

# Children and Education Select Committee



7 September 2018

## Surrey Children's Services Academy

**Purpose of report:** Scrutiny of Policy Development and Review

### Introduction:

1. This report sets out plans to establish an Academy to drive and co-ordinate learning and development across the whole children's workforce in Surrey.
2. The Academy will be a key mechanism for establishing a single, unifying model for everyone working with children and families in Surrey expressed through a common language.
3. The aim is to drive and support improvement and new ways of working, including an open, learning culture and more effective partnership working. It should help to make Surrey a more attractive place for managers and staff to work, with a consequential impact on retention and agency spend.

### Background

4. The transformation programme now underway for children's services includes work to strengthen the skills, knowledge and confidence of managers and staff working with children both in the Council and in partner agencies. The recent Ofsted report highlighted many areas where improvement in the capabilities of the children's workforce are essential. These include:
  - 4.1 the poor quality of assessment, planning and reviewing for children who are on statutory child in need or child protection plans
  - 4.2 the understanding and application of thresholds by external agencies which results in too many unnecessary low-level contacts and referrals, and overloads social workers in the multi-agency safeguarding hub
  - 4.3 confusion around internal thresholds in children's services meaning that large numbers of assessments are subsequently cancelled.
  - 4.4 managers at all levels not carefully and rigorously evaluating the progression of children's plans.
  - 4.5 Ofsted felt "a positive cultural change is starting to build a better understanding of risk, a learning-based practice model

and more confident, informed social work with children. However, these improvements are yet to be embedded, and have not yet led to sustained, widespread reform on the scale required.”

5. Turnover of staff remains a significant difficulty, compounded by the additional recruitment and retention pressures also faced by a number of other local authorities in south-east England in close proximity to London. To address this Surrey has some recruitment initiatives and an Academy for newly qualified social workers which has a strong reputation (Ofsted stated it is “highly regarded”). While successful, this Academy supports only a small subset of the children’s workforce. There is much less available to sustain staff once they move on in their Surrey careers. Recent analysis of turnover of staff who have attended the Academy gives some insight. Of the in-take of 23 staff in 2013, all have now left Surrey and had done so by 2016. While an exodus on this scale has not been repeated in more recent years (of the 2015 intake we have retained 75% of staff to date), there is evidence of staff supported by the Academy early in their careers leaving after around 2 years and taking their experience and knowledge with them.
6. Learning and development for the children’s workforce in the Council is currently fragmented. There is no strategic approach shared across professional boundaries and teams about how everyone needs to work in order to support children and families. There is no overall training needs analysis and no single plan for whole children’s workforce learning requirements. The link with quality assurance is not as strong as it needs to be in terms of ensuring that learning and development is addressing weaknesses in practice or checking the impact of training on practice back in the workplace.
7. As for training across agencies, the Safeguarding Children’s Board runs some multi-agency training. However, this is relatively small scale, is focused on some specific areas of development and is not joined-up with single agency training. Safeguarding Board training is not designed or delivered on a scale to establish and embed a common culture, approach and language across all managers and staff that will support children and families effectively.

<b>Scope of an Academy</b>
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8. The plan to address these concerns is to create an Academy for the whole children’s workforce. This will bring together learning and development across the Children’s, Schools and Families directorate, and also draw in relevant staff from across the Council who play a vital role in the lives of children and families such as Adult services, community safety, transport and those in corporate services: finance, legal services and other partners.
9. The Academy will also be open to partners and it will be important that it is seen as serving the whole workforce for children and families. This would include the NHS, police, schools, early

learning settings and the voluntary and community sector. Again, the managers and staff concerned would not only be those working full time with children and families, such as health visitors, but also staff whose client base is broader but who still have an impact on children and families – such as GPs, housing officers etc.

10. The new Academy would include within it the current and successful Surrey social work academy. The new Academy would support not only newly-qualified social workers but all staff to develop and grow throughout their careers and to develop managers and leaders of services and professional groups.
11. The Academy leadership would report into the Director Quality Assurance reinforcing the Academy's role in driving improvement, addressing development needs in the workforce and practice weaknesses.

