

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 4th January 2016

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People & Economy

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Children & Families Service

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To report to members progress since the Ofsted inspection of Halton which took place between 18 November - 10 December 2014.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) Members note the progress that has been made in meeting the recommendations of the Ofsted inspection.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Ofsted inspected Halton Borough Council children services under the Single Assessment Framework between the 18 November and 10 December 2014. This was a comprehensive inspection which examined all aspects of a child's contact with services from early help to adoption. Halton Safeguarding Children's Board was also inspected at the same time.

3.2 The framework is a challenging one, with the judgements in specific areas: the experiences of children in need of help and protection, the experiences of children looked after and achieving permanence, the leadership, management and governance of the authority and sub-judgements in the areas of adoption performance and the experiences and progress of care leavers.

3.3 Halton received an overall judgement of requiring improvement, with this being the judgement in the areas of help and protection and leadership, management and governance, with a good judgement received for the remaining 3 areas.

3.4 Inspectors made 19 recommendations in total, 3 of which were for priority and immediate action, and the remainder as recommendations for improvements.

3.5 The plan in response to the inspection has been overseen by the Chief Executive, Lead Member and the Strategic Director in partnership with the Chair of the Safeguarding Children's Board, local authority officers from Children's Services, Finance, HR, IT and partners from the Police and the CCG.

4.0 **PRIORITY AND IMMEDIATE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 The first action was to improve the quality of planning for children. In response, the service reviewed and revised all its forms and made improvements to its case recording system to ensure that the systems support the improvements in practice. Workshops were held with staff at all levels to involve them in identifying how to improve and this has been used to inform further training and development programmes. A multi-agency workshop took place to inform a different approach to core groups with children with child protection plans with to support partners in how they were able to evidence differently how they contributed to plans and outcomes.

This is an area of ongoing development, as we continue to refine our approach and ensure we can evidence sustained and continuous improvement. The next stage is to introduce a common approach to plans across all areas of the service along the model. The approach is to have a framework for all plans which is well understood by parents, carers and children and young people. Further training is also programmed for all staff on how to plan and use outcomes in care planning.

4.2 The second action was to ensure all children and young people who go missing receive a return interview and that information was shared in a timely manner to inform risk assessment, management and planning. In response, we have now introduced a new pathway and performance management system. All reports now go via a central point in the Contact and Referral Team (CART). The new record specifies what action is to be taken in response and the date of the return interview. Based on this information, or if a pattern of missing behaviour is escalating, the system prompts for a strategy discussion to take place in line with the Pan-Cheshire Missing from Home policy.

Weekly reports are now sent on the previous weeks missing reports to all teams, the lead member, the Chief Executive and the Strategic Director. This report outlines the number and types of missing, absent and unauthorised absence reports, if the young person is known to social care or not, if he/she is a child placed in our area by another local authority, the length of missing/absence and the date of the return interview. It also indicates if any young person has been flagged as being at risk of child sexual exploitation.

4.3 The third action was to strengthen management oversight and

capacity in CART. An additional part-time Practice Lead has been introduced to support the Principal Team Manager. Business processes have been reviewed by one of our business analysts with the team, and improvements made in methods of recording and tracking of all contacts and referrals. This is supported by a daily report to the Principal Team Manager and the Divisional Manager responsible and by weekly and monthly reports on timescales and outcomes to the managers and the Operational Director. The performance report also evidences numbers that do not progress to social care and why and number of repeats so these can be audited to confirm the decision-making. The multi-agency weekly referral meeting also reviews all contacts and referrals from the previous week and will reverse a decision if the professional view is that the referral should have progressed to social care for an assessment or if it should have progress to early intervention. Any changed decisions are recorded with the rationale for why on the child's record.

5.0 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 *Consistency of practice*

5.1.1 Single assessments now routinely analyse risk and protective factors. Chronologies have improved but this is not as routinely used as needs and is a priority area for further training and development. As referenced in paragraph 3.6 above, the work on improving the consistency of core groups has been led by the Safeguarding Board and has been supported by revised multi-agency Working Together training.

5.1.2 The quality of child permanence reports has significantly improved. Feedback is provided by the Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director) on excellent reports and redacted and anonymised versions are used to inform training by the Adoption Principal Team Manager.

5.1.3 Requests for a fostering placement forms have been amended to reflect all the considerations that inform a decision to match a child needs with a particular placement, and what additional support may be needed is recorded.

5.2 *Management capacity and oversight*

5.2.1 The strategy record now routinely records SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timescale) actions and also what contingency plan should be in place if the preferred action is not able to be achieved.

5.2.2 Capacity of independent chairs of child protection conferences and independent reviewing officers for children in care was raised given

the significant increase in both areas at the time of the inspection. Both functions have been reviewed with agreement to recruit a fixed term-contract to provide some additional capacity to both functions. Numbers of children in care have now stabilised and following new regulations introduced in April 2015, for children in long-term placement there is flexibility to reduce the number of reviews in a 12 month period if this is appropriate for that child. Numbers of children with a child protection plan have also reduced.

