



## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

**25 July 2022**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Directors Report</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Children and Young People Service
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Nova Charlton
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Report of</b>	Hilary Brooks Director of Children and Young People Services <a href="mailto:HilaryBrooks@sthelens.gov.uk">HilaryBrooks@sthelens.gov.uk</a>
<b>Contact Officer</b>	

Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	X
Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities	X
Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	X
Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	
Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture	
Be a responsible Council	

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Children and Young People Scrutiny committee in St Helens meets quarterly. This report provides the Committee an overview of progress in relation to the CYPS Improvement Journey and new developments.

## **2. Recommendation for Decision**

**The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:**

- 1) To note the contents of the report

## **3. Purpose of this report**

- 3.1 The report provides a detailed summary of the improvement journey for Children Services and shows the relevant progress being made relating to four priority areas of the children's improvement plan, in key departmental areas: Children's Social Care, and Integrated Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. It also summarises key developments in Early Help and Education.

## **4. Background: Ofsted Judgement of 2019 and the Children's Service improvement journey**

- 4.1 In 2019 St Helen's Children's Service was judged Inadequate overall by Ofsted. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers was deemed Inadequate, and the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families were both judged as Requires Improvement. There have subsequently been four monitoring visits, all of these have stated that although there have been some improvements there is a lack of rigour and pace to the progress being made. After the last visit in March 2022, inspectors outlined the following concerns: 'Difficulties recruiting suitably qualified and experienced social workers is having a significant impact on the services that children receive in the duty teams. For too many children, there is unnecessary drift and delay in having their needs promptly assessed and, for a minority, this leaves them in situations of unknown risk.'
- 4.2 A Children's Improvement Board was set up by the previous Director of Children's Services and continues to act as the overarching framework for improvement, monitoring areas where there is evidence of progress, and areas where progress is ongoing and needs added impetus. The board meets 6 weekly. a Children's Improvement Plan has been developed, with four priority areas, detailed below.

Priority 1 – Creating the environment to enable good practice:

Priority 2 – Improve the quality of key aspects of practice

Priority 3 – Leaders and Managers have an accurate understanding of practice to drive improvement

Priority 4 – Develop key areas of the service

Below is a summary of key developments within each priority area, and what still needs to be achieved.

### **4.3 Priority 1 Creating the environment to enable good practice**

4.4 **Leadership and Governance** - There is now greater stability amongst the senior leadership team, with the appointment of a permanent Director of Children's Services on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and interviews for Assistant Director posts being held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July. The Corporate Parenting Board is being strengthened with workshops being held and a widening of membership. In terms of participation & consultation with Children & Young People, the Children We Look After Council has been re-established. Feedback on the 'Lived Experience of the Child' is now informing training.

4.5 **Improvements to ICS** The ICS Liquid logic system is causing some difficulties for workers, therefore we have requested a review of the system. I have requested funding and support via the DFE from North Tyneside as they have the same systems and methodology. If agreed I am hoping this work will start in the autumn and will involve our own in house system analysis, who is working with me on a scoping paper around the issues.

4.6 **Workforce development** - A new social care workforce strategy has been developed with several priorities, including ensuring the workforce is engaged with shaping the improvement journey, has the time and resources to build meaningful and effective relationships with children that lead to effective support and staff feel valued, supported and provided with a wide range of wellbeing support aswell.

4.7 Workforce stability is improving, as of 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022, there has been little movement for the last two months, in terms of social workers leaving the Council.

4.8 The average caseloads per social worker are decreasing, and there are now only 17 social workers with over 20 CYP in their caseload, 10 less than in May 2022. For newly qualified social workers (ASYE) their caseloads have reduced from 17.3 to 15.5, with 4 having caseloads of over 20. A backlog of cases has been worked through to ensure all children and caseloads are now allocated within the correct teams.

4.9 **Children's social care recruitment** - The service continues to develop work to reduce the number of social care vacancies and use of agency staff. There has been a significant widening of the number of advertising methods and platforms to reach a wider audience, including the use of professional recruitment agencies, job sites and social media. In June a new recruitment campaign was

launched with a dedicated social worker 'Microsite' providing information on our roles and promotional videos from the Chief Executive and staff.

