

**CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG
LEARNING AND CULTURE
SELECT COMMITTEE**



TUESDAY 28 JULY 2020

CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

Purpose of report:

To provide an update on the improvement of Surrey's children's services and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the improvement programme. This report provides further information on the services and activity outlined in the last report to the Select Committee on 21 January 2020.

Introduction:

1. This report is being provided for information to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee and follows the previous '[Update on Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner Inspections](#)' at the 21 January 2020 meeting of the Select Committee.
2. Since the January update the fifth scheduled Ofsted Monitoring Visit to our services has been cancelled; this was due to take place on 7 & 8 April 2020 however all Ofsted inspections are currently suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information is provided in this report on the continuing improvement work taking place with a focus on the impact of these improvements on services and frontline practice.
3. An update on the priorities for the CFLLC directorate for 2020-21 is also summarised in this report. The directorate plan has been revised due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Further detail on the content of the report and the attached annexes is available if required along with information regarding the actions being taken by the service.
5. This information is also being reported to Cabinet as part of the 'Children's Improvement Update' on 23 June 2020.

Ofsted Inspections – Current Situation

Ofsted Monitoring Visits

6. As previously reported to the Select Committee, following Ofsted's judgement in 2018 that Surrey's children's services were 'inadequate', Ofsted conduct regular 2 day 'Monitoring Visits' to assess our services, frontline practice and the delivery of key improvements. We have so far had 4 of these visits (as listed below) with the findings reported to Cabinet and the Select Committee:
 - Visit 1: September 2018 – focus on Child Protection
 - Visit 2: January 2019 – focus on Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting
 - Visit 3: June 2019 – focus on C-SPA (i.e. the 'front door')
 - Visit 4: October 2019 – focus on Assessment and Family Safeguarding
7. Ofsted's next Monitoring Visit had been scheduled for 7 & 8 April 2020. With agreement from the Lead Inspector, this next visit was due to be treated like a full inspection so we were not aware of the services due to be inspected. Our position at the time of last reporting on the subject to the Select Committee was that following this fifth visit, Ofsted would then assess whether Surrey's children's services are ready for a full re-inspection.
8. Unfortunately Ofsted notified us in March 2020 that the Monitoring Visit could not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All inspection activity has been suspended except where there are immediate and urgent safeguarding concerns. At the time of writing this report, we do not yet have a confirmed date for the next Monitoring Visit or confirmation on whether this will in fact be rescheduled; there is a possibility that Ofsted will instead carry out the full re-inspection without a fifth Monitoring Visit.
9. Children's services are continuing to deliver the improvement priorities with a detailed quality assurance programme in place to identify and address practice weaknesses. We will welcome the external review of our progress and feedback from inspectors when Ofsted confirm the next steps for the inspection programme.

Ofsted Annual Conversation

10. Although the inspection programme has been suspended, we do maintain regular contact with the Ofsted Lead Inspector and Regional Leads. On 11 June 2020 the CFLLC Leadership Team will be meeting with Ofsted inspectors for our 'Annual Conversation' (or Annual Engagement meeting). The annual conversations take place alongside the Monitoring Visit inspection routine – it is not a replacement for a focussed visit and all authorities hold this meeting each year.
11. This meeting will cover general updates from children's social care, education & SEND services with a focus on the impact of covid-19, changes to frontline practice since last year and planning for the return to more normal working, including preparations for anticipated increased demand for services.

12. Further information, including feedback from Ofsted and any further insight into next steps for the inspections, can be provided to the Select Committee Members following the Annual Conversation in June.

Commissioner for Surrey's Children's Services

13. At the time of reporting to the Select Committee in January 2020, we shared the final report from Trevor Doughty, Commissioner for Surrey's Children's Services, to the Minister (Undersecretary of State for Education or equivalent) and the Department for Education. It has now been confirmed by the DfE that Trevor's role as Commissioner has now ended following the positive findings outlined in that report.
14. Trevor Doughty has continued to support our improvement journey in an advisory capacity since then and his involvement will continue until at least December 2020. We welcome this additional support and advice to help the Council fully embed the changes already delivered as we continue on our journey to providing good and outstanding children's services in Surrey.

