

CABINET

19 June 2018

Title: Children's Social Care Annual Self-Assessment 2017/18 and OFSTED Focused Visit of Children's Social Care	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Summary <p>This report serves two purposes. It introduces the first Annual Self-Assessment of Children's Social Care Services in Barking and Dagenham, as required under the new OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) regime. Written in the Spring of 2018, the self-assessment provides a detailed analysis of Children's Social Care Services and outlines plans and priorities for 2018/19. This report summarises the highlights and the self-assessment document is attached as Appendix A.</p> <p>The report also serves to provide an update to Cabinet on the outcome of the first OFSTED Focused Visit of Children's Social Care Services that took place in March 2018.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is recommended to note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) The first Annual Self-Assessment of Children's Social Care Services in Barking and Dagenham, including the service improvement and challenges contained within and the actions taken, as set out at Appendix A to the report;(ii) The areas identified as priorities for 2018/19 as set out in paragraphs 2.36 to 2.47 of the report; and(iii) The outcome of the first OFSTED Focused Visit of Children's Social Care Services that took place in March 2018, as set out at Appendix B to the report.	

Reason(s)

The Leader, Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services have statutory roles to protect children who are in need or risk of harm, as set out in national guidance. All Cabinet members and senior officers should act as Corporate Parents for our looked after children. This report is part of assuring their roles.¹

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The previous OFSTED Single Inspection Framework (SIF) of Local Authority Children's Services ceased at the end of 2017. This has been replaced with a new schedule and set of arrangements known as the Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework that will commence in early 2018.
- 1.2 This new framework introduces a 'proportionate and risk-based' inspection schedule that varies according to the most recent performance rating of the local authority. For Barking and Dagenham, this would be the 'requires improvement to be good' pathway, based on its last inspection in April–May 2014. The components of this new approach are:
 - Judgement inspections, which can be standard or short, and generally occur every three years;
 - Focused visits, which occur in the period between inspections (a Joint Targeted Area Inspection [JTAI] may replace a focused visit);
 - Annual Self-Assessment submissions, to be discussed at annual engagement meetings between OFSTED and the Local Authority;
 - Data from the OFSTED intelligence system (based on Annual Statistical Returns).
- 1.3 This report introduces the first Annual Self-Assessment for Barking and Dagenham Children's Services and introduces the outcome of the first Focused Visit conducted by OFSTED in March 2018.

2. The Self-Evaluation

- 2.1 In preparation for the first 'Annual Engagement Meeting' with OFSTED colleagues under the new framework, the first Annual Self-Assessment was written. This document is framed around the three key inspection areas and focuses on responding to three questions:
 - 1) What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
 - 2) How do you know it?
 - 3) What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

- 2.2 The annual engagement meeting does not result in a judgement of the local authority's performance and no output is published. The following sections of this report will summarise the key findings, strengths, and weaknesses of the first Self-Assessment.

What do we know about the quality and impact of our social work practice?

- 2.3 Overall, we judge the quality of social work practice as 'requires improvement' but, in some areas, this is improving to 'good'.
- 2.4 Both our internal audit regime and the most recent external audit of social work practice shows a trajectory of improvement. The rolling programme of internal auditing and quality assurance shows far fewer cases being judged as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement', and an inversely increasing number of cases are judged to be 'good'.
- 2.5 The external review noted that *'overall the work audited was of an adequate and often good quality and in a small number of cases it was outstanding'*. Recent audits judge over half of the plans in place for children in our care and those subject to child protection plans to be 'good'.
- 2.6 Overall, performance on key safeguarding indicators is being maintained or is improving, alongside an increase in demand, particularly in numbers of Children in Need and those subject to a Child Protection Plan. There does though remain some concern with a small number of indicators, which are discussed later in the report.
- 2.7 The response at the 'front door' of the service is judged to be effective. Audits show that thresholds are applied appropriately, and timeliness is good. More widely than this, our Early Help offer is well embedded in the borough, and this will be enhanced by the integration of many of our Early Intervention services under the Community Solutions umbrella. The quality of CAF Assessments (the multi-agency assessment designed to support families in need of help, but who do not meet the threshold for a service from Children's Social Care) is judged to be good.
- 2.8 Whilst the number of child protection investigations and the number of children subject to a child protection plan is high, and rising, thresholds are being appropriately applied and audits find that decision making is sound. This suggests that whilst the system is robust, demand is rising.
- 2.9 There has been a steady reduction in the number of children in care since the 2014 inspection. The rate per 10,000 has fallen from 82 to 66 in line with similar areas but higher than the national (60) and London (52) rates. Numbers have, however, started to slowly increase and demand models predict a further increase over the coming years. In the 2014 inspection, concern was raised about the number of children being taken into care under police protection. This has improved significantly.
- 2.10 There is evidence of effective joint-working between Legal Services and Children's Social Care, with the average duration of care proceedings within the family court improving, despite an increase in the number of actual proceedings.
- 2.11 Care leavers are well supported. The percentage of our Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training is improving and above average. The proportion of

our Care leavers in suitable accommodation is in line with similar areas, and work to increase accommodation options though both the private and social sector is beginning to yield results.

