

### **Transformation Assurance Board**

As part of my commitment to continue to embedding change in Children's Social Care, I have taken on the chairmanship of the Children's Social Care (CSC) Transformation & Assurance Board. This is in its fourth month of operation and developing into its role of overseeing the work of children's social care, in particular the impact of transformation and performance and driving forward improvements. The Board is supported by some external independent members, who are bringing their expertise to bear on this important work and ensuring external scrutiny. It also has cross-party member representation to provide additional strength and knowledge to the Board. A key focus has been on the family safeguarding service.

The **'Family Safeguarding Model** – Phase 2' project held a 'relaunch' workshop in December 2022 and received a diagnostic review report from our Hertfordshire County Council partners in practice. Senior leaders in CSC are currently reflecting on the findings ahead of publication. There has also been a number of workforce related workshops this month to support the Family Safeguarding Service's application of thresholds in social care practice.

I am pleased to highlight that the Family Safeguarding service has been successful in securing funding from the Department for Education that enables them to work in partnership with the Centre for Family Safeguarding from November 2022 to March 2023. The support focuses on strengthening the way the Family Safeguarding model is used as a way of working and the importance of working closely with safeguarding partners across the County such as Schools, Health Authorities, Voluntary Organisations, Probation Service and Police to address needs related with domestic abuse, substance misuse, and mental ill health. Partnership working in this way helps provide personalised access to support from specialist recovery workers who work alongside families to create conditions for improved wellbeing, happiness, and safety within their family units, which in turn helps us all to deliver on our ambitions to significantly improve outcomes for children and their families.

**Early Help:** The early help offer in Surrey is complex and dependent on the contributions of all agencies, partners, and communities. When this is working well families can access a localised early help offer, whether they are signposted and self-serve or are supported by practitioners through schools and early years settings, Police, GPs, and other health services to get the help they need. For families whose needs are multiple and more complex, practitioners or families themselves can request support through the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA). The aim of the partnership continues to be to identify and support families at the earliest opportunity, embed the Family Resilience and Safeguarding model across the whole system in Surrey and stem the escalating demand for children's social care.

A deep dive into Early Help was presented to the Transformation & Assurance Board in December 2022, as part of the intention to maximise the new outcome framework for Supporting Families. Its focus is on building the resilience of vulnerable families, and on driving system change so that every area has joined up, efficient local services which are able to identify families in need and provide the right support at the right time. The Board endorsed the next steps for the Early Help Improvement journey outlined below:

- Establish an early help partnership board, with the first meeting taking place in January 2023.
- A review with partners of the safeguarding partnership threshold document, focussing on changing language and ensuring the services are meeting need, not fitting into services. It is also hoped to use this opportunity to incorporate other thresholds such as IThrive.
- Refreshing our Helping Families Early strategy in line with the refresh of thresholds.
- Aligning with other council activity of community engagement
- Enhancing our adolescent offer to ensure we are offering the correct support to adolescent
- Exploring future delivery methods and funding streams for supporting families/ Early Help

As part of the Early Help Continuous Improvement Programme, the service has been learning about the experiences of children, young people and families that access Early Help services as well as learning from partners that deliver these services. A research partner was commissioned to carry out engagement work with 105 Practitioners, 5 Children aged 1-10yrs, 34 Young people aged 11-18yrs, 23 Parents and 3 Mentors. The research partner recruited and trained community researchers who conducted 59 interviews and 62 people were consulted. The ten themes that came out of the findings have been used as a basis to inform the service co-design events which took place at the end of January/beginning of February. The learning from families and partners will inform the Early Help Needs Assessment

that has been developed, will be used to shape our Early Help provision and the recommissioning of our Early Help services that will go live in April 2024 and be considered at a future Cabinet meeting.

We have recently welcomed inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for a multi-agency Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) into Surrey's Early Help arrangements for children and families. This entailed two weeks of arms-length evaluation of the Surrey partnership's early help arrangements and a week of fieldwork which was completed in early March, and I look forward to receiving the final report which is expected to be published in early May. I'd like to thank both our staff and those of our partners for their hard work in meeting and providing information to the inspectors.

