

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET****DATE: 28 JANUARY 2020****REPORT OF: MRS MARY LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES****LEAD OFFICER: DAVE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE****SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Children's services in Surrey were judged by Ofsted in May 2018 to be in a critical state. As a result Ofsted are carrying out a series of 'Monitoring Visits' approximately every 3-4 months, focussing on a different part of the service each time, and assessing the quality of practice for supporting and safeguarding children and families in Surrey. The fourth Monitoring Visit took place in October/November 2019 and the findings from that inspection are included in this report.

Following the 2018 full Ofsted inspection a Children's Commissioner was also appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) to make a judgement about whether children's services should continue to be retained by Surrey County Council (SCC). As previously reported to Cabinet (most recently July 2019), the Commissioner conducted a full review of children's services in September 2018 concluding that SCC had a credible improvement plan in place. A further 'interim review' was carried out in April 2019 with the Commissioner reporting that he was "encouraged at the pace of change – recognising the authority had made rapid and solid progress since the initial review". The Commissioner's final review of our services completed in December 2019 and his recommendations to the Minister and DfE are detailed in this report.

The service has embarked upon a comprehensive transformation programme with a major restructure of children's services completing last year to support the shift to a model based on early support and prevention. The significant internal and external scrutiny of the improvement programme, including the recent feedback from Ofsted and the Commissioner, shows the huge amount of progress made to improve and demonstrates that SCC is progressing well on the improvement journey. This scrutiny (Ofsted, Commissioner.etc) is welcome and provides important insight into the impact of the work however we continue to maintain that this is our journey to providing good and outstanding services for the children, young people and families that we support because they deserve nothing less.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet notes the progress made delivering the Children's Improvement programme and the findings from the recent Children's Commissioner Visit and the fourth Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

2. Cabinet reviews and agrees to the on-going scrutiny arrangements of the improvement programme for the next 6-12 months as described in paragraphs 16-24.
3. Cabinet reviews progress in May 2020 on the delivery of the Children's improvement programme and the findings from the April 2020 Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

#### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The next Ofsted Monitoring Visit will take place on 7 & 8 April 2020 with publication of the inspector's findings in late-April 2020. At this point the service is expected to have greater certainty on whether the Surrey's children's services will be ready for a full re-inspection from Ofsted this year.

As outlined in the main section of the report, the improvement programme is progressing well with Surrey's children's services successfully delivering the actions from the improvement plan to address Ofsted recommendations from the 2018 full inspection. There are comprehensive scrutiny arrangements already in place for 2020 with involvement from SCC officers, Members, partner agencies, the DfE and other key stakeholders.

#### **DETAILS:**

##### **Children's Commissioner Review of Progress and Final Recommendations**

1. When the DfE-appointed Children's Commissioner reviewed our transformation and improvement plans over a year ago (report submitted September 2018), they concluded that we had developed the right plan to turn around children's services in Surrey. The April 2019 visit was a check on our progress towards implementing our new structure and new model and to ensure we were on-track to improve the culture and practice for our staff, management and leadership and also our partners.
2. The findings from the interim review were reported to the DfE in May 2019 and the interim conclusion was as follows:
 

"The authority has made rapid and solid progress since I submitted my original report. It is important to emphasise that this is from a starting point of seriously failing services and there is still some way to go before there is clear evidence that vulnerable children and their families are being better served. Nonetheless, I can give a positive message on the Council's progress and the effectiveness of the leadership that has been put in place. I will report again in 6 months but I am able to commend the progress that has been made whilst continuing to emphasize the magnitude of the task."
3. The Commissioner has carried out a final review of progress in November and December 2019. Feedback was shared with Surrey County Council on 12 December 2019 and we have now received the Commissioner's final report to the Minister and DfE (*see Annex A - Report of the Non-Executive Commissioner for Children's Services Surrey - 20 December 2019*).
4. The methodology of the Commissioner's final review was the same as his previous reviews. Senior Managers and practitioners from Cornwall Council completed on-site visits to Surrey's children's services, meeting with practitioners, managers and partners as well as holding focus groups both with staff, young people and partner

agencies. The review also included audits of around 40 children's cases along with analysis of the following:

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

### **Ofsted Monitoring Visit Findings**

8. On 31 October and 1 November 2019 Ofsted carried out their fourth Monitoring Visit of Surrey's children's services. The focus of this visit was on the effectiveness of child protection investigations, the quality of statutory assessments and the impact of child protection and child in need plans in reducing risks and improving children's circumstances.
9. A letter from the Inspectors following the visit detailing their findings was [published on the Ofsted website](#) on 18 December 2019 and a copy is attached here (*see Annex B - Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter 18.12.19*).