- 2.12 Serious Case Reviews (SCR) are broadly well managed – though there have been some delays in publication of the most recent SCR due to the complexity of the review itself. The Action Plan for the Child B SCR (2015) has been completed and learning from the Child C SCR (2016) has been clearly distilled and disseminated. Our LADO arrangements (for responding to allegations made against professionals working with children and young people) are robust and appropriately applied.
- 2.13 Operation Palm – the response to emerging safeguarding and radicalisation concerns in the borough – demonstrates a timely, thorough, and serious response to emerging safeguarding concerns. This is also the case with the recently emerging complex child-sexual exploitation issues which has resulted in an appropriate and timely launch of investigations in line with pan-London Child Protection Procedures.
- 2.14 Key to an effective safeguarding response is a strong, stable, and adequately resourced social workforce. Whilst also a considerable issue, good progress has been made in this area. The use of agency social workers has reduced to 38% (from 55% 2 years ago), and even greater progress has been made in recruiting to a permanent management structure.
- 2.15 The self-evaluation, naturally, identifies several areas requiring improvement. Whilst good progress has been made (described above), the proportion of agency social workers remains too high. Caseloads are beginning to increase – as demand rises – and this is being felt across the service, including amongst Independent Reviewing Officers (who chair our Child Protection Conferences and statutory reviews for our children in care).
- 2.16 Despite many areas maintaining or improving performance, performance against some of our key indicators is still a cause for concern. The percentage of children subject to a child protection plan being visited as regularly as they should be is below average, and Core Groups are not always being held on time.
- 2.17 Performance in some key areas for our looked after children is too variable. The timely completion of health assessments and Personal Education Plans (PEPs) fluctuates throughout the year and the consistency needs to be improved. Long-term placement stability i.e. children who have been in our care for some time not having to change placement, is not as good as we would like.
- 2.18 The timeliness of adoption performance requires improvement as reflected in our Adoption Scorecard, and the number of children adopted is declining year on year. Our adoption scorecard continues to show that children are waiting too long to be placed for adoption and experience delay against national targets. However, recent performance has shown a notable improvement.
- 2.19 As described earlier, many audit findings relating to the quality of practice show a positive direction of travel. There are, however, areas that require further improvement. The consistency of management of casework supervision is variable, as is the quality of recording on our electronic case recording system. It is expected

that the implementation of Liquid Logic in March 2018 will result in considerable improvements in this area.

- 2.20 The efficacy of the Corporate Parenting Group is undetermined, with little in place to demonstrate impact. The work of the MPCG has been governed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy (April 2015-April 2018) and an annual corporate parenting report is produced. The Corporate Parenting Strategy needs to be refreshed.
- 2.21 There is no current Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategy or Neglect Strategy. Data on missing children and performance has gaps and return home interviews have not all been carried out. The resource gaps have now been filled and a recovery plan is in place, and the CSE Strategy and Neglect Strategy are being drafted. Our response to the recently emergent complex CSE issues in the borough do, however, provide assurance that identification and response systems are in place and functioning.
- 2.22 Whilst the mechanisms are in place for capturing the view of our young residents, greater work needs to be done to ensure that this is being reflected in service design and practice change, including how the impact of this is evidenced.

How do we know it?

- 2.23 The Council has implemented commissioning and operational service blocks to provide increased scrutiny, challenge, and support, as well as ensuring value for money. Commissioning mandates are in place to monitor and evaluate progress against service objectives and priorities, subject to the leadership and management governance arrangements in place, with over-arching assurance being discharged in the usual way through Cabinet, Health and Wellbeing Board and Select Committees.
- 2.24 There is an effective and long-embedded performance management framework in place. As a result, all stakeholders at all levels of the organisation are routinely well briefed and have a sound grasp of performance and areas for improvement in social work. This forms a core part of briefings to the Director of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services (LMCS). A refresh of the wider assurance processes i.e. how the organisation receives assurance that statutory duties are being effectively discharged was completed in 2017.
- 2.25 To supplement this ongoing quantitative evaluation, there is also a well-embedded and robust audit and quality assurance framework and process in place. This has recently been reaffirmed in the new in the new Quality Assurance Strategy and Framework. This framework provides a comprehensive and robust quality assurance programme across Children's Care and Support and is used in conjunction with the Performance Management Framework to constantly assess the quality of practice and identify areas for improvement as a matter of business as usual.
- 2.26 Leadership and management arrangements are primarily governed through the Service Development and Integration Management Group and through regular reports to the Lead Member for Children's Services and the triumvirate of Corporate performance, assurance, and strategy groups.