**Customer Services:** In Autumn 2022, an internal audit was undertaken to review the process of complaints management in the Children, Families & Lifelong Learning (CFL) directorate. The Customer Relations service provide a vital engagement service for Surrey residents, and the feedback received, in many cases, is used to develop practice and help us to understand the impact of our work with children and families. There were some outcomes for consideration, which reflected the experience of the Customer Relations team who have noted significant increases in the volume of enquiries and complaints over the past two years, in-line with increases in requests for services. The report findings and the actions proposed by the service in response are currently being reviewed by CFL senior leaders and will be a feature of a future CSC Transformation and Assurance Board deep-dive.

**Building Belonging Programme:** The Building Belonging Programme will provide a multi-agency (social care, health, education, police and voluntary sector) approach to preventing children and young people with complex needs entering the criminal justice system. The partnership has been successful in a bid for funding from NHS England to implement a pilot in one district in Surrey. The programme is part of a National Vanguard, Health & Justice, and part of the NHSE 10-year Integrated Framework and will be evaluated to identify local and national learning to service delivery.

A decision-making process involving data analysis and consultation resulted in the programme being focused in Elmbridge. Elmbridge has little by way of multi-agency partnerships and interventions for this cohort of children; Family Support are working with families with teenagers with mental health issues which in some cases is leading to anti-social behaviour and risk of exploitation. There is a cyclical nature to families with generational issues and young people following other family members into the justice system. Elmbridge has areas of deprivation and inequality, exacerbated by neighbouring affluence, but children from all demographics are at risk of exploitation which the programme will explore.

The Programme is currently being mobilised with a view to going live at the end of March. It will take a life course approach, providing both preventative and intensive support to children and families from early years through to transition to adulthood.

**Recruitment and Retention:** The recruitment and retention of our Children's Social Workers has been an ongoing challenge for the Council, further complicated by the pandemic and the increase in the cost of living. The demand for services has continued to rise, adding pressures to a workforce delivering services against a backdrop of high vacancies (c31% vacancy rate - December 2022). This is by no means unique to Surrey and the Local Government Association, which represents councils across England, published their 2022 Workforce Survey on 20 January, highlighting the scale of the issue - [2022 Local Government Workforce Survey | Local Government Association](#). It said 'significant staff shortages in local government risk having a serious impact on councils' capacity to deliver services'. The Survey finds that: *More than 8 in 10 councils are having difficulties recruiting children's social workers and almost three quarters (72 per cent) are having problems retaining them – councils are increasingly having to turn to agency staff to plug gaps which is more costly and leave less for children's services overall.*

Children's Services has been trying to tackle recruitment and retention issues through a targeted approach by setting up a Recruitment, Retention and Culture Workforce programme that has a specific focus on Social Workers (SW). Amongst several interventions, this has led to running targeted recruitment campaigns; webinars that are aimed at agency SWs (temp to perm campaign); career pathways that support internal growth; internal transfers that enable retention and development; a diverse external pipeline of social workers from frontline to universities and a continued programme of learning and development from the Children's Academy. To **page 48** develop the pipeline of skills we are looking to

grow our own through our Apprenticeship scheme and explore other approaches such as a non-SW qualified staff progression and supporting SW qualified staff in other roles back to the profession.

### **Looked after Children**

It is our aim, where appropriate, to have as many as possible of our Looked after Children cared for and supported in Surrey close to their support networks and communities and as part of this sufficiency strategy, we have embarked on an ambitious construction programme. On site construction and internal works continues at the new Epsom and Walton children's homes, with completion expected in March and Interviews for the Registered Managers for these homes have taken place. The application for planning determination for a Dorking children's home will be heard at the March Planning Committee and a team have started the detailed design work and issued a project programme. Major work to redevelop the Shaw family centre in Woking to a fit-for-purpose family contact centre continues with expected completion by June 23. In addition, Cabinet has also approved the allocation of a further £18 million to create an additional 24 beds in Surrey Children's homes in coming years, on top of the projects I have mentioned already - starting with a further home in the Woking area.