- 4.10 The service advertised 11 Social Workers roles for a 2-week period in June to test the impact of this work. The majority of these posts had been advertised previously without sufficient interest to appoint suitable candidates.
- 4.11 Interest has increased significantly as a result of widening advertising. The St Helens advertisements have received over 12,000 views on social media platforms. The Microsite has had nearly 1000 views. This has led to 96 views of the role details and resulted in 27 applications for various positions. The posts of most interest were in Fostering, Children We Look After and the Youth Justice Service. As of July 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 5 roles are currently being shortlisted for interviews by managers.
- 4.12 Six roles failed to attract sufficient workers for shortlisting and are currently being readvertised. These are mainly in the Duty and the Assessment teams, but there are also significant pressures in the Youth Offending Teams where there have been roles advertised that have received no applications.
- 4.13 Ongoing work to understand how we might convert interest in the posts into applications is happening. Further improvements are also being identified and addressed within HR systems and processes.

## **5.0 Priority Two Improve the quality of key aspects of practice:**

- 5.1 **Children's Social Care** – Ofsted inspections and monitoring visits have highlighted problems with the quality and effectiveness of assessments and plans for children and families; good quality timely supervision and a lack of permanency planning. There is a strong programme of work in place, including audit and performance meetings to improve practice and resultant outcomes for children and young people, and their families.
- 5.2 **What's working well (data correct as of 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022)** - There has been an increase in the number of compliments given to all service areas - 35 in Quarter 1 2022/23 as opposed to 15 complaints. The Duty backlog of cases has been cleared. Re-referral rates to CSC have reduced from 26% to 17% over the last 3 months and are now in line with our statistical neighbours. Training on assessments delivered in June has resulted in early signs of improvement.<sup>1</sup> Supervision is now regular practice for most teams. In some teams this is at

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• <sup>1</sup> Children and families sampled from both prior and post assessment training demonstrate improvement in capturing the key themes from the training. For example all sampled assessments are now showing as being informed by historical context and significant events, there are improvements in the network component of the assessment showing that there are attempts to ensure that the networks are supporting the family and they are part of the safety plan.

100%, however work and audits will be progressed over the next few months to look at the quality of supervision.

- 5.3 Training on care planning was delivered in June and July. Pre-proceedings timeliness has improved, there are at present only 2 families who have been in pre-proceedings for longer than 16 weeks, and for court proceedings, St Helens is now performing in line with or better than other regional LAs.
- 5.4 Permanence is now considered for all children when they come into care, care plans and reviews contain permanency plans; there is evidence that remaining with birth family or with extended family is routinely considered, and an increase in the use of adoption and SGO since 2019 to secure legal permanence for those children who cannot remain with their birth families. It is predicted that 20 children will be adopted this year against 10 last year.
- 5.5 Practice around placements with parents has improved, assessments are more thorough and placements are considered and authorised appropriately. There is evidence the discharge of care orders is being considered for children living with their families. Newly established reunification workers have started work to provide assessments and further develop support to children who may be able to leave care. For PWP in June there were 37 cases and July 34, work is underway to reduce these further.
- 5.6 There is now a panel chaired by the Head of Service who provides monitoring of permanence planning and an associated “tracker” The edge of care service has been further developed and reviewed and now provides effective levels of support for some children that prevents their admission to care.

**5.7 What we are worried about (data correct as of 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022)**

- There has been an increase in the number of referrals to CSC – 112 more children since May.
- The quality and consistency of practice - assessment timeliness and quality still need to improve at present only 72% are completed within 45 days compared to 86% nationally - there will be a drive on this over next couple of months.
- There is still a high number of S47 enquiries - 76% - that don't lead to initial child protection conferences (ICPC).
- Children in Need (CIN) – there is concern that children come into care with insufficient preventative work through Early Help, and Children in Need services.
- There needs to be a focus on Neglect. It is likely that legacy issues will see more children entering proceedings.
- Placement breakdowns are still happening and many of these are children in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) or residential provision.

- There is a lack of local authority fostering households, the recruitment and retention of carers needs to improve to remedy this.
- Fostering task group formed to look at recruitment and improvements within the service.