Children's Improvement Update

15. 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 shows the huge amount of progress made to improve and demonstrates that Surrey's children's services are progressing well on the improvement journey. **Our improvement programme has continued** over the last few months throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and related 'lockdown' and while some resources have shifted to support other parts of the service, improving frontline practice is critical to our journey to providing good and outstanding services for the children, young people and families that we support. **It therefore remains a priority for the CFLLC directorate throughout this pandemic.**

Focussing on the Impact of our Improvement Programme

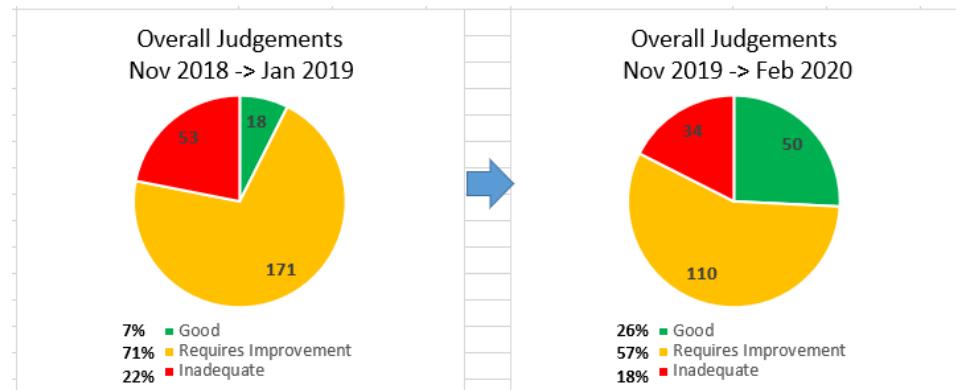
16. As reported in January 2020, delivery of the 'Children's Improvement Plan' actions – to address the 18 Ofsted recommendations from the May 2018 full inspection report – has progressed at a significant pace and the action plan is now fully delivered. Our focus of the improvement work has now shifted to have a greater focus **on the impact of the work** and it was therefore agreed that the Safeguarding Partnership would lead on providing the required oversight and strategic direction from January 2020 onwards.

17. In order to get a detailed understanding of what impact our improvements have had on frontline practice and the lived experience of service users, the directorate is carrying out significant quality assurance activity (working alongside the frontline services), this includes:
- Monthly Case Audit Programme: To review large numbers of children's individual cases to ascertain the quality of practice, identify improvements and work with Social Workers and Managers to improve practice.
 - Themed Auditing: Where significant improvements have been delivered against the Children's Improvement Plan, the Quality Assurance division conduct detailed analysis of the impact of the work to identify further actions to be undertaken where required.
 - Focussed Mock Inspections: 2-day sessions on individual services to identify further improvements, good practice to be implemented elsewhere and key themes to be addressed at a strategic level.

Monthly Case Audit Programme

18. The audit programme introduced in November 2018 provides the opportunity to review the quality of practice and effectiveness of the work being undertaken with children and their families. A selection of cases identified from a cross-section of children's services teams are audited each month along with several re-audits (of cases previously judged to be 'inadequate').
19. There have been **1088 audits completed** within the audit programme to date. Regular highlight reports are produced outlining the findings of the programme and importantly – the actions taken as a result. The most recent highlight report is attached here (see *ANNEX 1 - Audit Highlight Report Nov'18 to Feb'20 FINAL*).
20. There is significant insight gained from this work on the quality of our practice and part of our recent assurance work has been to assess the trends observed in the quality of practice and the impact of the improvement work. Some highlights are included here and further in-depth analysis can be provided to the Select Committee if required:
- 20.1 The first aspect to highlight is the change in average overall audit judgements since the Monthly Case Audit Programme began.
- In the first 3 months of the programme, just 7% of completed audits were judged as good and 22% were

judged as inadequate. In the most recent 3 months of the programme, 26% of audits were judged as good (a significant shift) and 18% were judged as inadequate.