- 2.27 Weekly meetings take place between the Lead Member for Health and Social Care Integration (the LMCS) and the DCS, Operational and Commissioning Directors and the members of the senior management team.
- 2.28 Scrutiny and challenge is routinely provided via the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board; the Corporate Parenting Group; Council Performance, Strategy and Assurance Groups, and quarterly performance challenge sessions (involving the LMCS). The Children's Select Committee provides additional scrutiny of Children's Care and Support.
- 2.29 Quarterly Safeguarding Triggers meeting with the BDSCB Chair, Lead Member, Leader of the Council, DCS, Adult SAB Chair and Chief Executive to scrutinise high level social care workforce data and performance and consider wider safeguarding efficacy.
- 2.30 The Local Authority and partner agency response to Serious Case Reviews is robust and well managed. Recently completed Serious Case Reviews have resulted in comprehensive multi-agency action plans and these have been effectively implemented. Thresholds are appropriately applied, and relevant processes are adhered to. SCR plans and case review monitoring reports on high risk cases are also produced for leaders, directors, and managers.
- 2.31 Operationally, effective arrangements are in place to ensure close monitoring and oversight of social work practice and performance.
- 2.32 A weekly updated performance dashboard comprising of key performance measures and caseloads is available to all social workers and managers. Regular casework supervision provided within the service's Framework for Supervision along with independent oversight from the Independent Reviewing Officers.
- 2.33 There is a fortnightly Practice Improvement and Outcomes Group (PIOG) for senior managers that focuses on policy, procedure, and practice improvement. This includes considering findings from audits and reviews and considering how best to embed the learning from these into everyday practice.
- 2.34 There are also monthly Quality Assurance and Performance management meetings, chaired by the Operational Director for Children's Care and Support.
- 2.35 The culmination of the systems in place is that leaders have a clear understanding of the performance, pressures, and issues in – and impacting upon - social work. Demonstrable organisational responses – such as the investment made to improve recruitment and retention, or the commissioning of a new ESCR system – because of this, are evident.

Our plans for the next 12 months

- 2.36 Our plans for the next 12 months fall into two, broad categories. The first is to build on the foundation of the business-as-usual systems and processes that are in place and delivering the gradual improvements that are evident. The second is to introduce some new initiatives designed specifically to address some areas requiring improvement as identified in the SEF, alongside delivering the ambitious targets set-out within the Council's Transformation Programme.

- 2.37 We will continue the work to increase the stability and permanence of our social workforce. The existing recruitment and retention strategy will continue to be delivered as we seek to attract new social workers into the borough. Our approach to 'growing our own' social workers will be expanded, and we will push hard to attract social workers from overseas.
- 2.38 We will deploy our new career progression framework and masterclass programme for social workers and we expect that this – alongside our priority retention incentives and key worker housing offer – will help to address the significant challenge of retaining high-quality social work practitioners.
- 2.39 On a more prosaic note, we will move towards a more locality-based organisation of our social work teams, aligning them more closely with other professionals across the partnership to deliver a more integrated, holistic response. It is along these lines that close professional relationships will be formed with our flagship Early Intervention service, Community Solutions.
- 2.40 The recently established Brokerage function will be rolled-out across the service. This function will not only free-up valuable social work capacity but will also deliver efficiencies and greater value for money. Our new electronic social care recording system (Liquid Logic) will 'go-live' during the coming year, delivering a significantly improved case-management system for our social workers.
- 2.41 The coming year will also see the continued roll-out of some key programmes to support children and families. This will include the implementation of the Pause Practice for work with women who have had children removed and to prevent repeat removals; Caring Dads groupwork aimed at supporting fathers who are a source of safeguarding concerns to focus more on the needs of their children, and the continuation of Mockingbird which is a project aimed at supporting foster carers and improving placement stability for looked after children.
- 2.42 During 2017/18 considerable work was undertaken to understand the root causes of the challenges we face in achieving timely adoptions for some of your children and young people. A plan has been developed to do just this, and the coming year will see this plan fully put into practice. This will, of course, run parallel to our joining Adopt London East (our local Regional Adoption Agency).
- 2.43 With Community Solutions reshaping our Early Intervention Services, we will be developing and implementing a new Early Help and Early Intervention strategy for our residents.
- 2.44 We have also recently developed a new LAC and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy designed to deliver improved outcomes whilst managing predicted demand and will be implemented in the coming year. This includes the establishment of a Social Impact Bond (SIB) to fund critical edge-of-care services as part of our wider strategy to manage the number of children and young people in the care of the Council.
- 2.45 In line with the new shape of the Council we will implement commissioning mandates and deliver improved outcomes alongside financial pressures and budget savings. Services that we buy will be ever more strongly linked to delivering the

