

<b>7 July 2020</b>		<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Update on Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## Executive Summary

This report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the update to Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan, following the Ofsted ILACS Inspection last November, which resulted in a 'Good' judgement in all areas.

On 4 February 2020 the previous Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help, Sheila Murphy, provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with details of the recent Ofsted ILACS Inspection process and outcomes. Following the Ofsted ILACS Inspection Report which was published on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019, Thurrock Children's Services updated its Development Plan, to reflect the recommendations of the inspection and to drive further improvement of the service.

Specific areas for improvement identified within the Ofsted Report:

- Planned transitions and closer collaboration with adult services needs to happen earlier for disabled young people and care leavers.
- Timeliness of initial health assessments when all children come into care.
- Alignment and effectiveness of systems that support children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care, to ensure that children can tell their stories.

These areas for development are explored in more detail in Section 3, below.

The new Development Plan incorporates these areas for development (above) as recommended by Ofsted within their inspection report, and also includes areas for

development which have been identified through self-evaluation by the Senior Management Team.

Sheila Murphy provided a draft of the updated Development Plan to Members on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020, seeking any comments or suggestions. This document was further updated and subsequently was sent to Ofsted for their consideration on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Ofsted confirmed they were satisfied with *Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan* and this document is now in use. It is reviewed regularly to measure our progress against the objectives within the Development Plan.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are conversant with the updated *Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan*, following the Ofsted Inspection in November 2019, which will be used to monitor and measure further development of the service.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 Thurrock Children's Services previous Ofsted inspection was in February 2016, when Children's Social Care was judged to be 'Requires Improvement'.

2.2 Prior to the Ofsted Inspection in November 2019, Thurrock Children's Services had been measuring its progress against an earlier version of the Development Plan. This was successful in enabling Senior Managers to evaluate the performance and practice in key areas of the service that had previously been identified for improvement. Our sustained focus on the Development Plan contributed to the 'Good' Ofsted judgement in all areas of the inspection. While we are very happy with the Ofsted outcome, we remain focused on continual improvement of the service to ensure the Children and Families of Thurrock receive the best possible service and outcomes.

2.3 The Development Plan has been updated to reflect further areas for continuous development.

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 *Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan* is attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 Progress made to date in respect to the areas of improvement identified by Ofsted:

3.2.1 *Timeliness of initial health assessments when all children come into care needed to improve.*

Prior to Ofsted's visit in November 2019 a review was undertaken of the Initial Health Assessment process to identify blockages and issues preventing

timely assessments. It was identified the referral process for arranging an Initial Health Assessment (IHA) was arduous and difficult to complete within the required timeframe. Therefore, the referral process has been simplified. Parental consent is now sought at the time of the child being accommodated. A weekly tracking process has been implemented and collectively these actions have significantly improved the timeliness of referrals to Health from Social Care.

Scrutiny of the Initial Health Assessment processes has identified further difficulties relating to delays by Health in completing the assessments. We have consulted with Senior Health Commissioners and there has been some improvement with local Paediatrician capacity. The situation for children placed outside of the local health area remains variable and where possible, children are brought back to our local health service to avoid delay. Getting teenagers aged 16 and over, who are accommodated, to engage in an initial health assessment can sometimes be challenging and this is an area we are working on to make sure their health needs are assessed.

This remains a key area of focus however our actions implemented to date have brought about a significant improvement in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments. There remain some challenges about working closely with Health to bring about the required improvements and this will be raised at the next Health and Wellbeing Board on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

### *3.2.2 Alignment and effectiveness of systems that support children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care, to ensure that children can tell their stories.*

New strategies have been implemented to address the issue of children going missing. Strategy meetings are held to fully consider with partner agencies all available information, and presenting risks to the young person. These meetings aim to ensure that repeated missing events are disrupted and safety planning is put in place. A new Child Exploitation (CE) Risk Assessment has been implemented and positive feedback has been received from workers and the Police. The new Risk Assessment highlights that the language used is now trauma-informed, sensitive, and reflects support to children with greater emphasis on disruption and seeing families as victims, which supports the recommendations made by Ofsted in the inspection feedback. Young People's CE Risk Assessments are considered at regular CE tracking meetings.

We have enhanced our data reporting system to provide detailed information on Children and Young People who are missing or deemed to be at risk of Criminal and/or Sexual Exploitation. The data set will track the completion of CE Risk Assessments and strategy meetings. This data report should be available by the end of June 2020. The monthly performance meetings chaired by the Assistant Director will also be able to review the performance in respect to Missing Children and management of Child Exploitation.

Return Home Interviews (RHIs) are completed for children who have been missing, to understand the reasons for their missing episode, where they have been and how their time away was spent. RHIs aim to highlight risk-taking behaviours and potential criminal or sexual exploitation. We commissioned 'Inspire' in April 2020 to complete RHIs and there has been greater focus on engaging young people to complete these. The information gathered from RHIs will contribute to assessing the risk and safety planning.

Early indications are that the changes to practice are bringing about some significant improvements for these vulnerable young people, however this will need to be closely monitored to ensure there is sustained progress.

3.2.3 *Planned transitions and closer collaboration with adult services needs to happen earlier for disabled young people and care leavers.*

Following the Ofsted Inspection, a Working Group comprising of key members of Children's and Adult Social Care services was set up and an initial meeting was held in December 2019 to review and progress the Transition Core Offer. The subsequent meeting of the Working Group was unfortunately delayed, due in part to the Covid-19 Pandemic and has been deferred until July 2020. In the interim, an internal report has been completed exploring the current Core Offer and some key areas for further development. An Action Plan will be completed in the next four weeks, outlining how we will consult with partner agencies to enhance the Offer to young people during transitions.

The Aftercare Service has recruited four additional Personal Advisors and as a result all care leavers are now allocated an adviser at sixteen years of age. The Strategic Leads from the Aftercare and Children with Disabilities Services are working closely to develop a meaningful, seamless transition process for young people, from Children's Services to Adult Services. A meeting is planned with the CCG to explore how we can collectively ensure better outcomes for young people going through transitions. It is acknowledged that further work is required around transitions and there is a clear focus on achieving a positive outcome.

- 3.3 A bi-monthly Development Board is chaired by Cllr Halden, and attended by the Corporate Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director and Strategic Leads of Children's Social Care and Early Help. The Board reviews the *Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan*, closely examining the practice and performance of each service area.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of, and have confidence in, Thurrock Children's Services Continuous Development Plan.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

Members were consulted about the draft version of the Development Plan on

5 March 2020, and the updated Development Plan was shared with Ofsted on 15 April 2020.

**6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

None

**7. Implications**

**7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead, Finance**

There are no financial Implications to this report.

**7.2 Legal**

Implications Verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

There are no legal implications.

**7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications Verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer**

The Continuous Development Plan seeks to improve systems and processes in place for the health and wellbeing of children and families in our care. The Continuous Development Plan also contains information relating to children with SEND and how they will be supported. Data reporting systems have also been enhanced to support children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and children missing from home and care. Further details are found in the body of this report and within the plan.

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

None

**7.5 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):**

None

**8. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Thurrock Children’s Services Continuous Development Plan, April 2020

**Report Author:**

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Children’s Services