

10 October 2017		ITEM: 11
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Ofsted Inspection Action Plan - Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Social Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Social Care		
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) 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 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 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.
- 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. Tracking systems are now in place to streamline the recruitment processes and to progress all enquiries in a timely, efficient manner in order to sustain the interest and motivation of prospective carers. There were 10 new approvals between April 2016 and March 2017; between April 2017 to August 2017, 22 new applications were accepted. Of the number, 9 families have been approved and 12 applications are at different stages of the assessment process. Since April 2016, 19 carers have been added and 12 Foster Carers have either resigned, retired, or have been deregistered, which gives a net increase of 7 foster families. It is estimated that by March 2018, 12 new families would be added to this portfolio. Currently, more children are now placed with in-house foster carers than IFA.
- 3.6 The launch of a new recruitment drive is scheduled to take place in October at Grays town centre. Thurrock fostering placement analysis from 2015 to 2017 predicts that between 200 and 250 children require foster placements

annually. In-house placement capacity has increased from 85 places at the time of Ofsted inspection, to 130 places currently. However about 100 children are still placed with independent Fostering Agencies. The strategy therefore is to increase the In-House foster placement capacity of 80 carers by 20% annually for the next 3 years. The intended outcome is that by 2020, Thurrock should be able to place up to 80% (230) of all children in care with In-House Foster Carers. To achieve this, a net increase of 45 new fostering household must be added to the current portfolio over the next 3 years.

- 3.7 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 for 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.
- 3.8 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 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 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.
- 3.9 Following series of workshops, children social workers are responding positively to a culture of early permanency. Social workers involved with children subject to the Public Law Outline process are required to attend permanency planning meeting for advice and guidance. The tracking system introduced has made a real difference in early permanency, particularly for children suitable for adoption. Due to effective management oversight, robust adoption tracking and streamlined linking processes, the current adoption performance, over the 3 year average, is below England and Eastern Region average. Of significant note is the 'Year To Date' (YTD) for 2016/2017 is below the DfE target. This trend, if sustained, will make Thurrock one of the best performing authorities (for adoption timeliness) in England by 2020.
- 3.10 Thurrock had its first concurrent placement in April 2017. The case was a

particularly complex but the department was praised by the high court judge for the steps taken to achieve early permanency for the child. The second concurrent placement has recently taken place and, within the next month, we expect to our third concurrent placement. The permanency planning for all of these three 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.

- 3.11 Post Adoption and Special Guardianship support has been expanded to offer ongoing direct support to families to minimise crisis, disruptions, and breakdown. The offer is also extended to parents who require support to deal with the loss of children through adoption or special guardianship. There is a planned launch of the core offer in October 2017.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 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 without notice and 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.
- 3.14 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

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

There are no financial implications

6.2 Legal

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

There are no legal implications

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Manager

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)

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:

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