

12 December 2017		ITEM: 14
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Ofsted Inspection Action Plan - Update		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director for Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director for Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director for Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This covering report provides an update on the progress against the Ofsted Inspection Action Plan.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny note and provide comment on the current progress and direction of travel in completing the required actions from the Ofsted Action Plan.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** All local authorities in England are currently inspected under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) over a three-year cycle. The Children's Safeguarding Board is inspected at the same time. The Ofsted inspection of Thurrock services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers took place between 22.2.16 – 17.3.16.
- 2.2** In response to the recommendations of the Ofsted Report the department completed an action plan detailing what work would be undertaken to address the areas of improvement. The improvement plan is currently being refreshed to acknowledge actions that have been completed and to keep a focus on further improvements required going forward. The refreshed improvement plan and action plan will be presented to the next overview and scrutiny committee.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Services to children, young people and families in Thurrock were judged to 'Require Improvement' by Ofsted. The inspectors stated in their report that 'children and young people were found to be safe during this inspection, with none identified who were at immediate risk of significant harm without plans and services being in place to reduce these risks and to meet their needs'.
- 3.2 Ofsted made 16 recommendations in relation to practice improvements that were required in Thurrock. Other key areas of concern included:
- 3.3 The instability of the social care workforce. The service was dependent on a high proportion of agency social workers, although it was acknowledged that a range of creative ideas had been implemented to improve recruitment; there has been a significant improvement made in this area, particularly in the recruitment of permanent Team Managers in the Children and Families Assessment Team (CFAT) and the Family Support Teams (FST). There has been an increase in the permanent recruitment of Social Workers in CFAT, FST and the Team for Disabled Children, who no longer have any agency staff members. The number of agency social workers has reduced from 58 to 42 and permanent recruitment is ongoing.
- 3.4 The service for children looked after was not consistent and too many children became looked after on an emergency basis. A new service has been established to strengthen our approach to early intervention and prevention. Previous audits have suggested that the number of emergency admissions has decreased. However this area of activity will continue to be monitored to ensure that progress continues to be made. A review of the impact of our Brighter Futures Prevention Service will be undertaken later this year to examine the impact of the service.
- 3.5 More needed to be done to increase the number of in-house foster carers as too many children and young people were placed out of the borough; The outcome of IMPOWER audit and review has informed a new recruitment strategy. It is estimated that by March 2018, 12 new families would be added to the fostering portfolio. Currently, more children are now placed with in-house foster carers than Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). A greater proportion of children are being placed within Thurrock but more needs to be done to improve in this area. A business case is being developed to 'invest to save' with a dedicated recruitment team to target additional recruitment of foster carers. A new fostering recruitment drive has been launched in October, with a new set of publicity material with the strap line 'Make a Difference'. The event in Grays town centre was very well attended and we will be monitoring in the coming months, how many fostering households we recruit from this event. There will also be a fostering recruitment presence at the shop in Lakeside for the Give a Gift event.
- 3.6 Management oversight needed to be improved and regular supervision needed to be in place. The service has in place reporting mechanisms to

report on the regularity of supervision within required timescales (supervision to take place monthly), this information is scrutinised at the monthly performance meetings chaired by the Assistant Director, with all Service Managers in attendance. Remedial action is taken as required following these meetings. A programme of monthly audits are in place and the audit template has a section on management oversight and supervision for each case audited. Current performance indicates that more work needs to be undertaken to improve the quality of management oversight. Further work is being undertaken to clarify expected management standards and to drive performance to be consistently good. A Team Managers' monthly performance report has been introduced since September and there is a section for the managers to report on monthly supervision requirements with opportunity to set out improvements in place within each team.

- 3.7 The organisation's use of management information and quality assurance was poor and this impedes improvement; Social Care managers have advised and supported the data team to provide a performance data digest and that is regularly scrutinised by the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director of Children's Services on a monthly basis to drive up performance. There is a Quality Assurance Framework for auditing cases and using the learning from these, with quality as its main focus. However, whilst there has been some investment into ensuring that there is a full suite of data available to managers and that there is regular monthly audit activity taking place, there is still a need to imbed this fully into practice.
- 3.8 Thurrock had its first concurrent fostering to adopt placement in April 2017. The second concurrent fostering to adopt placement has recently taken place. The permanency planning for these children has taken place prior to birth. Further work is being done to streamline the pathways of children in care to increase the number of adoptions and reduce the number of children, below 5 years old, leaving care with Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's).
- 3.9 A project is being started to target looked after children whereby SGO's (and adoption) could be used to provide permanency for those children who have been in foster care for a period of time. This will have the effect of achieving permanence for children and reducing the number of children looked after.
- 3.10 The improvement Board continues to meet monthly to ensure that all of the recommendations and other areas for improvement have been implemented. The Board is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
- 3.11 Ofsted is introducing a new inspection framework from January 2018, the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Those authorities who were judged Requires Improvement will receive a standard inspection (2 weeks duration) once in a 3 year period and up to 2 focused visits in-between inspections. The Ofsted focused visits will be of a particular area of service or cohort of children. A narrative letter will be published following a focused visit and these visits will inform Ofsted's decision about when to inspect a local

authority. Additionally, there will be an annual conversation with Ofsted and social care departments will be expected to submit an annual self- evaluation which must evidence improvement. While this is discretionary, failure to do so could trigger a full inspection of the service.

- 3.12 Effective progress continues to be made across all areas of the plan and additional input is being provided to address those areas that require this to remain on track. For example, the Signs of Safety training is being rolled out to all staff, this will focus on a strengths based approach to working with families that will drive up assessment quality and provide a consistent framework of intervention. There is still a strong focus on analysing and understanding our data in relation to missing children and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and we continue to utilise additional resources for these tasks to ensure that Return Home interviews and CSE risk assessments are completed in a timely way. The quality and timeliness of these continue to improve.

4. Consultation

- None

5. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 5.1 The completed action plan will allow the council to meet and improve upon its core statutory functions in the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor for Children's Safeguarding

There are no Legal implications

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

Whilst there are no direct implications from this report, the work to implement the Ofsted Inspection Action Plan will strengthen our ability to meet and improve the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers

6.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

7. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Ofsted Single Framework Inspection Report dated 24.5.16

8. **Appendices**

- None

Report Author:

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Children's Services