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Paul Hewitt
Corporate Director, Peoples Services
Harrow Council, Civic Centre, 2nd Floor, South
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Sean TARPEY
Senior HMI, London

Dear Paul,

Thank you and your staff for their active participation in this year's annual engagement meeting. The discussion about current performance and the actions you are taking to develop your services was very useful. Please see below some brief notes of the meeting that I hope encapsulates the key points.

Note of social care annual engagement meeting on 4 April 2019

Attending:

Paul Hewitt: Corporate Director People Services
Peter Tolley: Divisional Director, Children and Young People Services
Parmjit Chahal: Head of service Children's Access Service
Dionne Thomas: Head of Service Children in Need
Barbara Houston: Head of Corporate Parenting
Mark Scanlon: Head of Early Support and Youth offending services
Neil Harris: Head of Quality Standards and Service Improvement
Mellina Williamson-Taylor: Virtual School Head Teacher
Sean Tarpey, Senior HMI Social Care, London Region

Recent focused visit:

We commenced the meeting by reflecting on the experience and learning from the focused visit that took place in October 2019. The focused visit considered your 'front door arrangements' including the decision making within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). You stated that you were pleased with the outcomes found which I agreed given the substance of the letter were generally very positive and entirely indicative of a 'good' local authority. You reflected that for some staff and managers the visit was intense. It was pleasing you found the work and attitude of the inspectors helpful and that staff appeared comfortable being spoken to by

inspectors. You recognised and agreed that the three emerging areas to improve practice namely, partner engagement in strategy meetings, improved auditing and the better evaluation of early help services were fair and that you are already sighted on these as reflected in your initial self-assessment. You have since incorporated these more explicitly in your re-newed self-assessment that we went on to consider.

Self-assessment:

I commented on the ease and accessibility of your self-assessment document. It is well laid out for the reader, giving broad detail on matters such as leadership and governance, commissioning and quality as well as national and local priorities. The assessment then gives more detail in specific service areas usefully marrying commentary with information including statistics and comparisons were this is helpful or anchors a point. It is useful that the self-assessment can be seen in context with other multi-agency plans and/or initiatives. The section on demographics and services to children helpfully contextualises the challenges within the borough not least with respect to ethnicity as almost 70% of children and young people within the borough are from minority ethnic groups and 88.4% of your school population is classified as belonging to an ethnic group other than White British.

The evaluation goes on to highlight the key areas for further development incorporating the findings from the focused visit. You also highlight what you consider your top three outcomes for the year pertaining to strengthened partnerships, implementation of the workforce strategy and a range of initiatives to help prevent children becoming looked after unless this was the only venue to secure their personal safety. We will return to these issues later.

You also highlight and make evident the key risks for the year ahead and we discussed if these were shared across the Department. You assured me these were not only identified by senior managers in isolation but much rather from staff following a number of engagement activities to elicit their views. Unsurprisingly the challenges of austerity and knife crime are writ large across the workforce. More locally the provision of SEND services and developments to the landscape post LSCB's reflect national and political priorities.

Innovations, pilots and good practice:

Within Harrow you continue to demonstrate and embrace opportunities to improve practice. These are well documented within the self-assessment. However, I note your further work to consolidate and expand upon the Parenting Assessment Manual Software (PAMS). I know you hope this will improve the agility of your local responses linked to the public law outline and other legal proceedings.

In similar vein both the digital fingerprinting pilot and that of the alcohol breathalysers continue to show promise and external evaluation is positive. For these reasons it is likely the scope of such work will be broadened.

Your work with the Romanian Embassy and Ministerial leads for safeguarding has further strengthened your work in this area. The development of agreed protocols to manage casework is a significant achievement.

You tell me that you have secured funding from a DfE innovation fund to appoint a specialist female genital mutilation specialist who works within the MASH. It is notable that you have since secured your first female genital mutilation Protection Order. You have now entered phase three of the Harrow Safer Relationship Programme and report that the proof of concept is now met. For this reason, you will expand the cohort of couples with whom you work focusing on the issues of domestic abuse alongside underlying issues including drug and alcohol misuse. You are hopeful this work undertaken jointly with the Metropolitan Police Service will be sustained as clinicians from the Asian Counselling service receive training.

