

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 21 DECEMBER 2021



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

LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LIFELONG LEARNING

SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY / EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Purpose of the Report:

This report provides an update on the improvement of Surrey's children's services, an overview of our readiness for a full Ofsted ILACS inspection, a summary of the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit (September 2021) findings/feedback, our response and any impact on our improvement priorities.

Further information is included on the services and activity outlined in the last report to Cabinet. At the meeting of Cabinet in June 2021, [the decision was made \(see item 10\)](#): *'That Cabinet 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'*.

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 September 2021 Ofsted Monitoring Visit (focused on services for care leavers) and the updated improvement plan and priorities as set out by children's services in response to feedback received.
2. Notes the progress made delivering the children's services 'Getting to Good' plan, the improvement priorities resulting from the Ofsted Focused Visit in March 2021 and the services' preparedness for a full Ofsted ILACS inspection.
3. Agrees to receive a further update on the progress made delivering the children's services 'Getting to Good' plan and the overall inspection readiness in Spring 2022 (unless such an inspection has already taken place).

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 resumed in May 2021 and Ofsted are continuing to carry out the 'Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) programme. Although the timetable for inspection is not notified in advance, we are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services between Spring and Summer 2022.

Executive Summary:

Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Services

1. Since the last update to Cabinet in June, 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.
2. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced since last reporting to Cabinet – though there are still higher levels of demand across certain parts of the service, this is having a less disruptive impact day-by-day. Whilst the day-by-day impact has reduced, COVID-19 still has a significant impact on the remaining levels of demand on services, particularly when compared to the planned strategic direction pre-pandemic.
3. 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. As we enter the winter months and the risk of further disruption to services increases, we will remain vigilant and ready to respond – at pace – to any impact from the pandemic and will enact contingency plans where needed.

Ofsted – Monitoring Visit – September 2021

4. On 7 and 8 September, Ofsted carried out their 5th monitoring visit (since the 2018 inspection); this 2-day visit was focused on care leavers and specifically looked at areas of practice that were of concern during the last inspection:
 - The provision of information for young people on their entitlements and health histories.
 - The workloads of personal advisers (PAs) in the leaving care team.
 - The experiences and progress of young people aged 18 to 25 years of age who have left care.
5. The inspectors spoke to 10 care leavers, met with over 15 frontline practitioners and Team Managers, reviewed a selection of recent audits and looked at a significant amount of evidence and performance information both during the visit and in the days leading up to it.
6. Ofsted found that Surrey's children's services are helping children "make progress in their transitions to becoming independent young adults" and "young people who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UAS) receive specialist and skilled support". They fed

back that Personal Advisers (PAs) understand the profiles and needs of young people well and are in touch with nearly all care leavers and they work hard to maintain contact and trusting relationships.

7. Some concerns were highlighted where young people have not been well supported because of frequent changes in their allocated PA and the support provided by the Duty system (e.g. when PAs are unwell or absent) was not always good enough. The care leavers service is exploring a new way of supporting young people when their PAs are absent for long periods – a team in the South West quadrant has an exemplary model for this which we want to learn from for the rest of the county.
8. During the visit, inspectors identified that the majority of young people are in suitable education, employment and training, however, “nearly a third of young people are not, and this rate of non-engagement has not improved since the last inspection.” The service’s virtual school provides helpful dedicated education and employment advice for care leavers and UAS young people and an extensive range of mentoring and other well-targeted initiatives, which helps many young people make progress. Ofsted noted that “Senior managers recognise that they need to do more work within the county council and with local employers to provide more opportunities for young people to enter employment, apprenticeships and training in the local economy.”
9. The [full report](#) is available on the Ofsted website – published on 12 October 2021 and is attached here (see: ‘*Annex 1 - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter 12.10.2021*’). There is still more to do to ensure we are providing consistently good support for our care leavers – the Getting to Good team are working closely with the service to tackle the areas for improvement highlighted during the visit – and to build on the strengths and examples of great practice as well. The priority improvements following the feedback include:
 - Adopting a new model to manage staff absence and improve the duty system across all quadrants (learning from best practice in the South West).
 - Updating the Care Leaver Local Offer website and published document to improve knowledge of the offer and entitlements.
 - Expanding the role of the Virtual School to provide additional support to young people aged 16 and over.
 - Updating the housing protocol (for care leavers) alongside districts and boroughs.
 - Ongoing work of the Placement, Value, Outcomes (PVO) programme to improve sufficiency of suitable accommodation for care leavers.

