

## ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

27 April 2021

<b>Title:</b> Children's Social Care Annual Self Evaluation 2021	
<b>Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> None	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
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<b>Accountable Director:</b> April Bald; Operational Director Children's Care and Support; Chris Bush; Commissioning Director, Care and Support	
<b>Accountable Strategic Leadership Director:</b> Elaine Allegretti; Strategic Director, Children and Adults	
<b>Summary</b> <p>Each year, we are required to produce an annual self-evaluation of children's social care setting out our progress on improving the quality and impact of social work practice as well as our plans for the next 12 months to further improve practice. The self-evaluation is a key document in any inspection, as well as forming the basis of discussion at our annual engagement meeting with our OFSTED Link Inspectors.</p> <p>This report outlines the key messages from the 2021 annual self-evaluation.</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b> <p>The Assembly is recommended to:note the summary report and the full version of the 2021 annual self-evaluation of children's social care at Appendix A to the report.</p>	
<b>Reason(s)</b> <p>To assist the Council to achieve its statutory .</p>	

### 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Each year, we are required to produce an annual self-evaluation of children's social care. The self-evaluation outlines the quality and impact of social work practice and builds upon previous self-evaluations. The document is a key part of our commitment to continuous improvement of children services and vulnerable children's outcome and experiences. It draws upon existing documentation, activity data and performance for 2019/20 compared with national, London and similar areas. Where available, it also considers in year local data and performance.

- 1.2 At its heart, this self-evaluation critically evaluates quality and impact of social work practice through data, quality assurance activity, and considering best practice elsewhere to ask ourselves:
- a) What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority?
  - b) How do we know it?
  - c) What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
- 1.3 This report outlines the key messages from the 2021 annual self-evaluation.

## **2. Key Messages**

### Leadership and Management: Overview

- A challenging year, that has seen unprecedented demand in some areas of our services for children, including front door, children in need and those on plans for protection, and those with special educational needs (SEND) and disabilities.
- Investment from our corporate colleagues to help us keep up with unprecedented demand levels, which has resulted in higher than desired caseloads especially in front end of system and SEND / children with disabilities.
- A robust response to COVID-19 premised on our culture of putting the needs of the most vulnerable first, honest conversations, robust risk management and creating the conditions to work together as a team and with partners.
- COVID-19 has exacerbated our systems and strengths and challenges, and in some areas transformed the way we work for the better, especially with partners such as health and embracing technology in our ways of working.
- We continue to build a culture and conditions of a place where staff want to be and do their best. Ensuring we are child focused, build on and celebrate strengths, are honest about our challenges and see the strength of working together to deliver child and/or vulnerable adult centred support and challenge.
- Seeing the benefits of this through increasing permanence in our workforce, good morale and services that have remained safe and resilient throughout COVID-19.
- The next stage of our improvement journey will be focused around understanding and improving the lived experience of children and families, and understanding what difference we have made as leaders, managers, and workers, through our new approach to quality assurance being implemented in the next 12 months.
- As leaders, we are cultivating an ethos of compassion and kindness, relational working, and sense of accountability, underpinned by safe and effective partnership working and service delivery arrangements, to help us achieve our ambitions for local children and families.

### Early Help

- Early help continues to be priority for the children's improvement agenda, and although there has been progress on improving processes and strengthening management oversight, we continue to not see the improvements in children's outcomes, support, and demand.

- We have commissioned, jointly with Corporate, a review of the local Early Help arrangements. This will conclude in February 2021 and inform next steps in line with the local arrangement.
- A joint plan with corporate colleagues is in the process of being agreed that will deliver robust improvements in Early Help.
- A whole systems Early Help and multi -agency working arrangements is a priority of the new Safeguarding Partnership. Building on learning from our work regarding Domestic Abuse, to inform our approach.

#### MASH, Assessment, and Intervention

- MASH has returned to Children's Care and Support following a three-year tenure in the Council's Community Solution service. Its return in July 2020 has been swiftly followed by a restructure to increase capacity and realign to Children's Services, underpinned by a rapid improvement plan.
- MASH has seen some improvements in processes, compliance and consistency of decision making and stronger management oversight since its return with aspirations for the service to be the threshold expert and provide intelligence to drive the safeguarding system issues and improvements.
- The Assessment and Intervention service has significant distance travelled since the 2019 Ofsted inspection with improvements in practice, caseloads and greater stability and capacity of workforce, against conditions of high demand and the COVID-19 context.
- The pre-birth team continues to provide specialist capacity to oversee one of our most vulnerable group of children and parents, leading to improvements in early permanence, robust safeguarding and stronger interfaces, pathways, and relationships with key partners such as midwifery, with plans to strengthen further with the reconfiguration of our health visiting service.
- Audit shows quality of practice, assessments, strategy meetings and thresholds continue to improve, and consistency in practice continues to be a priority.