The Keeping Families Together initiative is now funded through the base budget following a successful pilot that focused on preventing children entering the care system or to be successfully reunified with family given ongoing support. The success of the initiative is reflected in the falling numbers of looked after children which now stands at an approximate figure of 160 from the higher figure of 211 in March 2017.

Core business:

I think it is fair to reflect that emboldened by your detailed self-assessment we rather 'cantered' through issues of core business highlighting notable successes or stubborn issues in so doing. For this reason, the summaries are brief:

- **Leadership and governance**

You inform me that Harrow continues to 'reap the benefits' of strong political and corporate focus. This is illustrated by committed and targeted support to Children and Young People's Services. The position of the DCS as head of the People's Service Directorate ensures that there are increasing opportunities for integrated structures as exemplified by the commissioning arrangements for the children and young adult's disability service. It is of note that permanent appointments have now been made following the departures of the former CEO and Corporate Director of Children's Services. Service plans are in place at all levels of the organization and feed in to individual appraisals and consideration of succession planning. For this reason, you believe workforce planning is strong as evidenced by the proportion of

permanent staff. Your use/reliance on agency staff is at 16% set aside the London average of 26%. Vacancy rates also compare favourably.

- **Commissioning and quality:**

Broadly speaking you feel you have maintained progress in this area in the past year. Examples of success exist for example in relation to your carers strategy that involved extensive consultation with young people prior to its implementation. Other examples have seen a focus on health assessments for children looked after and the redesign of the Children's Advocacy Service. The latter service has received positive feedback regarding the quality of advocates and the increasingly innovative ways they are seeking to hear the voice of the child. Robust monitoring of health visitor and school nursing contracts seem to have been both timely and impactful. I was powerfully struck by the reporting that the percentage of children who turned 15 months in the quarter who received a 12-month review by the age of 15 months has leapt from 7.6% to 86% from quarter 2 to quarter 3.

Your quality assurance framework is well embedded, and we discussed that within the first three quarters of this year 139 audits were completed across the service, commendably 28 young people or family members were able to contribute their views. Positive areas of practice evidenced good direct work with children and the increasingly stability of the workforce demonstrates such work achieves improving and better outcomes.

On the flip side more work is required to promote professional curiosity and explore with the 'whole/wider' family emerging information including risk and resilience factors. Some stubborn issues remain and although staff report they are well supported by active and experienced managers only 74.1% received supervision in line with departmental expectations. I note the figure is improving. Similarly, there is more work to ensure chronologies are produced, contain the right information and are used to inform practice. Similarly, management oversight within the audit sample was 75.4%. It is the challenge for Harrow to achieve consistency and ensure the good practice (much of which is evident) embeds as standard practice. Nevertheless, I was struck in this section that the auditing activity does strive to raise and maintain standards.

- **Education strategy and support to schools**

Your input into this section is very thorough running to nearly ten pages and will I know be of great interest to colleagues with a deeper knowledge and understanding of the detail. For this reason, I will pass the evaluation to education colleagues in preparation for the education bespoke meeting later in the year.

- **Early Support:**

I am aware that your model of service delivery was implemented in December 2016 and you report that this is now well embedded. Your aim is to deliver services within the heart of local communities seeking to deliver services to groups within existing facilities rather than as was traditional in the home setting. Your aim was to increase/maintain the provision of services within the confines of reduced budgets. You know believe you have extensive 'reach' and the service is working well. The work is supported by several service pathways including early help assessments. You are looking to better understand and evaluate what works well in the borough through an evaluation tool Outcome Stars which will fit well with the Mosaic management tool used extensively across the service. For older children you are seeking to establish an overarching Youth Engagement strategy and work to this goal is ongoing.

Together with Families (TWF) is Harrow's response to the Troubled Families programme. It was through TWF that the Keeping Families Together service was established building on the principles of a whole family approach to intensive intervention. To date Harrow has included over 1500 families in the Together with Families programme of which sustained progress can be securely evidenced for 480 families.

Within Harrow the number of children with LD, ASD and challenging behaviours has increased steadily since 2015. You tell me this has led to a growth in demand for children with SEND requiring additional support in mainstream or special schools. To meet this demand locally 151 additional places have been identified in Harrow including the expansion of three special schools. You believe that further demand is projected for an additional 120 places. This is putting substantial strain on already tight resources. You have not yet had your SEND inspection and wondered when it might be. My truthful answer is 'I don't know!' but advise that any preparation with partner agencies is likely to be helpful.