Ofsted Inspections – What Next:

10. Surrey’s children’s services have now completed 5 Ofsted Monitoring Visits and 1 Ofsted Focused (Assurance) Visit since the last full inspection in 2018. As of this month, children’s services now anticipate the next inspection from Ofsted to be the full ILACS inspection which will result in a graded judgement of the quality of our services.
11. Each visit over the last 2-3 years has looked at different areas of practice across different parts of children’s services. While there is still more to do to improve services, the quality of practice and the outcomes for children and families have vastly improved since 2018. This position is supported and evidenced both by the external scrutiny (e.g. from Ofsted, Department for Education, Peer Reviews, etc) and the internal quality assurance, performance and audit intelligence (e.g. case audit programme, mock inspections, performance information, etc).

12. At the time of the last report to Cabinet in June 2021, we were anticipating a full re-inspection of children's services sometime later in 2021 or in early 2022. This timeline has been revised (by Ofsted) which may have led to the decision to hold a Monitoring Visit (focused on services for care leavers) in September 2021.

'Getting to Good':

13. The Getting to Good (GtG) plan (i.e. the next iteration of the children's improvement plan) was developed 12 months ago and incorporates the learning from previous inspections, peer reviews, feedback from children and families and the significant amount of quality assurance work. The plan goes beyond the inspection findings from 2018; Effective Family Resilience is an entirely new practice model and therefore a more ambitious and innovative improvement plan was required to 'Get us to Good'.

14. The GtG Working Group continues to meet weekly and is overseeing a huge amount of improvement activity across all services – including some significant projects currently underway. The group members work closely with Quality Assurance and frontline services to ensure the improvement work is prioritised and delivered to a high standard with robust evidence in place.

15. Throughout the Summer the GtG group was reviewing – in detail – the Ofsted 'grade descriptors of good practice' and self-assessing against these. There is still a lot to do before we can be confident of achieving an overall 'Good' judgement at a full Ofsted inspection; however, we are on the right trajectory – as evidenced by the recent Ofsted visits and our quality assurance findings.

16. The next 6 months are critical for Getting to Good and Inspection Readiness. The recent Ofsted visit enabled us to model our service, staff, quality and performance information preparation and in October 2021 we developed a forward plan to ensure all services are 'ready' for a full inspection next year. Further information is included in the attached Annex document (see '*Annex 2 - Getting to Good & Inspection Readiness 6-Month Forward Plan*').

Children's Services Improvement Update:

17. As reported in June, our improvement work and Family Resilience Transformation Programme continues throughout this year and we have been giving particular focus 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 Ofsted Focused Visit in Spring this year. The continued implementation of our Family Safeguarding Model for children in need of help and protection is a key part of shifting our services to a model of earlier intervention and we are also maintaining a relentless focus on our workforce to ensure that children and families are supported by skilled and experienced practitioners.

18. **Neglect** continues to be the most common category of harm for children subject to child protection plans in Surrey. Developing colleagues' skills in working with families where neglect is an issue is an important aspect of their professional development. We are continuing to embed 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. Practitioner training continues to be delivered for our own staff and colleagues in partner agencies, and the

centralised recording system for GCP2 went live in the summer. As of October 2021, over 700 staff from children's services and partner agencies have been trained and licensed in the use of GCP2 (this includes over 75% of our social workers). We're working hard to recruit schools and the education sector into using the Graded Care Profile 2.0 and while this has been challenging at times, further engagement should help. Greater use of data and performance reports is also helping to identify gaps in use of the tool.