- 20.2 This trend clearly demonstrates that the significant change in the quality of practice has shifted far more children's cases into 'good practice' from 'requires improvement'. The shift in 'Inadequate' practice has not been as evident across the services. We are still finding too much inadequate practice during case audits (a position further evidenced through the Mock Inspection Programme as well).
- 20.3 The service carried out a deep-dive into 'Inadequate' audits in each service. This activity showed that there is still variability in the Management Oversight for driving the improvements forward in order to improve practice in individual cases. We have seen that where management oversight is limited or where the audits are not being discussed with managers during Supervision – we are finding that practice is often not improving. The cases where there is good oversight evident on the record and where managers are clearly discussing the improvement plans with social workers tend to show faster and more substantial improvement in the quality of practice and thereby an improvement in the overall judgement (e.g. to 'Requires Improvement' or to 'Good').
- 20.4 Where cases have experienced multiple lead social workers (and/or Team Managers) this has often led to a reduction in the quality of practice. A common theme for cases judged to be 'Inadequate' is high staff turnover and limited handover when this does occur.
- 20.5 It is also important to note that we are still auditing cases where there are significant legacy issues due to long-term poor practice. This impacts a relatively small number of children's cases however it is being identified during case audits. Our audits review a case for at least the previous 12 months and while a significant amount of improvement work has been delivered in that time, frontline services were just completing the restructure at this time last year and the improvement of services is an ongoing iterative process.

20.6 We have consistently received positive feedback from Ofsted regarding this programme as demonstrated in the Lead Inspector's comments from the latest report:

"An extensive audit programme continues to provide managers with a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the quality of social work practice and frontline management oversight. The significant time and effort invested in a high standard of quality assurance activity is a cornerstone of continuing effective improvement work. Inspectors agreed with the findings of a small sample of audited cases they evaluated and recognised the rigour and quality of the local authority's auditing work."

Thematic Auditing

21. The Quality Assurance and Performance division have committed to deliver a comprehensive programme of thematic auditing to inform and assure ourselves we are delivering an improved standard of practice across the system and to take action where to further improve where necessary. These audits are a critical element in learning and improvement and allow for the better understanding of practice in a specific service area. They provide an opportunity to look at the quality of work that is undertaken with children and families. These consist of an agreed number of audits completed on a bespoke audit tool relevant to the area of scrutiny.
22. To date the following thematic audits have been completed:
 - Permanency for Children
 - Private Fostering
 - Pathway Planning for Children Looked After and Children Leaving Care
 - Children Missing from Home, Placement or Education
 - Children Placed at Home with Parents Subject to a Care Order
23. The findings from these thematic reviews are attached here for the Select Committee (see *Annex 2 - Quality Assurance and Inspection Readiness Thematic Report April 2020 FINAL*).
24. The following thematic audits are also underway:
 - Placement Stability
 - YOS & Early Help
 - Supervision
 - FGC & Family Network Meeting
25. Findings from the thematic auditing work and other activity across the Quality Assurance division are routinely reported to the Safeguarding Executive as part of their ongoing oversight & scrutiny of the improvement programme for Surrey's children's services. The leads for each service area audited (Service Managers, Assistant Directors and Directors) develop an action

plan in response to the findings and these are tracked and supported with regular updates provided to QA Leads.

Priorities for the CFLLC Directorate

26. Our purpose is to ensure that Surrey's children and families get the help and support they need at the right time, enabling children and young people to be safe and feel safe, healthy, have great education, skills and employment opportunities and make good choices about their wellbeing. Our ambition is that children and young people can live, learn and grow up locally. The directorate aims to work with all our multi-agency partners and in true partnership with children and families to provide them with access to a range of services that tackle inequalities in outcomes, support independence and enhance their lives.
27. Our services are right at the very heart of achieving the **Community Vision for Surrey in 2030** and **Organisation Strategy 2020-25**, and central to this is strengthening and increasing our early intervention and prevention work, and investing locally, in a planned way, to bring children and young people closer to home. We work with some of the most vulnerable residents in the county, who are experiencing an inequality in outcomes, and are at times in their lives when they need our help and support. We touch almost every community with our support and services, which range from children's social care, services for children with special education needs and disability, through to registration services, and schools and libraries, which are often at the centre of our communities. We are working hard to support residents to help themselves and each other within their community whilst providing more integrated services that are more effective, efficient and seamless for residents.
28. The global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has seen the communities that we live and work in change overnight and has required us to be resilient and adaptable in our approaches to working with people and the services that we provide. The directorate plan for CFLLC has recently been reviewed and updated to reflect the evolving situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
29. We have seven strategic priorities for 2020/21 alongside our ongoing business as usual responsibilities within the directorate. These are:
 - Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic
 - Starting well: first 1000 days
 - Children's Services Improvement
 - SEND and additional needs transformation

