

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET**

DATE: 29 JUNE 2021

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: MRS CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY / EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Purpose of the Report:

The focus of this report is to provide an update on the improvement of Surrey's children's services, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the improvement programme and a summary of the recent Ofsted Focused Visit (March 2021), including findings & feedback, our response and the impact on our improvement priorities.

The improvement work in Children, Families and Lifelong Learning extends well beyond the improvements to children's social care, so the report also provides an update on the ongoing work to transform our services for children with additional needs and explains how we are working in collaboration with health partners to improve support to children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

This report supports the 'Empowering Communities' priority objective of the refreshed Organisation Strategy. The overall aims of the children's improvement programme and the model of practice in Surrey – 'Effective Family Resilience' – are that all children in the county receive the right help at the right time to enable them and their families to develop resilience to face future life challenges independently.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Reviews the findings from the March 2021 Ofsted Focused Visit and the updated improvement plan and priorities as set out by children's services in response to the feedback received.
2. Agrees to receive a further update on the progress made delivering the children's services 'Getting to Good' plan and the improvement priorities resulting from the Ofsted Focused Visit in early Autumn 2021.
3. Notes the cross-cutting approach on how 'getting to good' across the directorate is being taken forward which also includes services for children with additional needs (SEND) and services for children with emotional wellbeing or mental health issues (CAMHS), highlighting some key areas of focus; performance, retention, professional development, partnerships and finances.

Reason for Recommendations:

Children's services improvement is a high priority for the Council. It is important that Cabinet is aware of the evidence of progress made to improve services so far, as determined by both internal and external scrutiny and of the ongoing, ambitious and innovative improvement plan which is driven by a focus on improving outcomes for children and families and goes well beyond resolving only the issues highlighted by Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) and the Commissioner.

The routine national inspection activity resumes from May 2021 at which point Ofsted will begin a gradual restart of the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) programme for local authority children's services. Although the timetable for inspection is not notified in advance, we are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services later in 2021 or early in 2022.

Executive Summary:

1. At the meeting of Cabinet in January 2021, it was agreed that a further report would be taken to Cabinet later in the year to include an update on the children's improvement activity and the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response from Surrey's children's services (see 'Annex 1 - Children's Improvement Report June 2021' for a more detailed report).

Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Services

2. Since the last update to Cabinet in January, arrangements across frontline children's services largely remain the same with both frontline and support staff being asked to work in offices and the community where required to enable services to function effectively.
3. Demand across children's services remains high with the number of contacts to the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) being at the highest they have been over the last year with 5,099 contacts received in March – an increase of 37% from the month before.
4. Throughout this period of local and national lockdowns and the wider impact from COVID-19, our focus has continued to be on delivering the essential work to support Surrey's residents, to safeguard children and to maintain consistency across frontline services wherever possible

Children's Services Improvement Update

5. Over the 2021-2022 period, all remaining transformation work planned as part of the Family Resilience programme is expected to be fully implemented, with particular focus given to Neglect and Children with Disabilities (CWD) as these areas have been highlighted as requiring further improvement, a position supported by the feedback from the recent Ofsted Focused Visit.
6. **Neglect** continues to be the most common category of harm for children subject to child protection plans in Surrey. Following a pilot programme last year, we are in the process of implementing the Graded Care Profile 2.0 (GCP2) assessment tool to be used by social care and multi-agency practitioners to better identify and respond when there are concerns about the quality of a child's care in the family home. GCP2 Practitioner training continues to be delivered and the centralised recording system for GCP2 has recently gone live. There are now 25 GCP2 Champions from across all areas of the

safeguarding partnership who are helping to embed this tool into practice within their services and helping to develop specialist guidance for practitioners.

7. **Children with Disabilities (CWD) Services:** The Ofsted Focused Visit highlighted the need to improve management oversight and case planning, safeguarding practice and the timeliness and quality of plans for Children in Need. A decision has been made to accelerate improvement in this area through an increase in leadership capacity. We have appointed an interim Assistant Director for CWD, who is leading on an immediate review of the service and will provide both operational and strategic oversight of the service. This will in due course become an established post and we will move to permanent recruitment.

Ofsted – Focused (Assurance) Visit

8. On 24 - 25 March 2021, Ofsted carried out a 'Focused Visit' to Surrey services, where the inspection team spent their time on case sampling, interviews with practitioners and managers, gaining feedback from foster carers, schools, the judiciary and other partner agencies. Initial verbal feedback from the Lead Inspector told us that we showed a good understanding of ourselves which was reflected in our self-evaluation and that their findings were largely reflecting back to us what we had shown them we already know.
9. The [full report](#) was published by Ofsted on Tuesday 11 May 2021.
10. We know there is more to do to continue improving our services and we have initiated some additional work as outlined above to sharpen our focus on the key priority areas Ofsted highlighted.