<b>Objectives</b>
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12. The purpose of the Academy is to act as an engine for improvement in practice and partnership working. Specifically it will work to:
  - 12.1 ensure all staff have up to date knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles: there needs to be a 'back to basics' approach to ensure that practice is informed by a strong knowledge and skills base in terms of understanding risk, undertaking assessments etc.
  - 12.2 introduce and embed new skills, values and ways of working in Surrey to staff in all agencies that work with children and families these fundamental basics will be within a new model that is fundamentally about building family resilience and a strengths- based approach. The new model and approach need to be understood by the whole workforce as well as each person understanding their roles and responsibilities to make them work;
  - 12.3 drive culture change and develop a shared language and values: the Academy should play an important role in building a shared commitment across agencies and professional boundaries towards better outcomes for children and achieving these earlier intervention and prevention. The shared language will reinforce this and ensure effective communication across different parts of the workforce. We want to create an open, collaborative, learning culture.
  - 12.4 drive up and help maintain professional standards: the Academy needs to work very closely with heads of profession like the Principal Social Worker to tackle development areas revealed in practice audits, performance appraisals, Serious Care Reviews etc. It is also important for training to be up to date and refreshed to reflect changes in law and best practice nationally. We want to embrace the concept of a learning culture - everyone, at every stage of their careers, needs to keep on learning and being open to new ideas

- 12.5 build effective leadership skills and capacity across children's services that can lead and sustain change: If front-line staff are trained in new ways of working and this is not reinforced by managers and leaders back in the workplace then staff are likely to revert to previous practice. It is therefore important for managers and leaders to prioritise their own development so that their own practice is up to date and they can mentor their staff. In addition we need leaders who think across the whole system and not just their service or team. The expectation therefore will not only be of continuous professional development but that career progression will hinge on having undertaken the necessary learning to equip managers for the challenges they will face as they move up the career ladder.
- 12.6 develop better understanding between agencies of each other's roles and responsibilities, more effective ways of working together and confidence to work in multi-agency teams - managers and staff need to understand and value partners' contributions. It is important for individuals to have an understanding of different perspectives and to 'walk in the shoes' of partners. They must also understand how to work effectively as part of a real or virtual multi-agency team and what the team is aiming to change for that child or family. The focus at all times must be the child, and that means joining up effectively around the child's needs and not letting the boundaries between teams and agencies to get in the way.
- 12.7 improve retention by making Surrey a good place to work: Remuneration is only one factor in attracting and retaining staff. Feeling valued and supported are key. The aim of the Academy is to invest in people's development and help them feel supported throughout their careers. There is clear evidence from other local authorities that these elements have an impact on recruitment and retention. If more staff can be retained this will also reduce spend on agency staff.
- 12.8 support the pace and sustainability of the transformation programme for children and families by embedding new ways of working: the improvement programme for children needs to have an impact quickly and for the changes made to be sustained into the future. Establishing an Academy will provide a vehicle to reinforce and embed good practice
- 12.9 keep abreast of new practice - the Academy will have a responsibility to forge and maintain relationships with regional, national and international experts, and to bring their learning into Surrey. This will include holding regular speaker events so that staff can be inspired by hearing from leaders in their fields and challenged to think how they can use this learning in their practice.

<b>Model</b>
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- 13. The Academy is still in the design phase but some elements are clear.
- 14. As will be apparent the vision for the Academy is something much broader than simply a vehicle for delivering training and

development – although that will be central to how it achieves its objectives. That broader role will be reflected in the model.

15. The aim is to create a virtual ‘hub and spokes’ model. The Academy will be the hub providing overall co-ordination of learning and development and ensuring that whole workforce training is in place. It will be responsible for all learning and development and relating to children and families in the Council and will support the children’s workforce into and through their Surrey careers. It will also connect with and inform learning and development programmes and networks in different agencies and services. This will ensure that the core family resilience and family safeguarding approaches being adopted in Surrey are reinforced in all agencies and that there is a strategic understanding of workforce development needs with capacity and resourcing across the system to address these.
16. The Academy will report into the Director of Quality Assurance, reflecting the strong links between quality assurance and learning and development.
17. To drive forward the design of the Academy and ensure we have good engagement from partners and staff we are establishing:
  - 17.1 a strategic stakeholder group with membership from across the Council and from partners to shape proposals on scope, direction and priorities
  - 17.2 a reference group of staff and managers from across the workforce to provide ideas and feedback, help shape the content and act as ambassadors for the Academy in their services
  - 17.3 a mechanism for regular input from children and young people and from foster carers.
18. The offer to managers and staff will include conventional training courses, plus e learning, a library of resources that can be accessed, opportunities for work shadowing and coaching and regular events with external speakers who are regional or experts in their fields.
19. The staffing and budget for the Academy still need to be determined and will be part of the business case for the family resilience programme. The development and roll out will be phased, As a first step we are reviewing the current budgets and staffing capacity for learning and development.