#### Children in Need or subject to a Child Protection Plan

- Conditions of unprecedented levels of demand are not conducive to improvement, arising from several factors including increased community needs pre and post COVID-19, rising numbers of vulnerable children and families being placed in the local area by others, and work still to do to strengthen the local early help service and infrastructure which is not impacting on demand.
- Although getting better, with ongoing improvement in variability and consistency of practice, planning, and intervention - children in need continues to be a practice improvement area, across children's care and support and its partners.
- Enhanced management oversight across child protection services with introduction of several panels, strengthened joint working and communication with child protection chairs and regular deep dives is enabling more consistent practice and improving quality of outcomes.
- Work to strengthen whole system oversight of children with disabilities and their safeguarding needs, including the setting up of a complex case panel and interface with safeguarding board and partners, particularly about neglect.
- Going from strength to strength in the development of multi-agency working around domestic abuse, a persistent feature of our community, including a new strategic partnership with Refuge, introduction of Stronger Together and

ongoing review of practice, through initiatives such as Domestic Abuse Commissioning and a review of MARAC.

- Building on our learning from domestic abuse improvements, using the learning and approach to reinvigorate our approach to neglect, especially partnership working, and our early intervention offer. This is a key priority of the new Safeguarding Board partnership. We are seeking to identify a strategic partner and our revised quality assurance thinking to drive and shape improvements in this area.

### Vulnerable Adolescents

- Continued investment in partnership and operational working arrangements to deliver a whole system and specialist approach to safeguarding and risk management of adolescents. This is underpinned by evidence of trauma, older neglect, and contextual working, and regularly reviewing what works and how do to things better to improve consistency of practice.
- Adapting our approach to respond to the challenges of practice, which in this area has substantially changed the landscape of risk and how we need to work together.
- Contextualised multi-agency working arrangements across adolescents including youth violence, child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, missing, children missing education, elected home education, Prevent and interface with the Youth Offending Service. A strong Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Group and Criminal Exploitation Group (CEG) that have remained distinct to ensure risk and issues get equal focus, as well as exploring areas and young people that overlap.
- Step up Stay Safe programme goes from strength the strength providing the vehicle for strategic and operational join up of support to young people and schools. This is underpinned by robust partnership working and innovation leading to improved, joined up work with young people, universal and specialist services, and voluntary sector resulting in interventions that reduce exclusions and improve at risk behaviour.

### Children in Care and Permanence

- Focus on permanence continues to be the cornerstone of our approach to ensure children come into care only when they need to and in a timely and planned way.
- Practice improvement continues although consistency and variability remain a priority. This is set against a trajectory of improving practice as identified by audit, good stability, and sustained performance in adoption.
- Innovative and exciting Specialist Intervention Service continues to develop interventions that reflect children, young people and community needs to help keep children in their families or return home.
- For those children in care, a strong in-house fostering service supported by the Mockingbird programme continues to keep placements stable and responding to the variety of needs of our children, with stronger Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) footprint evident.
- We continue to respond to the diversity of children in care population including upskilling the workforce to better support our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Also, in our anti-racist practice developments, ensuring our

care offer understands and meets the needs and experiences of our black and ethnic minority children and young people in care.

- Further work to do, but continued improvement in our partnership working, with education and health outcomes improving. A health led overhaul of our initial health assessment and reviews has led to significantly improved performance.
- Lead Member led Corporate Parenting Board going from strength to strength with honest conversations with children, young people, foster carers, and partners resulting in better understanding experiences, what needs to be different and agreed actions for improvement.