## **6.0 Priority 3 – Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of practice to drive improvement**

**6.1 Ofsted monitoring visit March 2022:** Inspectors stated ‘Leaders are now more aware of the weaker areas of social work practice and how these impact negatively on the outcomes for children. They have clearly considered how to address these concerns in the updated self-assessment and the recently revised improvement plan. However, these concerns were raised in the ILACS in September 2019. As a result, this visit demonstrates that there has been a lack of rigour and pace to improve social work practice in the duty teams and, ultimately, reduce risk for children more quickly to improve their lives.’

**6.2 Quality Assurance:** An updated Quality Assurance Framework is in development and has reached the consultation stage. This will ensure a rigorous framework is applied to examination of the work in children’s social care. The new framework will include: Collaborative Case Reviews (CCR) in line with the new practice model, Signs of Safety. It will involve a number of different methods: thematic audits; dip samples; performance data; observations of practice through various means; feedback from children and families, management QA. It will also include feedback from the local safeguarding partnership, IROs and Child Protection Chairs, and other teams in children’s services.

**6.3** The service has continued to maintain an accurate understanding of practice through a range of activities. This has included:

- The re-establishment of a regular performance clinic, the Performance Support meeting which is held monthly with the Safeguarding Unit and all heads of service and managers in CSC and Early Help.
- Reports of dip sampling of supervision(26), planning (29) and visits (27).
- Audits of children - themed cohorts, for example the last 10 children placed into care, or Children we Look After.
- A review of children in care who have experienced changes in social worker.
- The pilot of CCR (April 2022)
- A review of 21 children who go missing regularly including those who are at risk of exploitation.
- A specific review of service areas by an independent social worker.
- Permanence – a review of permanence planning for 32 children was completed June 2022.
- A review of the fostering service has been commissioned to take place in July 2022.
- A revised supervision policy has been finalised - training programme to be rolled out.

- Review requested of the ICS system and how this correlates with Signs of Safety

### 6.3 What needs to happen:

- Analyse the use of CCR to inform future work.
- Finalise the way in which learning will be shared and implemented in the service as part of the framework.
- Full implementation of the revised quality assurance framework from September 2022. This to include a revised QAF programme and new governance arrangements
- Workshops for all managers to support their involvement in thematic audit and CCR
- Review of impact in March 2023
- An independent social worker is supporting the Children in Need coordinator with a focus on Neglect.

6.4 **Safeguarding Partnership** – The business priorities for the local integrated safeguarding partnership have been set. The review of Early Help findings (see 7.1) have been reported back to the Board. The Structure and sub-groups of the partnership are being reviewed. At present we are conducting one LCSP review. A joint review between Wigan and St Helens has been completed and ratified and an action plan is being progressed.

## 7.0 Priority 4 - Develop key areas of the service - Early Help and Education

7.1 **Early Help** - The last decade has seen a reduction in Early Help funding resulting in a higher demand for costly acute services. It is important to strengthen prevention services to reduce the demand for statutory services. Reviews of Early Help in St Helens during 2021/22 have shown a mixed picture of effectiveness, highlighting problems such as: LA provision is small compared to demand – demand has increased 6% since 2019, evidenced through referrals to MASH. Teams require modernisation and are expensive to operate. It is difficult to demonstrate impact as there is limited performance information. Early Help is not currently a multi-agency partnership offer, it is limited primarily to the LA and Schools, there is a lack of common understanding of the Early Help offer, and the definition of what it is. More work is required on systems and practice, particularly step down and step up to CSC. Some services are ‘skipping’ Early Help and referring straight into Statutory services. Covid Recovery has limited professional prioritisation of Early Help. There is limited support for Adolescents within Early Help provision.

### 7.2 Improvements to date:

- Redesign and modernisation of LA Early Help teams.
- Attracted funding for development of Family Hubs – Whole Family Services 0-19 years (see below 7.3)
- Integrating Early Help and Edge of Care provision as appropriate.