<b>Outcomes and performance measures</b>
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20. The Academy will be an enabler for improvement across outcomes for children and families. It will support cultural change, practice improvement and new ways of working to ensure all children in the county receive the right help at the right time. This shift to early intervention should help make the service more financially sustainable.

21. Isolating the Academy's unique contribution to these improved outcomes will be important – but not straightforward. We will measure, for example, the retention rate of social workers, which is currently poor and we believe the Academy can help improve. We will also glean useful feedback from staff satisfaction surveys. Staff who feel valued and supported by their employer are likely to have higher levels of satisfaction (although other factors such as remuneration and caseloads will play a part).
22. Measuring the Academy's impact on practice and partnership working will need further thought. Each person who undertakes training will be asked after 3 months how they have applied their learning and the difference it has made. We would expect that practice audits and performance appraisals should show improvements in practice if they involve staff who have undertaken relevant training and development. Audits should also be able to show how partnership working is improving – but we might want some form of annual survey across partners to supplement these. Over time the level of sustained engagement by managers, staff and partners will of itself be a barometer of how effective they feel the Academy is as a vehicle for improvement in which to invest money and staff time. In addition we would want to see a sustained impact on the retention of social workers who choose to stay more than 2 years after their initial supported year of practice.

<b>Next steps</b>
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23. The Academy is still in a design phase, with work in hand to understand the current training and development offer, budgets, training leads and networks etc. We are also looking at best practice elsewhere, such as the Essex Social Care Academy. There an Academy for all social workers has been very successful in supporting practice improvement. In 2014, Ofsted said of Essex: "Senior managers have been very effective in improving services for children, young people and families in Essex. They have very good plans in place that are working well to make sure that they employ, support and keep good social workers to ensure that services can be maintained". Since then the Essex Academy has begun to expand to include multi agency training.
24. There may be some private sector models worth examining too. The concept and model need to be discussed and co-produced with staff, stakeholders and partners to ensure these are fit for purpose. The aim is to gain strategic commitment to the Academy concept and model and complete the first phase of design over the next 3-6 months with a launch event early in 2019. While not all aspects of the Academy will be in place by then, it is important to establish the profile of the Academy and to reinforce for all staff that learning and development will be a priority in the future and will make Surrey a great place to work with children and families.
25. Establishing and delivering first class learning and development will require up- front investment. Existing training budgets will need to

be re-purposed, but there is still likely to be a need for an increase in investment in learning and development. Over time the Academy should have an impact on retention rates of staff that reduces the cost of agency staff and recruitment. As practice improves and the shift is made from intensive, specialist services to early intervention and prevention there will be savings more generally to which the Academy will have contributed.

26. In parallel work is in hand with other transformation workstream leads to determine the priorities for learning and development and how these can best be delivered. The new offer will be developed in phases but with a commitment to pace and key areas of practice improvement. Alongside this design work will need to be consideration about how to measure impact and improvement and how to ensure learning is reinforced in the workplace through supervision, performance appraisal etc.

#### **Conclusions:**

27. An Academy to lead on learning and development for all managers and staff who work with children and families in Surrey is being designed with a view to a launch early in 2019. The Academy will have a positive impact on practice and support the introduction and embedding of new ways of working across agencies that will improve outcomes for children. It will support the development and maintenance of high professional standards.
28. Establishing the Academy shows a commitment to supporting and developing staff which should over time help to improve rates of retention.
29. Partnership working will be improved by developing an approach that all agencies will share and understand. Staff will be expected to understand each other's roles and responsibilities so that they can work together more effectively across agency and professional boundaries towards shared outcomes.
30. The Academy will seek out best practice and bring experts into Surrey to inspire and support staff.

#### **Recommendations:**

31. The Committee is asked to
  - 31.1 note progress so far in designing the Academy and determining its purpose, scope and objectives
  - 31.2 comment on the design and planned next steps in order to shape final proposals
  - 31.3 receive an update on progress following the launch of the Academy early in 2019.

#### **Next steps:**

32. Receive an update report early in 2019.

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**Sources/background papers:** None