**Foster carer remuneration:** Recruiting and retaining our in-house foster carers is also key to our sufficiency strategy of providing Surrey homes for Surrey children and nationally the number of people registered as foster carers has seen a decrease in recent years. Currently 51% of children in foster care, excluding those living with Council foster carers from their own kinship network, are placed with Independent Fostering Agency carers which can cost £20,000 more per child per year on average than an in-house foster home. Of those, 89% live outside of Surrey. Whilst people decide to foster for a number of reasons, of which remuneration is only part of the picture, it was recognised that the Council's remuneration is not wholly competitive with other local authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies. The proposal to restructure and increase remuneration to foster carers was approved by Cabinet on 31 January 2023. Investment totalling £2.7m was approved to bring fostering allowances and skills payments more in line with competitors and to reward and incentivise areas of fostering that are more complex or difficult to recruit to.

I hope that by increasing the number of placements in our own homes and by supporting the recruitment and retention of our brilliant foster carers that it will be possible both to reduce the cost of care and provide high quality placements in Surrey to avoid children losing contact with their local communities.

In December I was pleased to be able to attend a brilliant Christmas celebration organised by the User Voice and Participation team for looked after children and care leavers at Surrey's headquarters in Woodhatch, Reigate. During the event, there was a DJ, a live performance by Fiaa, a craft area where children and young people could decorate baubles, a buffet, popcorn machine, face painting and Santa was handing out gifts from his grotto with his elves and Mrs Claus. The evening was full of laughter, smiles, and amazing dance moves!

We want to create more opportunities for care leavers and be an outstanding 'corporate parents' to all of Surrey's care leavers. As part of this we are in the process of joining the Care Leaver Covenant which is an initiative aimed at improving outcomes for care leavers across the country.

### **Congratulations and support for our Staff**

Our dedicated staff are key to our support for vulnerable children and they often work in challenging conditions. To highlight their contributions, in December the communications team launched an internal Yammer campaign called 'Celebrating CFLL' to promote the successes of staff within the CFLL directorate during 2022. The campaign recognised that roles in CFLL are often tough and put a spotlight on the work the directorate does to support children and families in Surrey. Staff from across CFLL, including each member of the CFLL Leadership Team, posted achievements which supported the directorate's purpose: to ensure that every child is seen and heard, feels safe and can grow. The posts were seen by Yammer users 2,642 times in total and had over 180 interactions. The 'Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Hub' community on Yammer tripled its membership during the campaign, with 764 active participants in the first month of launch.

The communications team also hosted the first Surrey-wide recognition awards in December, 'Stars in Surrey' to celebrate the efforts and successes of teams across Surrey County Council as well as our partners and heroes in our communities. CFLL staff were shortlisted in eight of the ten award categories and took home four awards in recognition of the fantastic individuals in the directorate and the importance of their work.

Our staff can use one day per year to volunteer as a team to help community organisations as well as providing an opportunity for team building. Recently the Policy, Planning & Projects Team in CFLAG organised a Volunteering Day, supporting Linkable an invaluable disability charity based in Woking. The team worked hard to give the internal rooms a make-over and tidy up the garden. This was organised through Surrey's Social Value Marketplace [Surrey County Council \(supplytosurrey.co.uk\)](http://supplytosurrey.co.uk) and meant that staff could give back to a charity that supports both children and adults to learn independent skills. The Linkable team were very grateful for the help which meant that their staff could focus on the most important aspect of their work, supporting those they work with and their families.

### **Housing Strategy**

Work has continued on engaging stakeholders and developing the draft strategy, that has been based on the baseline assessment and Housing Summit on 8<sup>th</sup> December. The strategy makes a number of 'Calls to Government' and 'Calls to Action' for all in Surrey with a role to play in improving housing, homes and accommodation. District and Borough Housing Officers, Planning Officers and Chief Executives have been given an opportunity to contribute to and refine the draft strategy, which is on the agenda for consideration at today's meeting.