

Children's, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

21 January 2020



UPDATE: Ofsted and Children's Commissioner Inspections

Purpose of the Item:

To provide a summary of the recent inspections of Surrey's children's services including the latest Ofsted Monitoring Visit and the final review by the Children's Commissioner for Surrey.

The reports from the Ofsted Lead Inspector and the Commissioner are attached to this report and provide further detail for the Select Committee.

Introduction:

1. This report is being provided for information to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee and follows the Cabinet Member Update at the 13 December 2019 ([Item 5](#)) meeting of the Select Committee; reports of the inspections and further details of the findings and feedback are now available and outlined in this report.
2. Further detail on the content of the report and the inspections is available if required along with information regarding the actions being taken by the service.
3. This information is also being reported to Cabinet as part of the 'Children's Improvement Update' on 28 January 2020.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit:

4. Children's services in Surrey were judged by Ofsted in May 2018 to be in a critical state. As a result Ofsted are carrying out a series of 'Monitoring Visits' approximately every 3-4 months, focussing on a different part of the service each time, and assessing the quality of practice for supporting and safeguarding children and families in Surrey.
5. On 31 October and 1 November 2019 Ofsted carried out their fourth Monitoring Visit of Surrey's children's services. The focus of this visit was on the effectiveness of child protection investigations, the

quality of statutory assessments and the impact of child protection and child in need plans in reducing risks and improving children's circumstances.

6. A letter from the inspectors following the visit detailing their findings was [published on the Ofsted website](#) on 18 December 2019 and a copy is attached here (*see Annex A - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter 18.12.19*).
7. The inspectors found that we have made substantial progress over the last year. They were really pleased to see improvements in both the timeliness and quality of interventions. They saw that thresholds were more appropriately managed, that caseloads are more manageable and that management oversight is regularly recorded on records, although the impact of this is variable. They found practitioners to be confident, skilled and enthusiastic when talking about children and their work.
8. While the progress made in these areas of children's services has been recognised by Ofsted, there is still more to do and the inspectors commented that "practice is not yet consistently strong for all children"; some specific issues highlighted by the inspectors include:
 - Ensuring practice is consistent across all teams, services and quadrants so that children and families receive the same high quality of service.
 - Supervision and management oversight needs to be more reflective and focussed on improving outcomes for children.
 - Continue the recruitment of new specialist workers to achieve multi-disciplinary social work teams.
 - Child protection conference chairs must document their analysis and evaluation clearly and concisely.
 - While documenting children's views has improved, they must be better evaluated to generate well-informed questions and hypotheses about future levels of risk.
 - Child in need and child protection plans must be made consistently 'smarter' with a greater concentration on the progress and measurement of plan objectives.
 - Continue to introduce the 'neglect assessment tool' currently being piloted in the South East across all quadrants.
 - Further improve and evolve outreach work with children who are at acute risk of exploitation.
9. Ofsted will conduct the next Monitoring Visit on 7 & 8 April 2020. With agreement from the Lead Inspector, this next visit will be treated like a full inspection so we will not be aware of the services being inspected until just before the visit. Following this fifth visit, Ofsted will then assess whether Surrey's children's services are ready for a full re-inspection and we currently expect this to take place later in 2020.

Children’s Commissioner Visit – Review of Progress & Final Recommendations:
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10. Following the 2018 full Ofsted inspection a Children’s Commissioner was also appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) to make a judgement about whether children’s services should continue to be retained by Surrey County Council (SCC). The Commissioner conducted an initial comprehensive review of children’s services in September 2018 concluding that SCC had a credible improvement plan in place and acknowledged that “the Council recognised and accepted the depth and complex nature of the issues it faces in children’s social care”.

11. A further ‘interim review’ was carried out in April 2019 as a check on our progress towards implementing our new structure and new model and to ensure we were on-track to improve the culture and practice for our staff, management and leadership and also our partners. The findings from the interim review were reported to the DfE in May 2019 and the Commissioner’s interim conclusion was as follows:

“The authority has made rapid and solid progress since I submitted my original report. It is important to emphasise that this is from a starting point of seriously failing services and there is still some way to go before there is clear evidence that vulnerable children and their families are being better served. Nonetheless, I can give a positive message on the Council’s progress and the effectiveness of the leadership that has been put in place. I will report again in 6 months but I am able to commend the progress that has been made whilst continuing to emphasize the magnitude of the task.”