19. **Children with Disabilities (CWD) service:** We reported to Cabinet in June the need to accelerate improvement in this area. We have increased leadership capacity for the service, conducted a skills audit of practitioners and carried out a complete review of the support being given to all children. The review found that many children supported by the CWD Service have the right plan and right support in place to meet their needs, develop their independence, address social isolation, and keep them safe. However, we have also found that for many children, planning needs to be smarter and more timely, recording needs to improve, supervision & management oversight need to focus more on improving children's outcomes and additional training is needed for frontline staff. A series of recommendations has been made and these are being progressed as a priority over the coming months.
20. The rollout and embedding of **Family Safeguarding and Motivational Interviewing** continues with significant effort on training, staff engagement and support. The embedding of these new ways of working continues to be a challenge. We can see the improvements happening in frontline practice but getting all practitioners comfortable using these approaches is taking longer than expected. There are pockets of excellent work but sometimes social work practice is not as safe as it needs to be and can be inconsistent.
21. **Mindworks Surrey:** The way children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Surrey are delivered is being transformed. We reported on our progress to Cabinet in June 2021 and highlighted that this remains an area of priority concern for the Council where the most work is needed to improve children and families' experiences. Our new approach which began in April this year ensures children and young people have a central voice in decisions about their care, and their needs are met based on their goals. During the summer we announced the new service name (Mindworks Surrey) and launched the website which was co-produced with children and young people alongside families, carers, schools, GPs, and alliance staff. The [Mindworks Surrey website](#) provides children, young people, families and carers with information about services, advice and resources and also features a dedicated area for professionals including schools and GPs. It is a source of essential information, including how to ask for help in a crisis via the 24/7 Crisis Line.
22. **Transforming Surrey Children's Residential Services:** On 30 November we will have reported to Cabinet to seek approval to transform Surrey County Council Children's Homes by addressing vulnerabilities in the current staffing structure and management capacity, strengthening the specialised purpose for each home and developing a new provision for children with autism experiencing crisis. This is an important and exciting change to provide Surrey homes for Surrey's children and young people, enabling them to stay living in Surrey wherever possible and appropriate by having a range of homes that can meet children's diverse needs. Our aim is to update the current staffing establishments, specialise the purpose of each home, transform the specialist crisis provision for young people with mental health difficulties – and for children with

disabilities, and use the funding to better enable efficiencies by containing or saving costs on commissioning external placements.

23. **Recruitment, Retention and Culture:** We have a comprehensive plan to develop our workforce strategy and improve our offer to potential and existing employees. We know that in service areas where retention is poor, the turnover of staff affects children and families' abilities to develop positive work relationships that will effect change. We concluded 'Phase 2' in the Summer – developing and implementing new approaches – and have already seen a noticeable impact on our workforce with improved retention and staff turnover rates reducing from 27% in January 2020 to 19.65% today. We do still have over 35 vacant social worker posts and a further 80-90 with locums in place of a permanent social worker; there is more to do in order to reduce vacancies and improve retention and further initiatives will be rolled out during the year. Our initiatives in 'Phase 3' (Jun-Sep 2021) and 'Phase 4' (Oct-Dec 2021) include the launch of a new continuing professional development package to support staff professional development, an 'Aspiring Managers & Practice Experts Programme', an Academy talent pipeline, succession planning workshops, ongoing events & promotions to attract skilled social workers, ongoing employee-led cultural development and the implementation of a permanent 'Staff Retention Group'. This will enable us to retain, develop and attract the best staff to Surrey and to cultivate a culture that is positive, supportive and meets the needs of our practitioners and managers.