Transforming services for children with additional needs (SEND)

11. In this past year, Cabinet agreed £79million of capital investment in 1,600 new specialist places so that Surrey children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) could be educated closer to home. The new places that have already been created have meant that the vast majority of children with SEND received their offer of a place for academic year 2021 by the national deadline.
12. Alongside this, a number of practice improvements have been made which have also improved the experience of children and families. The timeliness of agreeing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has improved to a rolling average of 73% completed on time, compared to a national average of 58%.
13. School leaders, supported by the Council, are driving forward a new approach to inclusion in mainstream schools for children with additional needs. There is a clear vision and purpose to this work – which is gaining traction with schools and settings across the county – that recognises that 'Inclusion is at the heart of a school's work'.

CAMHS Update

14. The pandemic has had a significant impact on young people's mental health, leading to an increase in the number of requests to Children and Young People's Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (often traditionally referred to as CAMHS). These services have worked hard to respond effectively given the significant additional pressures. National benchmarking data shows that CAMHS has experienced a 22% increase in demand above the same time last year.
15. Services and the wider system now face the challenge of meeting children's needs in a context of some backlogs, ongoing demand and additional 'surge' demand at the same time as embedding the new Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health contract with the i-THRIVE model at its heart which started on 1st April. We are working in collaboration with

health partners to improve support to children with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

16. Set out in Annex 1 are the actions taken to deliver the three priorities to reduce backlogs and waiting times, find new ways of meeting demand and mobilise the new services.

Cross-cutting themes

17. Woven through this range of service improvements are the core cross-cutting themes of performance management, retention and professional development of the workforce, partnerships with a range of organisations, most notably schools and the necessity of managing the finances. Enhancement in these domains will improve both the pace and long-term sustainability of our improvements.

Consultation:

18. The Children’s Improvement Plan and its follow-up iteration (the ‘Getting to Good Plan’) was developed between officers from the Children, Families and, Lifelong Learning directorate, representatives from Surrey Police, Surrey School Phase Councils, health services including the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and providers and colleagues from the third sector. Cabinet Members, Ofsted inspectors and representatives from the DfE were consulted on the content of the improvement plan in 2018 - and progress made since then – on a regular basis.
19. Progress addressing the key areas of improvement across children’s services continues to be regularly scrutinised by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee.
20. Overall scrutiny and oversight of the improvement work in children’s social care, and the delivery of the ‘Getting to Good’ plan continues to be overseen by Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB) members with regular engagement and reporting to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive.
21. As part of the routine quality assurance and audit programme, a sample of children and families whose cases are being audited are routinely contacted to get feedback on their experience interacting with children’s services.

Risk Management and Implications:
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to recruit and/or retain staff in key posts delivering and managing services for children and families leads to children being left in harmful situations, poor outcomes, costly services and damaged reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Workforce Strategy group – established in summer 2020 – has developed a comprehensive plan to develop our workforce strategy and improve our attractiveness as an employer. (This is known as our ‘employee value proposition’). This strategy will enable us to attract the best workers to Surrey and to retain and develop them, cultivating a culture that is positive, supportive and meets the needs of our practitioners and managers. • A professional development framework for social workers is being launched, which will establish the career development pathway for social workers and social work managers at every stage
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	<p>of their career in Surrey, from student social worker to Director.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People, Performance and Development Committee (PPDC) recently agreed a new financial package to attract and retain qualified social workers to join our service • Regular engagement activity with the workforce is now in place following the first 'Workforce Matters' webinar in November 2020. These will provide opportunities for us to share ideas, hear how everyone is and take action where things need resolving.
<p>The impact of COVID-19 on frontline practice caused by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wellbeing deteriorating and leading to reduced productivity and increased absence. • Inability to provide the required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline staff or to make SCC workplaces 'Covid-Safe' reducing the ability to deliver frontline services. • External commissioned providers, voluntary, faith and care sector providers of services for children, young people and families fail due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. • Delays in processes such as court procedures or other partnership working creates drift & delay for children and families and negatively impacts on their outcomes. • Reduced visiting (face-to-face), direct work with children and families and other frontline social work, negatively impacts on outcomes and leads to further negative consequences. • Delayed referrals and 'hidden' household concerns such as neglect, domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation (CSE) lead to spikes in demand for services at a time when capacity will be stretched. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are maintaining a good stock of PPE and have been for the last 12 months. • In terms of protecting our staff, we continue to ask managers to risk assess any team members returning to offices and are regularly reviewing these. • While the COVID-19 pandemic has put a strain on resources across children's services and we are seeing an increase in demand in most parts of the 'system', the focus on improving practice has not stopped. • All teams within Commissioning Services have worked hard maintaining contact, visits and meetings (virtually) and support with providers to ensure continuation and quality of service. • There have been ongoing discussions with Partners including the court service to ensure delays are minimised wherever possible. • The Mental Health and emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people (CYP) have been of high profile throughout 2020. A weekly health/CYP recovery cell has continued to bring health partners together to discuss risks and mitigations throughout the COVID-19 period. • During lockdown the Family Resilience providers largely delivered their services through virtual means which meant that families continued to receive support. Over the summer months they have moved towards delivering face to face activity alongside virtual support. Whilst