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

### **Improvement Priorities – January to June 2020**

13. The latest Ofsted report – and the report from the Commissioner - represents the significant amount of work by staff and partners over the last 18 months but we recognise there is more that can be improved on and the journey to good and outstanding services for children and families in Surrey continues.
14. There are several major transformation projects already underway across children's services and these will continue into next year. However we will also be addressing the specific feedback received recently. Priorities for the next 6 months include the following:
- a. Developing the Early Help Offer and ensuring this is clear and well understood by practitioners and partners. Specific activities include: a multi-agency review of the Early Help Assessment (EHA); refreshing the Family Information Service (FIS); improving communication about Early Help in Surrey for the internal and external workforce; fully implementing changes to

our Family Centres and completing the recommissioning of Early Help services.

- b. Addressing the gaps in our training offer both for staff and partners through the Children's Academy and the Safeguarding Partnership.
  - c. Continuing the recruitment activity through the dedicated task-force by increasing the number of permanent practitioners, developing a 're-entry to social work' programme and improving the effectiveness of the centralised recruitment of staff. To achieve the fully multi-disciplinary teams for the Family Safeguarding model, the existing vacancies for specialist workers (e.g. domestic abuse practitioners and substance misuse / mental health practitioners) need to be filled.
  - d. Greater scrutiny of performance information & intelligence, audit and quality assurance findings to ensure services are operating consistently across all parts of the county.
  - e. Fully embedding the Family Safeguarding Workbook and supporting staff to use the new recording system effectively.
  - f. Improving engagement work with children and young people with a renewed focus on ensuring action is taken to address issues that matter to young people and their lived experiences.
  - g. Ensuring managers continue to improve their support for practitioners and helping them to produce 'smart plans' with innovative and focussed direct work being undertaken that directly links to the plan.
15. In line with the priority agreed unanimously by [Full Council in October 2018](#) to bring children in care closer to home, work will continue to expand the pool of SCC foster carers; from April to December 2019, 24 new foster carer households have been approved and we have 17 booked for review at panel between January and March 2020 bringing the expected total to 41 approved for the year. The rollout of the evidence-based [Mockingbird model](#) to better support foster carers continues at pace; this model helps to ensure carers and children have the extended family they need, lowers the risk of placements falling apart and allows foster carers to set up a home hub of around six to eight families providing a network of support to each other. SCC's residential children's homes have an important role to play in this and it is noteworthy that two of our in house services, Libertas (just confirmed on 3 January 2020) and Burbank (October 2019) have both received Outstanding judgements from Ofsted since the last report to Cabinet. In addition, a full review of the residential estate is planned for 2020. There will be a sustained focus on placing children in or close to Surrey and the widely publicised findings of the [All Party Parliamentary Group report 'No Place at Home'](#) and the [report by the Children's Commissioner 'Pass the Parcel'](#) reinforce the need for this to remain a priority for SCC's children's services. It is however important to note that despite this continued effort to bring children closer to home, it will take some time for the overall numbers of looked after children living outside of the County to reduce significantly.

### **Oversight & Scrutiny of the Improvement Work**

16. The Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB) has been responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan since September 2018 with membership from Surrey County Council officers and Members, partner agencies, the DfE and the Commissioner.

17. 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 almost 100% complete. Scrutiny of the improvement work is now shifting 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 2019 onwards. This decision was taken following discussion with the Safeguarding Partnership Executive, the DfE, Commissioner and other senior stakeholders.
18. To ensure the corporate division(s) of the County Council are also kept informed on the progress of the improvement programme – and its impact on frontline practice, children and families – the Executive Director for Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture and the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership will report regularly to the Corporate Leadership Team.
19. Scrutiny from the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee will continue along with regular reporting to Cabinet in 2020. Progress addressing the key areas of improvement identified in the 2018 Ofsted inspection were [last reported to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on 12 September 2019](#) (along with updates on the Family Resilience Transformation Programme). The Committee recommended that “the Performance Sub-Group monitors the quality of social work practice, service user experience and the performance of the new Family Resilience model via its regular scrutiny of the Children's Service compendium and feeds back to the Committee as appropriate” (see [Item 5 minutes](#) for details).
20. In addition, Members of the Children's Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee along with the Lead Member have recently carried out further in-depth scrutiny of the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) in December 2019 as part of their regular scrutiny cycle and they also took part in a 'Recommendation 41 visit' at the C-SPA at the same time. This was an opportunity to carry out detailed scrutiny of the frontline service, observing the teams working in real-time; these and similar visits continue to enhance Members' understanding and awareness of the changes delivered in the improvement programme and the impact on the services.
21. Detailed internal scrutiny of both the quality and performance of frontline services continues to take place through several settings – now well embedded into 'business as usual' across the directorate. These range from team meetings tackling local issues through to countywide 'Practice Leadership Team' meetings chaired by the Director for Quality Assurance focussing on information including performance intelligence, audit findings and feedback / complaints. The team of senior managers and assistant directors use this time to analyse the information, share learning and agree actions with a focus on both issues and what can be done to improve as well as on positive information and data and how it was achieved.
22. 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 continue to be audited each month with a significant proportion of audits continuing to go through moderation. We continue to receive 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.”*

