

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting:	9 th December 2014
Subject:	Children and Families Self Assessment
Responsible Officer:	Chris Spencer, Corporate Director of Children and Families
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	Cllr Linda Seymour Cllr Janet Mote
Exempt:	No
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Children and Families Scorecard for Early Intervention and Targeted Services2. Strategic improvement priorities for Children and Families

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the additional information that was requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th October 2014. It provides a Children and Families Scorecard and a summary of Children and Families Services' strengths and weaknesses (including length of time for assessments).
- 1.2 Children and Families Self Assessment is written to capture strengths and areas for improvement, against the Ofsted Inspection Framework for the inspection of Local Authority services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Elected member scrutiny and overview of the Self Assessment and strategic response to areas of improvement are critical to the inspection judgement relating to the overall leadership, management and governance of Children and Families Services.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to note the additional information.

Section 2 – Report

2.1 Introduction

At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th October 2014, the full Children and Families Self Assessment draft document was presented by the Corporate Director of Children and Families and the Head of School Improvement. The Self Assessment has been written against the national Ofsted Inspection Framework for the inspection of services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

- 2.2 The Inspection Framework sets out a number of criteria against which inspectors would assess the effectiveness of the Local Authority Children and Families Services. The inspection consists of three key judgements:

Key Judgement 1:

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Key Judgement 2:

The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence

Key Judgement 3:

Leadership, management and governance

- 2.3 The following further information was requested:
- i Summary of strengths and weaknesses (including details about the length of time for assessments)
 - ii A scorecard setting out performance against key indicators in respect of Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers

2.4 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

2.4.1 Strengths

- Highly effective multi-disciplinary Early Intervention Teams and Children's Centres reaching over 5,000 families and children per year, in need of early help and support. Early Intervention Teams supported 330 vulnerable families over the last 6 months
- Strong multi – agency MASH (Multi – Agency Safeguarding Hub) Working together with partners effectively to ensure timely referral to statutory services and early help services where needed
- Low rates of children with Children Protection Plan (CPP) for more than 2 years, indicating that our interventions are timely and appropriate (scorecard ref: TS 5)
- Relatively low numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) compared with statistical neighbours.
- Low cost placements for children looked after demonstrating cost effectiveness

- Percentage of CLA placed more than 20 miles from home has reduced on the previous year (although has not met target yet TS 20)
- Utilisation of evidence based practice throughout the whole service from early intervention to targeted services aimed at improving outcomes for children and families. Good examples of parenting programmes (e.g in the first half of 2014, 80 parents involved in direct counselling to support their parenting capacity, to 29 parents of young offenders successfully completed parenting programmes, which included domestic violence and community recovery programmes)
- Strong long term partnerships with Coram on adoption – robust planning and good timeliness
- Systemic social work practice undertaken across Children and Families supported by Morning Lane, raising quality of practice through a combination of training and direct work.
- Strong systems for challenging the robustness of internal practice through Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection chairs
- Rate of social care assessments completed within time scale, continues to improve and percentage of initial child protection conferences held with timescales have risen above target and comparative levels (TS2, TS3)
- Quality assurance framework in place and all managers involved in monthly audit processes
- Missing children policy and systems have been strengthened. Monitored through monthly Safeguarding meetings
- Highly effective youth development provision has led to high levels of participation by children and young people aged between 11 and 19 in positive activities (4675 young people accessed positive activities from January to September 2014)
- Significant reduction to first time entrants to criminal justice system
- Best joint figure on NEET – lowest in the country (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

2.4.2 Weaknesses

- Need to further improve the consistency of good practice, particularly in the area of Children in Need
- Our compliance levels on social care processes are variable (TS 2,3,4,6,7,14)
- Whilst QA processes are stronger, regular auditing of cases by managers is more variable – although activity has increased target levels of case file audits are not yet being met.
- High numbers of agency staff results in lack of consistency and continuity of workers. Recruitment of experienced social workers remains challenging. Significant investment in additional social workers and a grow your own recruitment strategy is gradually improving the stability of the workforce in Children's in Need, including increasing the number of permanent staff and reducing reliance on agency staff

- In relation to Team Around the Family, further work is needed in the use of the Common Assessment Framework by all agencies.
- Long term placements stability for CLA, who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years, is below target. Action is being taken to minimise placement moves. Note that some placement moves are positive e.g. to achieve independence of a step towards permanency (TS 9)
- CLA educational achievement is weak and is a focus for the restructured Virtual School to be established. The Virtual School Team is working with schools and social workers to reduce absence and exclusions for individual children (TS17-19, TS 25,26,27)
- Complaints are low but need to improve timeliness of response
- 79.9% of initial conferences have taken place within 15 days of strategy discussion or referral. Although still above target, there has been a reduction of 6% from Q1 to Q2 and action is being taken to improve (TS 3)
- The target level of adoptions has not been met but the service is confident of meeting it based on current plans for permanency (TS 15)
- CLA reviews and CP conferences within timescale has dropped due to some falling just outside required timescales – management action is being taken to improve this (TS7, TS 4)
- The service can demonstrate improving outcomes for care leavers in terms of levels of education, training and employment and settled accommodation but is not yet reaching target levels – the Q1 position was particularly low because not all information had been gathered. This remains a priority for improvement (TS10)
- Similar improvements are needed in levels of young offenders not in education employment or training (TS27)
- The quality and timeliness of initial health assessments for CLA remains a significant challenge. Some recent improvement in annual reviews, but initial assessment timeliness remains low and could impact adversely on the inspection outcomes for Children and Families and the Council overall (TS12-14) . This will be the top priority for the newly commissioned CLA health service.

2.5 Scorecard is attached as an enclosure

2.6 Following the Self Assessment and the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, Children and Families Directorate have drawn together a set of improvement priorities for the coming 2 years. These are set under the Child Journey Themes, which were agreed by the Council in 2012. Detailed actions for Service Managers and teams have been identified which will inform the Performance Management of services as well as individuals, so that weaker areas are addressed at a fast pace. Annex B sets out the strategic improvement priorities for Children and Families.

Financial Implications

None directly in respect of this report

Performance Issues

The Children and Families scorecard provides the performance of the Directorate against key national indicators and local targets.

Environmental Impact

None directly in respect of this report

Risk Management Implications

If an Ofsted inspection finding for Harrow places the Council services for Children and Families to be inadequate, it could have significant implications on the resources and reputation of the Council.

Equalities Implications

Children and Families Services support the most vulnerable groups within Harrow.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name:

Jo Frost, Finance Business Partner -
Children's Services

Date: 27th November 2014

on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Ward Councillors notified:

NO

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Chris Spencer, Corporate Director Children and Families
Farzana Aldridge, Head of School Improvement

Background Papers:

Children and Families, Self Assessment – Harrow Council

Ofsted Inspection Framework for the inspection of services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers – Ofsted

Children and Families Scorecard Q1 and 2 – Harrow Council