	<p>working virtually has been extremely helpful in maintaining contact with families, at present it is unclear as to how effective this has been in enabling families to become more resilient, especially with regards to building support networks and reducing isolation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quantity of change happening across the children’s services operation leads to reduced performance across the service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We maintain high expectations that our staff will be able to provide the quality service children and their families in Surrey deserve. Additional resources have been deployed across the services during this period of rapid transformation and improvement. • Several of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit reports since the 2018 inspection have commented on the improving learning and quality assurance culture which enables managers to have a detailed and accurate view of front line practice and related performance. The high level of both internal and external scrutiny on the services enables managers to take corrective action if performance drops within a particular service. • Each of the Quadrant Assistant Directors has monthly performance meetings will all of their managers to maintain practice standards, to challenge and improve where issues are identified and to embed good practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider stakeholder groups involved in the provision of children’s services and related support for vulnerable children and their families may not be fully engaged or committed to working collaboratively to ensure the successful delivery of the Surrey Children’s Improvement Programme and wider Transformation plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership representation is vital and this view is supported by the recommendations following Ofsted’s 2018 inspection of children’s services. A cross-partnership ‘Improvement Plan Delivery Group’ was established in 2018 and this group reported regularly to the Ofsted Priority Action Board on progress. Continued oversight and scrutiny of the improvement work transitioned to the Safeguarding Partnership from January 2020 and this group includes key stakeholders across the partnership. All partners are held to account by the Independent Chair.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to transform the provision of children’s services and related support for vulnerable children and their families through collaborative engagement and commitment of the wider stakeholder groups leads to children being left in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surrey Children’s Safeguarding Partnership continuing to ensure improvements are delivered and embedded across all agencies.

<p>harmful situations and damaged reputation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close working with Department for Education and Ofsted to inform Children’s improvement strategy. • New Family Safeguarding model developed to strengthen relationships with vulnerable children and families. • Surrey Children’s Services Academy co-ordinating recruitment, learning and development across agencies. • Monitoring of change through quality assurance and performance management across Children’s services to ensure performance and quality of service delivery is maintained. • Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership relaunched and becoming embedded in assuring the system and driving learning
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Financial and Value for Money Implications:

22. All improvement work is being delivered using existing resources, revenue budgets, grant funding and transformation funding where required. The transformational changes set out in this report will contribute to the efficiencies included in the medium-term financial plan.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

23. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council’s financial position, the medium-term financial outlook is uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected from next year onward, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the progress of the Children’s Improvement Plan, which will be delivered within existing revenue budgets and factored into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

24. This update is provided for information and does not require any decision. In his original report to the Secretary of State the Commissioner highlighted the importance of the role of Members in the delivery of the improvement plan. Members will need to consider the progress of the continuing Improvement Plan as set out in this report.

Equalities and Diversity:

25. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report, but any actions taken need to be consistent with the council’s policies and procedures.

Other Implications:

26. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	The inspection of children's services by Ofsted in February/March 2018 rated the 'children looked after and achieving permanence' service as Requires Improvement. 5 (of the 18) recommendations from the inspectors specifically relate to services for looked after children; several actions in the Children's Improvement Plan have addressed these issues. In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children, Young People & Families, continues to oversee the relevant improvement work for these services.
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	The Children's Improvement Plan outlines the work required to address all recommendations from Ofsted following the re-inspection of children's services. Up to 10 of the recommendations describe work required to address failings in our practice to safeguard vulnerable children. The 'Getting to Good Plan' (i.e. the next iteration of the improvement plan) outlines the priority improvement activity to be undertaken between October 2020 and September 2021 and has been adapted to incorporate recommendations arising from the Monitoring Visit in March 2021.

What Happens Next:

27. We are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services later in 2021 or early in 2022.
28. In June 2021 the CFLL Leadership Team met with Ofsted inspectors for our 'Annual Conversation' (or Annual Engagement Meeting) at which the main focus of the discussion was services for children with additional needs, because the Focused Visit in March 2021 meant that the Ofsted team was already well-sighted on improvements and further work required in children's social care.
29. Oversight and scrutiny of the improvements to children's services will continue to take place at the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership (Executive group), the Surrey Corporate Parenting Board and the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee. Detailed action plans are in place which will take the service through to the next full inspection.

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Simon Hart, Independent Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership

Surrey Children's Safeguarding Partnership – Executive Group

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Children's Improvement Report June 2021

Sources/background papers:

Guidance information published on GOV.UK - [Guidance for children's social care providers about Ofsted's phased return to inspection](#).

GOV.UK [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for children's social care services](#)

'Children's Improvement Update' at the 26 January 2021 meeting of Cabinet ([Item 13](#)).

'Corporate Parenting Annual Report' at the 11 March 2021 meeting of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee ([Item 5](#)).

Surrey and Borders Partnership – [Summary of our new approach to emotional wellbeing and mental health service for children and young people](#) (i-THRIVE).

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