

REPORT FOR: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 11 October 2012

Subject: Children and Families' Services Improvement Plan

Key Decision: Key
[Affects all Wards]

Responsible Officer: Catherine Doran, Corporate Director of Children and Families

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Brian Gate, Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families

Exempt: No

Decision subject to Call-in: Yes

Enclosures: Post-Ofsted Improvement plan

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the key issues arising from the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services carried out in May 2012. The Corporate Director Children and Families, has convened an improvement board to secure rapid improvements through an improvement plan agreed by all partners. The post-Ofsted improvement plan is included at Annex A. The Health action plan is included at Annex B.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to agree the post-Ofsted Improvement Plan.

Reason:

Ofsted is the independent regulator of children's services. The Council must take political as well as corporate responsibility for ensuring that rapid improvements are secured.

Section 2 – Report

The Council's top corporate priority is the protection of vulnerable children and adults. This report addresses how improvements will be secured in relation to the protection of vulnerable children in both safeguarding and looked after children's services.

Options considered

Ofsted is the independent regulator of children's services. Addressing the recommendations in the inspection report is not optional.

Background

Ofsted inspected Harrow's children's services between 8th and 18th May 2012 and subsequently published a report on 27th June 2012 [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/harrow>]. The purpose of the inspection was to "evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers and care leavers" (London Borough of Harrow Ofsted inspection report 2012, p.2)

At the same time, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out an integrated inspection of health services. The Ofsted inspection report includes recommendations for the Council, NHS Harrow and North West London

Hospital NHS Trust. CQC also publish a separate report containing recommendations from the Ofsted report and some additional recommendations.

The inspection came at the end of a four-year cycle of all Local Authorities in England under the framework for inspections of safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services. It is widely recognised that the criteria for evaluating services have been raised considerably in this period due in part to the tragic death of Peter Connelly in 2007 and the subsequent publication of Lord Laming's report "The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report" in 2009.

Services now have to do more to achieve a 'good' judgement and the number of children's services being judged 'inadequate' has risen sharply. Of 81 safeguarding inspections in the 15 months to March 2012, only 4 percent were judged to be outstanding, 43 percent good, 47 percent adequate and 6 percent inadequate. In the last quarter, the bar has been raised again. In London alone, for the last group of authorities to be inspected, three were judged to be inadequate: Sutton, Kingston and Bexley and are now subject to intervention.

Inspectors judged that in Harrow the overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement for safeguarding is adequate. The overall effectiveness for Looked After Children Services is adequate, however the capacity to improve is good.

The inspection report acknowledges:

"The local authority has a clear vision of how it aims to improve the safety of Harrow's children which is shared by staff and partners. This vision is being delivered through its new operating model (NOM) which is based on a thorough analysis and understanding of the key issues for children's services, and implemented with careful and considered change management. It is, however, too early to evaluate the impact of these changes for children."
(London Borough of Harrow Ofsted inspection report 2012, p.5)

The New Operating Model was launched in February 2012, just three months before the inspection.

The Corporate Director Children and Families, with partners and the independent Chair of the LSCB, has convened an improvement board to secure rapid improvements through an improvement plan which addresses all 22 recommendations in the Ofsted inspection report.

Ofsted also has the responsibility to inspect a range of children's services that fall outside of the above remit. The judgements for overall effectiveness of these services are set out below:

- 94 percent of schools are judged to be good or outstanding with all schools good or outstanding on the safeguarding judgement.
- There have been no priority actions in either of the last two unannounced safeguarding inspections.

- Private fostering, adoption and the fostering inspection have all been judged to be good for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspections – all these inspections are conducted on a 3 yearly cycle;
- Honey Pot Lane was inspected on 20th August 2012 and graded good – this is an unannounced inspection which takes place every 6 months;
- The Firs was inspected on 28th August 2012 and graded outstanding - this is an unannounced inspection which takes place every 6 months.

The 2011 annual assessment of Children's Services by Ofsted resulted in an overall judgement of 'Outstanding' for Harrow. While this now needs to be seen in the context of the more recent safeguarding inspection which will affect the 2012 annual assessment, it did indicate the extent to which Ofsted had recognised improvements in other areas of Harrow's Children's Services. In particular, Ofsted drew attention to improved performance in narrowing the education gap, quality of early years provision, schools and social care services such as fostering, adoption and children's homes. Harrow's strong performance in achieving outcomes for young people, for example in terms of education, employment and training, was also recognised.

Current situation

The improvement board, which is a multi-agency partnership board with representation at the most senior level, has met four times to set the strategic direction and hold all partners to account. An officer group at service manager level has also met to do the detailed action planning so that actions are owned at the appropriate level. There is strong partnership commitment to the improvement plan – all partner agencies have worked together to develop the actions and agree the plan.

The improvement board signed off the post-Ofsted improvement plan on 10th September 2012. We are currently on track to deliver the actions that will secure the improvements required.

Recruitment is underway for a new divisional director of targeted services – interviews will take place on 19th October 2012. There is a new service manager for quality assurance in post, an incoming service manager for commissioning, two new service managers in targeted services, three new team managers in post and a new Child Protection Chair. These appointments enhance our management capacity and capability and bring new skills and experiences to the organisation.

A recent West London Alliance (WLA) review demonstrates that Harrow has the lowest number of social workers in the sub-region, with children's social workers per child population being half the WLA average. Social work salaries are also no longer competitive in the region. The social work recruitment and retention package is being reviewed.

