

11 July 2017		ITEM: 7
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Ofsted Inspection Action Plan - Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Clare Moore – Strategic Lead- Prevention.		
Accountable Head of Service: Sheila Murphy - Children's Social Care (CATO)		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson – Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This covering report provides an update on the Ofsted Inspection Action Plan. A copy of the updated action plan is attached to this report.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny consider the current progress and direction of travel in completing the required actions from the Ofsted Action Plan.**
- 1.2 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny receive assurance that action plan continues to deliver the required improvement.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 All local authorities in England are inspected under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) within a three-year period. The Children's Safeguarding Board is inspected at the same time. The Ofsted inspection of 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. The updated action plan is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

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 in Thurrock 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 are required in Thurrock. Other key areas of concern included:

- 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 service for children looked after was not consistent and too many children became looked after on an emergency basis: A number of audits have been undertaken in this area and has concluded that the numbers of emergency placements have decreased and it is anticipated that they will continue to do so as the Brighter Futures, prevention agenda becomes fully imbedded.
- 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; there continues to be a strong focus on the recruitment of Foster Carers which has seen a rise of 17 newly approved carers since April 2016. 12 Foster Carers have either resigned, retired, or have been deregistered, which gives a net increase of 5 foster families.
- Management oversight needed to be improved and frontline staff had to be supervised regularly to improve the quality of practice; there is now a management system that records the frequency of supervision which has helped to drive up the performance in that area. Prior to these quantitative monthly reports, there was a reliance on the qualitative evidence from case audits. It is important for the department to combine the quality of supervision from the outcome of audits and the frequency to gain a more in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of management oversight and scrutiny of cases.
- 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

monthly performance data digest that is 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 utilising 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.

- 3.3 Training for all social workers to ensure permanence work with children starts earlier and that delay is avoided. There have been a number of workshops with practitioners and managers focusing on Permanency Planning and the need to focus on this at the earliest stage of the child's journey. Permanency planning for children is also tracked on monthly basis by Senior Managers to avoid drift and delay. An ambitious target was set to reduce the 3 year average from 601 days (2015/16) to 500 days (2016/17) for a child coming into care to the date of permanency, however the year to date performance is 362 days impacted positively on previous years' by reducing the 3 year average time by 6 months 452 days. This performance evidences effective management oversight, robust adoption tracking, streamlined Linking and Matching processes and availability of adopters due to the Coram Adoption Partnership.
- 3.4 The Action Plan to address the recommendations made by Ofsted has previously been presented to Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 3.5 A final copy of the Action Plan was shared with Ofsted.
- 3.6 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. The Portfolio Holders for Children and Adults and Education and Health continue to provide a further layer of oversight and challenge through monitoring progress against the action plan on a monthly basis.
- 3.7 Ofsted is currently consulting on a new inspection framework where it is proposed that those authorities who were judged Requires Improvement will receive another inspection within three years. In addition, it is anticipated that new modular inspections will be undertaken in the next year. The modular inspections are carried out over 2-3 days to test whether authorities are making the requisite progress with their improvement plans. Furthermore, social care departments will be expected to submit an annual self- evaluation to Ofsted which must evidence improvement. While this is discretionary, failure to do so could trigger a full inspection of the service.
- 3.8 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. These quality and timeliness of these continue to improve.

4. Consultation

N/A

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

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

There are no financial implications

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

6.2 Legal

There are no Legal implications

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

6.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

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

N/A

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 to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Ofsted Single Inspection Report & Local Authority Action Plan – Final updated April 2017.

Report Author:

Clare Moore

Strategic Lead

Children's Social Care