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing
 - Libraries and Cultural Services transformation
 - Enabling our people, utilising our technology and embedding equality and diversity for all
30. The directorate has extensive breadth and depth in the services and support it delivers. As we develop and deliver our seven strategic priorities, we will maintain a relentless focus on:
- Culture, Practice and Outcomes
 - Supervision
 - Developing Front Line Managers
 - Staff Wellbeing
 - Technology, Resources and Systems
 - Partnerships
31. The directorate's priorities are articulated in the attached visual (see *Annex 3 - CFLLC Directorate Plan Visual - May 2020*). Further information on the key activities and 'what success looks like' is included below for each strategic priority.

Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

32. Planned Activities:
- a) Provide support to enable the most vulnerable people to 'shield' from the virus and ensure their welfare;
 - b) Keep up to date and reflect fast paced National Guidance and Policy changes in our services;
 - c) Address potential workforce capacity issues, including through staff redeployment to business-critical roles;
 - d) Adapt procedures, data reporting, and the way we work, alongside partners, to safeguard children, young people & families, and to ensure staff are appropriately protected;
 - e) Collaborate with all partners to adapt together and provide support to families during the pandemic;
 - f) Where possible, plan and mitigate for pressures on services and staff caused by changes in working arrangements, staff absence and potential surges in demand for services;
 - g) Capture and learn from the positive solutions, to inform improvements to how we work in the future;
 - h) Consider how to empower families and communities to be stronger and support themselves as we move towards recovery;
 - i) Work with educational settings, libraries and cultural services to re-open on a needs-assessed basis to ensure the safety of vulnerable groups, young people and service users;
 - j) Prepare Registrar Offices for adapting to General Register Office (GRO) directives and re-opening to the public.

33. What does 'success' look like: Children, young people and families continue to receive appropriate levels of support throughout the pandemic and can eventually adjust to life beyond the pandemic. The level of usage of quality services by service users is moving towards the level before the pandemic or a level close to i.e. proportion of young people in educational settings and measures for those using registration and library services.

Starting Well: First 1000 Days

34. Planned Activities:

- a) Developing integrated commissioning with health;
- b) Prevention and early intervention focus such as: immunisations, breastfeeding, accident prevention & first aid, dental hygiene, social communication, emotional wellbeing, weight management;
- c) A graduated response for early help and SEND support, with multi-partner community hubs;
- d) Developing family and community resilience, including accessible information;
- e) Pre-conception strategy;
- f) Whole system approach to supporting families affected by domestic abuse.

35. What does 'success' look like: Increase in vaccination rates.

Improved mental health support surrounding pregnancy.

Improvement in school readiness. Reduction in children in need.

Children's Services Improvement

36. Planned Activities:

- a) Implementing the Helping Families Early Strategy in partnership, including a clear offer for practitioners and families;
- b) Maximising the potential of our youth centres in partnership with the community, voluntary and faith sector;
- c) With partners, fully embedding the Family Safeguarding model;
- d) Enabling children to live closer to home through increasing available placements in Surrey including; capital investment in residential homes, Mockingbird programme for foster carers;
- e) Recruiting and developing our workforce, including being agile;
- f) Improvements to our youth offending service, responding to issues highlighted in the 2019 HMIP inspection.

37. What does 'success' look like: Reduction in re-referrals to children's services and the number of child protection plans in place.

Reduction in number of Looked After Children placed out of county.
Vacant posts filled contributing to a reduction in caseloads.
Confident and skilled workforce.

SEND and additional needs transformation

38. Planned Activities:

- a) Deliver a strong system for children with SEND and additional needs, across Health, LA and Education. Develop SEND System graduated response and early support, which supports mainstream inclusion more. Develop Early Years Intervention Strategy and an Autism Strategy.
- b) SEND Operational Improvements – improvement of casework and caseloads. Workforce development to ensure staff are skilled and confident. Develop Front Door, Local Offer and transport governance arrangements to support decision making.
- c) Commissioning and market management, including capital investment to ensure local, maintained provision is available, and incorporating the needs of this cohort into commissioning of emotional health and wellbeing services.
- d) SEND Transitions – post 16 provision and preparation for adulthood.