Consultation:

24. 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) (now ICSs) and providers and colleagues from the third sector. Cabinet Members, Ofsted inspectors and representatives from the DfE were consulted on the content of the original improvement plan in 2018 - and have been consulted on the progress made since then on a regular basis.
25. 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. The content of this report along with a more detailed update on the No Wrong Door project will be presented to the Select Committee in January 2022.
26. 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.
27. 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Workforce Strategy group – established in summer 2020 – has developed a comprehensive plan to |
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<p>left in harmful situations, poor outcomes, costly services and damaged reputation</p>	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A professional development framework for social workers has been launched, which has established the career development pathway for social workers and social work managers at every stage of their career in Surrey, from student social worker to Director. • Regular engagement activity with the workforce is now in place following the first 'Workforce Matters' webinar in November 2020. These provide opportunities for us to share ideas, hear how everyone is and take action where things need resolving. • Overall, we do have fewer vacancies than at the start of the year and the Recruitment, Retention & Culture project is exploring more ways to improve our retention of experienced staff.
<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"> • The Family Safeguarding Model and Motivational Interviewing (MI) is taking time to embed. The turnover of staff and employment of locums presents a big challenge as has the impact of Covid and working from home arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are constantly training new staff on the model, the new way of recording and use of the intervention programme. Family Safeguarding teams have focused work-plans with oversight from senior managers. • The MI Practice Leads (appointed in July) are having a good impact in recent months – they are continuing to run workshops, deliver training learning sessions and champion the model across the workforce. • We do see some really positive impact from the model – some pockets of brilliant practice that really evidences how well the model works.
<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 harmful situations and damaged reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surrey Children’s Safeguarding Partnership continuing to ensure improvements are delivered and embedded across all agencies. • Close working with Department for Education and Ofsted to inform Children’s improvement strategy. • 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:

28. The improvement work will deliver long term benefits for the families and young people we support, however it is also complex to project the budgetary effects. Achieving the improvement in children's services is not mutually exclusive to the need for financial rigour and so a number of projects and actions are in place to support the improvement work whilst striving to manage the budget.
29. The rate of uptake and change to recruitment and retention mentioned in paragraph 20 is contributing to pressures on the staffing budget. An in-year overspend of c£3m due to increased costs of employing agency staff is being forecast. Reductions in the level of agency staff are part of the 22/23 MTFs assumptions in order to mitigate this pressure.
30. Numbers of Looked After Children have been increasing during this year which has led to a current forecast overspend of c£2m on social care placements. MTFs assumptions, from 21/22 onwards, are that new practice models such as family safeguarding (referenced in paragraph 17) will lead to a reduction in numbers of Looked After Children requiring residential support. The impact of COVID-19 on numbers is also a factor on cost pressures.
31. In addition to regular financial monitoring, a comprehensive finance action plan has been developed which focuses on particular areas of pressure.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

32. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains 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 in the medium term, 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.
33. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the recommendations of this report and the continued improvement in Children's services, whilst also noting the link between both service and financial trajectory improvements.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

34. 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:

35. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report, but any actions taken will be consistent with the council's policies and procedures.

Other Implications:

36. 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:

37. We are anticipating a full re-inspection of Surrey's children's services between Spring and Summer 2022.
38. Delivery of the transformation and improvement work outlined in this report will continue at pace with significant resources focused on improving the quality of practice and frontline services for the children and families we support.
39. 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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Consulted:

- Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families
- Simon Hart, Independent Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Surrey Children's Safeguarding Partnership – Executive Group
- Surrey Corporate Parenting Board

Annexes:

- Annex 1 - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter 12.10.2021
- Annex 2 - Getting to Good & Inspection Readiness 6-Month Forward Plan

Sources/background papers:

- GOV.UK [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for children's social care services.](#)
- 'Children's Improvement Update' at the 29 June 2021 meeting of Cabinet ([Item 10](#)).
- [Mindworks Surrey](#) website.

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