### Care Leavers

- New care leaver service that is young person centred in capacity and processes and that responds to new duties.
- Our work with care leavers underpinned by “no expiry date” ethos for our care and support offered, with strengthening relationships, good rates of keeping in touch, and celebration of their achievements.
- Continuing to work to support our most vulnerable care leavers, including increased communication through virtual ways of working, exploitation and safeguarding oversight and intervention.
- Increased investment in our enhanced local offer underpinned by better internal and external partnership working including Community Solutions, housing, inclusive growth, and brokerage with aspirations to work towards Care Leaver Covenant.
- Continuous improvement plan that reflects our strengths and challenges of our offer and practice following a helpful and inspirational visit from the National Improvement Advisor for Care Leavers – Mark Riddell owned politically and operationally at the highest level.

### Voices

- Good progress in strengthening consistency and visibility of child voice and lived experience.
- An active and greater presence of children in care council in our improvement and corporate parenting work including shaping virtual ways of working.
- Young people voices and experiences shaping our strategy and ways of working to big local and entrenched issues such as domestic abuse and structural racism.
- Embedding good communication with our workforce in our ways of working, keeping up morale, listening and responding to their views on our strengths and challenges.
- Proud of our work to share experiences and deliver tangible action that challenges and shapes our approach to anti-racism experienced by our workforce and service users across the whole of children and adults care and support service.

### Performance and Quality Assurance

- Quality assurance is adequate but enabled us to achieve the first aim of our improvement programme to get the basics right, to test and assess the impact of changes we have made. However, quality assurance is not sufficiently

driving the improvement and ambition to be consistently good or better in all areas of practice.

- We are undertaking an overhaul of our approach to quality assurance to ensure it is embedded in the lived experiences of children, their progress, outcomes, and the difference we make to their lives.
- The next 12 months will see us begin in our whole system realignment around understanding and progressing the lived experience, improving outcomes and what difference we made.
- Our approach will look at the child's journey across risk, assessment, planning, intervention, direct work and visits, review, and oversight.
- Our plan is that this approach extends wider than children's social care, to multi agency working, SEND and adults with plans in place to achieve this ambition.

### **3. Headline plans for the next 12 months**

- Tacking the fall-out from the pandemic and moving to recovery and then legacy planning – much of which is still emerging as we see the effects of the pandemic manifest in our communities.
- Move from the 'first-phase' Improvement Plan ('Getting the Basics Right') to the new phase two improvement plan that is focused on delivering outstanding services.
- Implement our new Quality Assurance Framework and the Care and Support Centre of Practice, setting the foundation for the next phase of our improvement journey.
- A joint plan with corporate colleagues is in the process of being agreed that will deliver robust improvements in Early Help.
- Develop further and embed our multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements – including a redesign of partnership (and Council) Early Help Services, ensuring more children and families get the right, targeted support early enough and are kept safe; and responding to the findings of the Domestic Abuse Commission.
- In response to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and a re-focus on the area of anti-discriminatory practice, to ensure that matters of race, culture, diversity and disproportionality are considered in both case planning and staff support. This needs to be reflected in all forms/case notes/ supervision notes/panel forms and management reports.

### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 The annual self-evaluation of children's social care has been considered and approved by the Corporate Strategy Group at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

### **5. Financial Implications**

Implications completed by Philippa Farrell, Head of Service Finance

- 5.1 The nature of the report is to inform a discussion with OFSTED. Section 3 outlines activities to be embarked upon over the next 12 months. These activities are to be met within the existing budget envelopes, considering the growth in the MTFs. It should be noted that this is an area at high risk due to the uncertainty on the impact of Covid. In addition, there is a risk that the redesigning of Early Help, which will

conclude in June, could result in additional costs but at this point these cannot be quantified.

## **6. Legal Implications**

Implications completed by Lindsey Marks Deputy Head of Law

- 6.1 Each year, OFSTED asks local authorities to produce and disclose a self-evaluation of social work practice with OFSTED and to meet with OFSTED regional representatives to discuss it. It is for each local authority to determine which documentation and information to draw on for the self-evaluation, but it should answer 3 questions (i) what the local authority knows about the quality and impact of social work practice in the local authority? (ii) How does the local authority know it? (iii) What are the local authority's plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice. It is for the local authority to determine which documentation and information to draw on for the self-evaluation and there is no prescribed format or content for the self-evaluation, but the self-evaluation should set out the main themes and learning.
- 6.2 OFSTED treats self-evaluations which identify weaknesses in practice, but where the local authority has credible plans to take clear, appropriate, and effective action in response as effective leadership that rather than an automatic trigger for an inspection or focused visit.

**Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:** None

### **List of appendices:**

- Appendix A: Children's Care and Support Self-Evaluation 2021