We are implementing a more robust quality assurance model that includes a full programme of audits as well as 'deep-dive' internal reviews of teams on a rolling programme.

We are also refreshing our approach to workforce development. A new 'systemic support service' has been commissioned to work alongside front-line social workers to support and strengthen practice.

We are looking with the police and other agencies at how we deal with demand at the 'front door' of children's services - the Children's Access Team (CAT) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Our aim is to strengthen practice, increase the capacity and capability of the workforce and children reach their destination point quickly and effectively.

The recent stability in NHS Harrow Management Team and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) taking an active role in commissioning and more robust oversight of safeguarding, has meant that relationships in the partnership have significantly improved. The Corporate Director and Borough Director for NHS Harrow meet three weekly and the Local Authority and NHS teams meet on a more regular basis.

The independent chair has brought a sharper focus to the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB's terms of reference, sub-groups and work programme have all been reviewed.

We are starting preparations for the next inspection which will be a two-week unannounced inspection following the entire child's journey. As a partnership, we are committed to developing a collective understanding of what good and outstanding look like.

Implications of the recommendation

The inspection found a lot that was good, for example early intervention services, services for disabled children, but also practice that needs to be put right - for example, too much of the child protection work lacks appropriate focus, assessments are variable in quality, there is insufficient rigour and challenge in supervision and in reviewing plans. We will need to raise our game considerably in the context of the new inspection framework.

An even tougher inspection regime is being introduced from May 2012 which supersedes the safeguarding and looked after children inspection framework. The new framework involves an unannounced 2-week inspection built on a relentless focus on the child's journey, including the quality of practice and the effectiveness of early intervention services.

Financial Implications

To deliver a successful inspection requires sufficient resources in early intervention and targeted service budgets.

Currently the cost of securing the immediate improvements to Children's Services is being born by the directorate however this is creating a pressure in respect of staffing the front door. Consideration will be given as to how to fund service improvement in the medium term, especially given the pressure on Council budgets and the need to reduce budgets. Funding the improvement plan in the medium term will need to be considered as part of Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It should be noted that in terms of reaching a judgement that our overall effectiveness is 'adequate,' Ofsted judged staffing resources overall to be just sufficient. Costs associated with inspection failure are significantly higher than investment to secure service improvements now.

Performance Issues

Harrow continues to perform strongly in a number of key social care indicators including:

- reviews of children subject to a child protection plan
- adoptions of CLA
- long term stability of CLA
- reviews of CLA

Our performance on initial and core assessments completed within appropriate timescales has dropped due to increased demand and more robust assessments. A review of the Children's Access Team is underway and the service manager is addressing the performance and staffing issues. In common with all London Authorities, it is difficult to recruit experienced social workers to the front door due to the challenging nature of the work. We are reviewing the skills and experience needed and are recommending advanced practitioner posts in line with the Munro Review of Child Protection. Many local authorities have begun to introduce these posts as recommended by Munro.

Work to reduce the duration that children remain subject to a child protection plan is ongoing. Targeted work is focusing on long term cases and a protocol is now in place to ensure action is taken at the third review, which is at 15 months.

The 'Be Healthy' outcome for Looked After Children was judged to be inadequate in the Ofsted inspection. We are working with Health services to address urgently the issues around initial health checks, the quality assurance of health checks and information sharing. Key health posts are now being permanently filled by Health. This action is central to the post-inspection action plan.

The attainment and attendance of Children Looked After is being robustly addressed by the Virtual Head teacher and the Service Manager for Looked After Children working closely with the Education Strategy and School Organisation Service and the Harrow School Improvement Partnership. Scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Panel have helpfully been focusing on this area of performance.

Environmental Impact

There are no environmental impact considerations in this report.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

Separate risk register in place? No

There is a risk arising from new the Ofsted framework which raises that bar in relation to the criteria to achieve a good inspection outcome. As stated above, in order to manage and mitigate this risk, we are starting preparations for the next inspection. As a partnership, we are committed to developing a collective understanding of what good and outstanding look like and securing our improvement journey by self-assessing against the criteria.

Legal thresholds have been reviewed following the Ofsted inspection and this has resulted in more children coming into the care system.

In addition, there are risks associated with demographic growth affecting demand for services. While Harrow's rates per population of children in need, Looked After Children and children subject to child protection plans have been significantly lower than comparator averages, there is likely to be increased demand for services as Harrow's population changes, with greater numbers of young people, an incoming population and increasing deprivation. In addition, Black and mixed ethnic groups are currently over-represented in the care population. The predicated demographic trends demonstrate that there is an increase in these groups which is expected to increase the care population.

Any areas requiring growth will be identified in the MTFS.

Equalities implications

As this report sets out the actions we are taking to secure improvements, there should be a positive impact on equalities groups.

Corporate Priorities

Please identify which corporate priority the report incorporates and how:

- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Emma Stabler



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 1 October 2012

Name: Sarah Wilson



on behalf of the
Monitoring Officer

Date: 21 September 2012

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: David Harrington



on behalf of the
Divisional Director
Partnership,
Development and
Performance

Date: 1 October 2012

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director
(Environmental
Services)

Date: 1 October 2012

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Leora Cruddas, Divisional Director of Quality Assurance, Commissioning and Schools

Background Papers: Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services, London Borough of Harrow, Ofsted, 27th June 2012. <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/harrow>

**Call-In Waived by the
Chairman of Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

[Call-in applies]