23. To further enhance the scrutiny activity and detailed understanding of the quality of practice, a series of ‘Mock Inspections’ will also be taking place between January and April 2020. There will be at least 2 inspections each month across a range of services and the findings from these lead to detailed action/improvement plans being produced by service managers and assistant directors. The Practice Leadership Team will provide the support (and challenge) to ensure actions are followed up and delivered. Findings from these inspections and general inspection readiness work will be reported to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive at least every 2 months.
24. Work has already begun to ensure we are aligning the scrutiny of the improvement activity with the work of the Safeguarding Partnership Executive. We will be reporting in detail to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive in February 2020 on the subject of thresholds with analysis of the impact across services – and on service users – resulting from the Family Resilience model put in place earlier this year.

**CONSULTATION:**

25. The Surrey Children’s Improvement Plan has been developed between officers from the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture directorate, representatives from Surrey Police, Surrey School Phase Councils, health services including the CCGs and providers and colleagues from the third sector. 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.
26. Progress addressing the key areas of improvement across children’s services continues to be scrutinised by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on a regular basis (see paragraph 19). A [further update was given to the Select Committee](#) by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families on 13 December 2019 to provide the opportunity for scrutiny of the priority areas of work, the budget position and the performance of services.
27. Overall scrutiny and oversight of the improvement work and the delivery of the Children’s Improvement Plan is being transitioned to the Safeguarding Partnership from the Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB) from January 2020 onwards. This is following agreement from OPAB board members, the Independent Chair, the Safeguarding Partnership Executive, the Children’s Commissioner and the DfE representative.

**RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

<p><b>The quantity of change happening across the children’s services operation leads to reduced performance across the service.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Officers understand that this is a challenging programme of transformation. We have high expectations that our staff will be able to provide the high quality service children in Surrey deserve. Additional resources have been</li> </ul>
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	<p>deployed across the services during this period of rapid transformation and improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit reports over the last 12 months 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.</li> <li>• Each of the Quadrant Assistant Directors has monthly performance meetings with all of their managers to maintain expectations about compliance. We have built in additional capacity for 12 months (from April 2019 to March 2020) in the Front Door, in Assessment and in Family Safeguarding to lend resilience as new ways of working with families and with partners continue to embed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>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.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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 is transitioning to the Safeguarding Partnership from January 2020 and this group includes key stakeholders across the partnership. Robust terms of reference have been agreed and all partners are held to account by the Independent Chair.</li> </ul>

#### FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

28. There are no direct financial implications relating to the Surrey Children's Improvement Plan. All improvement work is being delivered using existing resources and revenue budgets where required.

## **SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY**

29. 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 as it is heavily dependent on decisions made by Central Government. With no clarity on these beyond 2020/21, 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 factored into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER**

30. Following the assessment by Ofsted of Surrey's children's services as 'inadequate', the appointment of the Children's Commissioner and his recommendation following review that Surrey Children's Service should be allowed 12 months to demonstrate it can make the required improvements, this report has been prepared to inform Cabinet of the progress of the improvement plan. The Commissioner has recommended to the DfE that Surrey has demonstrated sufficient improvement that the possibility of an alternative delivery model no longer needs to be considered.

31. 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 Ofsted Priority Action Board and of the role of Members in the delivery of the improvement plan. Members will need to consider the revised scrutiny arrangements as set out in this report.

## **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

32. 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.

## **CORPORATE PARENTING/LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IMPLICATIONS**

33. The re-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 are addressing these issues. In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children, Young People & Families, continue to oversee the relevant improvement work for these services.

## **SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS IMPLICATIONS**

34. 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.

<b>WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:</b>
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35. The Commissioner's report and subsequent recommendations detailed in this report will be reviewed by the Minister (Undersecretary of State for Education or equivalent) and the Department for Education. The Minister will then confirm any further specific action that is required by the Authority however the formal involvement of the Commissioner for Surrey's children's services has now ended (subject to agreement by the Minister).
36. Ofsted will next carry out a Monitoring Visit on 7 & 8 April 2020 and the report outlining the findings will be published late-April 2020. At this point, Ofsted will make a judgement on whether Surrey's services are ready for a full re-inspection and if so, it is expected that a full re-inspection will take place later this year.
37. The services will continue to deliver the improvement programme with an immediate focus on the priorities outlined in paragraph 14. Progress and particularly the impact of the improvements on children, young people and families will be scrutinised by the Safeguarding Partnership (Executive) approximately every 2 months with action taken and resources allocated to address emerging issues as required. Additional updates will be reported to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee and to the Corporate Leadership Team on a regular basis.

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**Consulted:**

- Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families
- Simon Hart, Independent Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Surrey Children's Safeguarding Partnership – Executive Group
- Ofsted Priority Action Board (OPAB)
- Trevor Doughty, Commissioner for Surrey's children's services

**Annexes:**

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

**Sources/background papers:**

None

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