- Working to re-engage with Health providers.
- Refresh of Early Help Partnership Strategy and Delivery Plan underway with suggested objectives

### **Next steps:**

- An ambitious LA Strategy needs to be developed to refocus resources and priorities towards Early Help & Edge of Care as part of the Demand Management programme.
- A trial of the amalgamation of targeted Early Help with CiN to create Family Help provision, as recommended by the McAllister Independent Social Care Review.
- Partnership Arrangements developed, centred around up to 4 geographical Family Hubs (Sutton, Newton, Central & Parr).
- A Hub and spoke model developed for existing service provision.
- A programme of communications and engagement with Partners.
- Recommended EH Partnership Sub-group as part of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

7.3 The Government's vision and framework for Family Hubs has been set out in the document: 'The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days' (March 2021) St Helen's is eligible to be one of the initial 75 local authorities who will set up Family Hubs, with an estimated budget of between £2.91m and £2.99m over three financial years starting in 2022-23. During the next few weeks Local Authorities are required to determine internal governance processes, as well as instigate discussions with local health partners who will be critical to the programme's success, ahead of the sign-up process opening in August.

7.4 **Education-** The Government White Paper on schools, published in March 2022 outlines the chosen policy direction - the use of 'academy trusts' to give schools a network of support to aid improvement, a strengthened role for local authorities in challenging schools where necessary and the requirement that by 2030 90% of all pupils should be reaching their attainment targets. This is a huge task, given that at present only 70% of pupils do so.

7.5 **A Green Paper - SEND Review-** Right Support, Right Place, Right Time focused on children with special educational needs and disabilities was also published on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2022. Government is seeking views on proposed changes to the systems relating to SEND provision in England. There is an emphasis on boosting mainstream school provision to allow more pupils with SEND to attend, but also on making sure that needs are identified earlier, and preventative strategies negate the need for more costly specialist provision. Meetings with parents and CVFS groups is ongoing in St Helen's to ensure all stakeholders are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas on the new proposals. Nationally, 15% of CYP have SEND, in St Helen's this figure is higher at 18%.



**7.6 Education performance** – In St Helens, 95% of primary schools are now judged by Ofsted as Good or better than good, which is an excellent achievement.

100% of special schools are Good or better.

47% of secondary schools are Good or better – 2 are awaiting inspection since becoming academies.

Schools judged to be Requires Improvement have had termly reviews and have been provided with a full written report highlighting successes, progress and next steps.

Attendance – Absenteeism, where a child has less than 95% attendance is high, at 22.3% - the England average is 19%. There is a clear focus on this and raising awareness across children social care. This will be our top priority in Education as from September

## **8.0 Conclusion**

8.1 The last 10 weeks have been extremely busy, the service has worked incredibly hard to make up for any time lag and ensure we can demonstrate improvement and traction prior to the Ofsted monitoring visit. Whilst it will take some time to really show impact we are heading in the right direction.

8.2 The service is more stable, caseloads reducing, children in care figures a month ago were 469 last Friday 465, CPP were 251 now 241, PWP 37 now 34 and pre proceeding are stable at 23.

8.3 However, as expressed within this report there is still a long way to go for the service to be RI. Currently, there is a cohort of children in CIN who for many reasons, especially through the time of significant changes of workers, have not had sufficient work undertaken with either them or their families.

8.4 Whilst we are exiting children from care, we have also bought into care some large families through real neglect. It may be for a while these figures move upwards whilst we manage this cohort and then reduce as they work through the system. Work is currently underway with support to prevent this, but I am not confident we can prevent all the cases escalating.

8.5 As we progress through the summer and into the Autumn, work will continue on the improvement journey. The SEF is currently being updated for the monitoring visit and the children's improvement plan is going to be re written in the next 2 months so it shows impact and is measurable, this will provide us a stronger platform with which to demonstrate impact and show progress. It will also provide the service with the roadmap out of inadequate to a solid RI, which is what we must achieve in the next ILAC Ofsted inspection.

**9. Legal Implications**

9.1 N/A

**10.0 Community Impact Assessment (CIA) Implications**

10.1 N/A

**11. Social Value**

11.1 N/A

**12. Sustainability and Environment**

12.1 N/A

**13. Health and Wellbeing**

13.1 N/A

**14. Equality and Human Rights**

14.1 N/A

**15. Customer and Resident**

15.1 N/A

**16. Asset and Property**

16.1 N/A

**17. Staffing and Human Resources**

17.1 N/A

**18. Risks**

18.1 N/A

**19. Finance**

19.1 N/A

**20. Policy Framework Implications**

20.1 N/A

**21. Impact and Opportunities on Localities**

21.1 N/A

**22. Background Documents**

22.1 None

**23. Appendices**

23.1 None