outcomes that are required, and these outcomes will be informed by the needs and wishes of the service user.

- 2.46 Alongside this, action will be taken to strengthen our role as Corporate Parents; improve how we listen to the voices of our children and their families and improve permanency arrangements for those in our care.
- 2.47 All of this must be considered within the context of meeting a key challenge: coping with increased demand at a time of financial constraint. We know that our population is growing and that pressure on Children's Social Care is increasing. Many of the strategies that we have developed – or are developing – have this at their core, and the coming 12 months will shape the Council's response to this most fundamental of challenges.

3. OFSTED Focused Visit

- 3.1 In March 2018 OFSTED conducted the first Focused Visit of Children's Social Care Services.
- 3.2 Inspectors considered the arrangements at the 'front door' for children who need help and protection. Specifically, they considered contacts, referrals and decision-making within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). They also considered transfers to early help, immediate child protection enquiries and the quality of assessments for children in need.
- 3.3 Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including case discussions with social workers, managers, and a number of partner agencies. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information, as well as children's case records.
- 3.4 The findings from this visit, as summarised in the formal letter from OFSTED appended to this report, were very positive.

Summary of Findings

- 3.5 Inspectors found that there is strong corporate leadership to improve services to meet the diverse needs of children and their families and that this scrutiny enables better quality social work practice to embed. Senior leaders were found to know the service well, as shown by our recent self-assessment. Inspectors found evidence of sound social work practice in the MASH and assessment service, both of which have benefited from innovative actions to secure a more stable workforce. In the cases audited and in all other work considered, Children's Social Care was found to have acted appropriately to safeguard children and keep them safe.
- 3.6 The MASH was found to be working effectively to safeguard children. Partners are well engaged, which ensures timely information-sharing, the consistent application of thresholds and proportionate responses for children and their families who need help and support. Managers take appropriate decisions to safeguard children, and responses to immediate child protection concerns are timely. Children and families are appropriately referred to early help services, where a wide range of staff and resources are available to provide help and support. Inspectors noted delays for a small number of children in the sharing of information before early help services are

offered. However, effective systems are in place once children are provided with the help they need.

- 3.7 Work that goes through the MASH and into the assessment teams is well integrated and managed. Strategy discussions and child protection enquiries are timely and lead to effective action to safeguard children. Assessments are mostly thorough, incorporating the views of children and their families, and the diversity of their needs is appropriately considered. Management oversight is well embedded in the MASH, although more variable in the assessment service. However, all staff reported that their workloads are manageable, they have access to good quality training and are well supported so they can provide children and their families with effective direct help and services.

What needs to improve

- 3.8 There were, naturally, areas where OFSTED felt improvement was required.
- 3.9 The quality of referrals from partner agencies is not always comprehensive enough to identify the level of professional concern. This has a detrimental effect on some children as there is a delay in the delivery of services to them.
- 3.10 The use of qualitative information and auditing to inform practice developments does not yet drive and monitor further practice improvements.
- 3.11 Management oversight and supervision of case work in the assessment service needs to be better recorded on the IT system. This inhibits the understanding of what is working well to improve outcomes for children and measure whether such progress is sufficiently timely.
- 3.12 The thresholds between statutory services and early help services should be monitored during the bedding in of the new early help structures (i.e. in Community Solutions).
- 3.13 An improvement plan has been developed to address the range of recommendations made by OFSTED and has been incorporated into the pre-existing plan for service improvement. This plan is in the process of being delivered.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- OFSTED guidance on inspecting local authority children's services from 2018, can be found by clicking [here](#).

List of Appendices:

- Appendix A: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Children's Care and Support Annual Self- Evaluation 2018
- Appendix B: OFSTED Letter: Focused Visit to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Children's Social Care Services