- 5.2.3 A recommendation was made to strengthen the capacity of commissioned services to provide direct work to children and families affected by domestic violence. Following scrutiny by this committee and consultation with stakeholders, the need for this service is still required and is subject to re-commissioning currently. The Gateway programme for families affected by domestic violence at level 2 of the Levels of Need has now begun, and there is an agreed protocol in place between the current service for children and the commissioned service for adults to ensure there is good information-sharing and no duplication of work.
- 5.2.4 Both fostering and adoption strategies have been reviewed and revised to ensure there is a match to local need and to provide a range of placements.
- 5.2.5 For children in care who need life story work, independent reviewing managers will now use the refreshed escalation process to raise any concern about delay or the quality of this work. The Child in Need teams are now more pro-active where there is a possibility of a child remaining in long-term care or moving to adoption in gathering supporting material and information such as pictures, toys, photographs, detail from parents, family members, foster carers and recording memories and anecdotes about a child's life to inform planned life story work at a later stage.
- 5.2.6 In respect of private fostering, a multi-agency group with 2 young people as members have revised and re-launched the private fostering strategy with a planned programme of awareness raising in schools. Any potential links with CSE are overseen by the CSE operational group.

5.3 ***Educational Outcomes***

- 5.3.1 The virtual head for children for vulnerable pupils (including children in care) has targeted a number of areas including improved performance management and tracking of vulnerable children and evidencing challenge to schools in reducing fixed term exclusions. In partnership with schools, following a conference specifically targeted at improving outcomes for children in care and being ambitious and aspirational for them, a range of material and training has been provided and Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have been revised

to simplify how to show targets for improvement and how this will be done, including use of the Pupil Premium, which the virtual headteacher scrutinises a regular sample to ensure they are effective.

5.4 ***Children and young people's participation and access to information***

5.4.1 The recommendation was to strengthen the participation of children and young people in child in need and child protection processes, including the take up of advocacy services, and to gather feedback of their experiences to help make improvements in practice. While it is now more routine to see on children's records their voices, wishes and feelings recorded through direct work, pictures, and written contributions this is still an area requiring further work and their attendance at these meetings is still low. Advocacy has now moved to be an "opt-out" service for child protection conference in the expectation this would increase attendance by providing independent support but this is still not as effective as required. This makes it difficult to gather feedback to inform improvements in practice. This is a priority area for the service to look at more creative solutions to achieve what is needed for the next 6 months.

5.4.2 In contrast, the children in care council goes from strength to strength. They have reviewed and re-designed both the children in care and careleavers pledge and a member of the council has made a presentation about their work to this committee. A DVD which they have made to support children in care is about to be distributed and it is in their plan to ask officers and members to attend a question and answer session with them.

5.4.3 All care leavers now have had direct access to their health information with support from the Children in Care Nurse if needed, or if they do not want to do this at this time, have been provided with information about how to get this information in the future.

6.0 **NEXT STEPS**

6.1 As part of ensuring that we reach an outstanding level of service for all our children by the next inspection, the service will continue to reflect, develop and challenge itself to ensure we provide excellent outcomes for children and young people.

6.2 We will do this by continuing to recruit and retaining excellent staff at all levels and continuing to provide excellent training, support supervision and managerial oversight of practice. Managers at all levels will be able to use the performance systems and tools now in place to know their service and its areas for development, and to ensure that their service is reflective and responsive to changing demands and needs. Children, young people, their families will tell

us more often if we are getting things right and what we need to do better, and we will change what we do and how we do it in response to their feedback. Multi-agency partners will also continue to work in partnership with us in developing innovative and creative services.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The current approach by Ofsted to inspections will end in March 2017. They are also undertaking thematic inspections and Halton may be selected for one on these. From March 2017, it is likely that there will be a new inspection framework; Ofsted are in initial discussions about what this may be but the indications are that the current single inspection framework will be replaced by a different model.

7.2 The Government has also announced a number of policy/legislative changes which have implications for local authority delivery of children's services. Currently before parliament, there is legislation to move to regional adoption agencies and to strengthen the government's powers to intervene and direct the outsourcing of statutory children's services from local authorities if they are seen to be failing or not meeting the needs of children. A review of how children in care are supported is currently underway led by Sir Martin Narey and will lead to recommendations about how services meet the needs of children in care.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 As a demand led service, it is essential to maintain the capacity and skills of an experienced, professional workforce to manage those demands safely, and to manage those demands by supporting and intervening early with children and families and supporting them to live with their families and in their communities when this is safe to do so.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

9.1 Children & Young People in Halton

This is outlined in the report.

9.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Children will be supported to reach their potential in all areas

9.3 A Healthy Halton

Children's health needs are addressed and supported to help them reach their potential.

9.4 A Safer Halton

Children affected by domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour are supported to meet their needs.

9.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified.

10.0 RISK ANALYSIS

10.1 As outlined above, if a local authority is not able to demonstrate that it able to provide a good or outstanding service in the future, then there is a risk that there could be government intervention and direction to place statutory services outside of local authority control.

11.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

11.1 The service must be aware of and be able to demonstrate that it responds effectively to equality and diversity needs.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Single Inspection of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers Published 3 rd February 2015	Halton Single Inspection Report 030215	Tracey Coffey Operational Director 0151 511 6790