been arranged which will be led by Sir Alan Wood on the 14th November, this will be reflected and fed back as part of staff engagement at the meeting.

We have reformatted the new improvement plan to take into account the fact that we are definitely going to be inspected under ILACS. The ILACS has different criteria so we are having to ensure that we are assessing ourselves against these updated outcomes. We have updated the draft plan to reflect this and have begun to process of updating the commentary and RAG ratings. The plan is to assess ourselves against the different headings, including identifying what data we hold, both quantitative and qualitative to evidence this. We will use this to develop a higher level document, likely covering the three key areas of

- 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

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 Under Ofsted's "Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services" introduced in November 2017 ("the ILACS, information held about each local authority is used 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 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 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.
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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