12. The Commissioner has now carried out a final review of progress in November and December 2019. Feedback was shared with Surrey County Council on 12 December 2019 and we have now received the Commissioner’s final report to the Minister and DfE (*see Annex B - Report of the Non-Executive Commissioner for Children’s Services Surrey - 20 December 2019*).

13. The methodology of the Commissioner’s final review was the same as his previous reviews. Senior Managers and practitioners from Cornwall County Council completed on-site visits to Surrey’s children’s services, meeting with practitioners, managers and partners as well as holding focus groups both with staff, young people and partner agencies. The review also included audits of around 40 children’s cases along with analysis of the following:
 - New / updated policies and procedures;
 - Strategies and frameworks;
 - Our plans (e.g. Improvement plan, Transformation plans, Corporate Parenting Board, Safeguarding Partnership plans etc.);
 - Child and young people records;
 - Performance information and intelligence.

14. The Commissioner’s findings were overall very positive with recognition of the “significant progress that has been made in all ten areas” that were highlighted in his first report in September 2018. In summary, **the Commissioner’s view is that “sustainable improvement is underway in the Authority and that an alternative delivery model no longer needs to be a consideration”**.
15. Further information is available in the attached report (Annex B) with the key findings and conclusions from the Commissioner as follows:
- Progress has been impressive and there is clear evidence of practice improvement and cultural change.
 - Staff morale is good and they report a positive working environment.
 - The introduction of performance management processes and quality standards based on sound data has been particularly impressive.
 - There is now a clear expectation of what is required of staff, linked to an understood social work model.
 - There is still variability across the four quadrants but consistency is much improved along with an overall rise in standards.
 - The North East area has moved to high quality accommodation and in some areas, is leading the way in terms of improvement.
 - The political support has been consistent and delivered on the promises made when the authority went into intervention.
 - The senior management team is strong and the authority has demonstrated a commitment to improving and prioritising children’s services.
 - There is still much work to do and maintaining pace will be a significant challenge but the authority has come a long way in a short time in terms of improving services to children, young people and families in Surrey
16. We are now awaiting agreement from the Minister on the Commissioner’s recommendation and the publication of the Commissioner’s report. The report will be published by the DfE and the Select Committee will be informed once this has happened.

Conclusions:

17. The service has embarked upon a comprehensive transformation programme with a major restructure of children’s services completing last year to support the shift to a model based on early support and prevention. The significant internal and external scrutiny of the improvement programme, including the recent feedback from Ofsted and the Commissioner, shows the huge amount of progress made to improve and demonstrates that Surrey’s children’s services are progressing well on the improvement journey. This scrutiny is welcome and provides important insight into the impact of the work

however we continue to maintain that this is our journey to providing good and outstanding services for the children, young people and families that we support because they deserve nothing less.

Recommendations:

- The Select Committee notes the overall findings and feedback from the recent Children's Commissioner Visit and the fourth Ofsted Monitoring Visit.
- The Select Committee receives a further update at the 25 June 2020 meeting on the delivery of the Children's improvement programme and the findings from the April 2020 Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

Next steps:

The Commissioner's report and subsequent recommendations detailed in this report will be reviewed by the Minister (Undersecretary of State for Education or equivalent) and the Department for Education. The Minister will then confirm any further specific action that is required by the Authority however the formal involvement of the Commissioner for Surrey's children's services has now ended (subject to formal agreement by the Minister).

Ofsted will next carry out a Monitoring Visit on 7 & 8 April 2020 and the report outlining the findings will be published late-April 2020. At this point, Ofsted will make a judgement on whether Surrey's services are ready for a full re-inspection and if so, it is expected that a full re-inspection will take place later this year.

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Annexes:

- Annex A - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter 18.12.19
- Annex B - Report of the Non-Executive Commissioner for Children's Services Surrey - 20 December 2019

Sources/background papers:

None

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