39. What does 'success' look like: Timely and effective identification and support that meets needs at the earliest opportunity, reducing the demand overall and specifically on high cost, high need interventions. Promoting resilience and independence to reduce ongoing need for support and delivering improve outcomes. Children, young people and family voices help shape the system to get the best results. Children live, learn and grow up locally and achieve their full potential, due to the right support being available in education settings.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

40. Planned Activities:

- a) Award of a new Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health service contract;
- b) Continued transformation work to trial new models of delivery;
- c) Continue to develop system integration that supports collaborative working.

41. What does 'success' look like: New services commissioned providing appropriate services that meet the needs of children and young people in Surrey. Further reduction in overall referrals, backlog and shorter waiting lists. Strong, respectful, trusting and honest

relationships across the system, including all providers and stakeholders.

Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation

42. Planned Activities:

- a) Engage residents and partners in the co-design of the future model of library services;
- b) Develop an approach to increase the impact of our services in delivering health, learning, cultural & social well-being and economic prosperity;
- c) New offer from Lifelong Learning and Cultural Services for vulnerable learners, children missing education and NEETs;
- d) Increase in co-delivery across adult learning, libraries, heritage and arts services and with children's and education services;
- e) Identify new partners locally and nationally to co-locate/deliver shared services in our buildings.

43. What does 'success' look like: Wide range of staff, residents and partners participate in co-design activities. Increasing take up of services. Improvements to library services identified through the co-design are supported by communities and partners. The contribution of libraries, arts, adult learning and heritage In Surrey to health learning, cultural/social well-being and economic prosperity mapped and understood. Evidence of community support for improvements when implemented with a number of new activities/events delivered by community and partners in libraries.

Enabling our people, utilising our technology and embedding equality and diversity for all

44. Planned Activities:

- a) Developing our staff and embracing difference;
- b) Embracing agile working;
- c) Recommissioning our education management system;
- d) Equal opportunities recruitment;
- e) Further integration of staff to support close partnership working – particularly between health and social care;
- f) Adapt and be responsive to challenges that emerge and learn from the positive ways of working that evolve from these.

45. What does 'success' look like: Staff feel supported and enjoy working for the directorate. Staff are enabled with the most up to date technology and supported to learn from the agile approach being modelled in the North East Quadrant. Recruitment of a diverse range of skills, experience and backgrounds.

Conclusions:

46. While the expectation of children's services was to have a 2-day inspection from Ofsted in April 2020 with a full re-inspection taking place before the summer this year, the necessary changes to this forward-plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic have not stopped or significantly affected our improvement programme. Continuing with the activities agreed with the Surrey Children's Safeguarding Executive, the Quality Assurance division has completed a significant amount of work since the last report to the Select Committee in January and this has provided us with:
 - The assurance that the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan through 2018-19 has had a significant positive impact on frontline practice and the lived experience of children and families we support.
 - The insight and detailed understanding of where practice still needs to improve, where we need to further embed the improvements and where targeted quality assurance work needs to be focussed over the coming months.
47. The priorities for the CFLLC directorate remain largely unchanged and despite the impact from COVID-19 pandemic, the children's improvement programme and continuing on our journey to providing good and outstanding services for the children, young people and families that we support will remain a priority for the directorate because our residents deserve nothing less.

Recommendations:

48. The Select Committee notes the overall findings and feedback from the recent quality assurance activity included in this report and the impact on frontline children's services resulting from delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan.
49. The Select Committee receives a further report at the September 2020 meeting – to include an update on the children's improvement programme and the next steps for the re-inspection of Surrey's children's services by Ofsted.

Next steps:

The CFLLC leadership team will be meeting with Ofsted representatives on 11 June 2020 for the 'Annual Conversation'. It is not expected that Ofsted will provide confirmed dates for a Monitoring Visit or re-inspection at this point however we do anticipate some indication of when this may happen and what format the next inspection of Surrey's children's services will take.

Oversight and scrutiny of the improvements to children's services will continue to take place at the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership (Executive group).

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Sources/background papers:

- Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter 18.12.2019 ([link to Ofsted website](#))
- 'Update on Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner Inspections' at the 21 January 2020 ([Item 7](#)) meeting of the Select Committee.

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