- **Children's Social Care: Referral, Assessment, Children in Need and Child Protection:**

Referral activity is increasing although it remains manageable. Other figures are unremarkable save for the high percentage (98%) of assessments completed within 45 days which constitutes good practice. You describe in your self evaluation your MASH as a strong platform that promotes getting it right first time' and the focused visit supported this assertion. It is noticeable that within this aspect of service audit and performance activity feature strongly and the service is staffed with permanent workers. This somewhat bucks a London trend.

Within the Children Access Service you have located your multi-agency violence, vulnerability (VVE) and exploitation team. You report you are very pleased with its progress believing in particular that the daily VVE meeting have greatly improved information sharing. You have agreed the remit of the MACE should be extended and are progressing developments to this end. You tell me that the contextual safeguarding model is being further developed to be aligned with Safe Harrow and LSCB initiatives. Alongside these strategic developments you continue to develop a range of meetings where individual young people at risk of VVE are discussed following the Victim, Offender, Location and Themes model (VOLT).

We discussed the improvements to strengthen the expertise in the MASH including the appointment of a specialist female genital mutilation worker. We have previously commented favourably on the inclusion of an education lead within the MASH and the positive impact this has to engage schools in all safeguarding activity. I was pleased this was further recognised within the focused visit and continue to see this post as a best practice exemplar others could, or indeed should, follow. We discussed briefly the work of the First Response Team including the high priority it affords child in need cases.

- **Children looked after:**

Generally service delivery in this area remains strong. Relevant data shows improvements in placement stability (despite a more complex cohort), health assessments and the completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ's). You report that as you have been successful in reducing your overall children looked after figures the proportion of UASC within that cohort as well as care leavers has grown. You are looking to work collaboratively with other London Boroughs to best support this vulnerable young group. You report that Senior Leaders including politicians are ambitious and pro-active corporate parents. As a result, there has been improved access to educational support and information communications technology (ICT). You also report an increased focus on personal education plans and improved pathways for mental health support through Harrow Horizons.

- **Care leavers:**

Your own provisional data suggests that currently 90% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation and 65% in Education, Employment or Training. This is above statistical neighbours and national averages. The local offer to care leavers has been updated following consultation with young people and is informed by the requirements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Leaving Care Charter has also been updated and care leavers receive Council Tax relief.

You inform me there is a comprehensive Preparation for Independence Programme for care leavers to include coverage of such topics including, finance, relationships, education, employment and training. You provide in addition to personal advisors specialist advice from a commissioned service (Prospects) as well as an independent advocacy service. Alongside young people you commission two Leaving Care Forums each year where you inform me older care leavers may discuss and explore their own personal journeys while offering advice and support to younger peers. There is an increasing number of care leavers attending further and higher education including University (16%).

- **Missing children:**

In keeping with many other London Boroughs you have adopted the Pan London Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Protocol. Missing children data is reviewed and analysed by the VVE sub group of the HSCB. You, as a partnership, have invested in E-CINS, a cloud based software package to further support the sharing of information promoting improved analysis of vulnerable children who go missing, the reasons why and known associates. You convene multi-agency strategy discussions for individual children and have promoted with the police 'grab packs' to help to quickly locate and safeguard children where possible. Information regarding missing children is shared with the CSE co-ordinator who may in the light of other contextual information escalate matters for a strategy discussion or bespoke vulnerability assessments.

- **Domestic abuse:**

You evidence through section 3 of your self assessment your work and commitment to address and reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse in all of its insidious forms. I note that the HSCB maintains an appropriate focus on this work that includes the Tavistock couples counselling partnership alongside perpetrator programmes delivered through the Safer Harrow partnerships.

Summary:

You recognise within your own 'final words' section of the self evaluation that the challenge for your good services is to sustain your high standards. The self-evaluation, thoughtful contribution to this meeting with a senior management team that is both stable and able provide firm building blocks for this to occur.

Thank you once more for your contribution to a constructive and interesting meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean Tarpey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S" and a period at the end.

Sean Tarpey
Senior HMI (social care)

Please note: This letter is not published by Ofsted and the comments made have not been evaluated as part of an inspection.