

SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Meeting date: 10 May 2016

From: Corporate Director Children's Services

Children's Improvement Update

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The report sets out the improvement activity undertaken within Children's Services and across the partnership since the last meeting of the Scrutiny Board in February.

2.0 Issues for Scrutiny

2.1 Scrutiny to note progress set out in the report.

3.0 Background

3.1 Since January Cumbria County Council has received the reports from the Chair of the Children's Improvement Board (ChIB) and Independent Chair of the LSCB submitted to the Minister. These were the main discussion items for the ChIB at its meeting in March. Since then we have had confirmation from the Minister for Children and Families that he is satisfied with our progress and does not believe it necessary to change our level of intervention. That could sound underwhelming, but the significance really cannot be understated. In particular the letter highlighted the role of leadership and the members of the Council, as well as the scrutiny of performance.

3.2 The Council also received a report from the LGA Advisor, Tony Crane who had been working with the Corporate Parenting Board on their improvements. This report was made available for the DfE review, and has been appended to this report. His report is positive and endorses progress over the period of his involvement with the Corporate Parenting Board.

3.3 The Council and its partners hosted a visit by Jeremy Oppenheim, the Director of Safeguarding at the Home Office. His visit was a direct result of questions being raised in the House of Commons regarding the publicity surrounding the death of Poppi Worthington, who died, aged 13 months in December 2012. The visit was scheduled at very short notice and the dialogue between Jeremy, the LSCB, Partnership Trust and Children's

Services ensured that he received a positive overview of the work to safeguard Cumbria's Children and young people that have been realised since 2013. He also met individually with Temporary Chief Constable Michelle Skeer and Police and Crime Commissioner Richard Rhodes.

- 3.4 On the 10 March 2016, Jeremy, Graham Archer Head of Child Protection at the DfE and Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner visited Cumbria. This visit was one working day prior to the formal DfE review on the 14th March 2016. We presented a positive partnership on both the 10 March and again on the 14 March, and evidenced the progress that has been remarked upon in external reports and is clearly evident in Cumbria.

4.0 Leadership and Governance

- 4.1 I am pleased to be able to advise the Board that on the 26 January following a robust interview process, Walter McCulloch was offered and accepted the post of Assistant Director Children & Families. Walter has been the Assistant Director with Leicestershire County Council and has held that post for six years. Walter scored highest across all panels including the external partners' panel. Walter is taking up the post in early May.
- 4.2 The appointment of a permanent assistant director will mean that Cumbria will have a permanent team at Assistant Director and Senior Manager positions and seven of the eight operational service manager posts are also permanent. This is a positive position for Cumbria and is critical in being able to continue delivering and embedding improvement.
- 4.3 Recruitment to experienced social worker and team manager posts continues to present a challenge for the directorate. It is anticipated that the social work academy will recruit 15 graduates in September 2016 and an exclusively Newly Qualified Social Work team, with additional support in the form of an Advanced Practitioner will be located in Allerdale and Copeland.
- 4.4 Ofsted co-hosted with Children's Services an improvement seminar on the 17 February 2016. The seminar was well attended by colleagues within the directorate and across the partnership. Ofsted shared their findings from their monitoring visits and specific discussion focused on improving performance in the safeguarding hub, Independent Reviewing Office service and initial health assessments. Actions were identified and captured by respective lead officers.
- 4.5 Cumbria's Promise was presented to the Health & Wellbeing Board on the 15 February 2016 by the Lead Member for Children's Services. There was a challenging conversation amongst board members about owning their Promise and committing to the principle in a proactive manner across their respective organisations.
- 4.6 I have previously referenced an improving relationship with HH Judge Forrester and also a need to secure additional court time to finalise permanence plans for some of our most vulnerable children. Cumbria now has 48 children who are placed for adoption with their forever family but

require the completion of due court processes before the appropriate order can be made. Securing permanence for these children is fundamental to improving their future life chances, embedding permanence planning and thereby removing drift and delay for children is also a critical part of the improvement journey following the Ofsted Inspection in 2015.

- 4.7 Ofsted have undertaken their seventh monitoring visit during February. The visit concentrated on the Carlisle and Eden area. Their judgements were 3 Requires Improvement, 2 Good and 1 case Inadequate. There were positives again for Cumbria as the Inspector agreed with the judgement applied to each case by the auditors from Children's Services. I have previously stated the importance of this outcome as it demonstrates we have staff who know what good looks like and leads a self-improving system.
- 4.8 The DfE review takes place, as previously stated, on the 14 March 2016. The schedule for the day included focus group meetings and a wider conversation with key leaders in the afternoon. The team from the DfE include Jocelyn Shaw, Kate Lyons and Claire Burgess. Key documents to be shared with the DfE are our updated self-assessment and revised Improvement Plan. As mentioned above this resulted in a positive letter from the Minister for Children and Families.
- 4.9 The revision of the Improvement Plan was presented to the DfE at the review meeting. Following their feedback on the plan the Improvement Plan update was agreed at the April ChIB meeting.
- 4.10 The council has agreed an additional £2 million for Children's Services in 2016/17 to contribute to the challenges of Children Looked After. An element of this is being used to work with I-MPower to recruit and develop foster carers in Cumbria.

5.0 Children Looked After

- 5.1 Along with the Portfolio Holder I met with Members of the South Lakeland and Barrow Children in Care Council. It was a challenging discussion with a wide ranging focus on accommodation and permanence. My reflection following this meeting is that the senior leaders from the directorate of Children's Services need to meet more regularly and strategically with Children In Care Councils across Cumbria to ensure that their voices shape the services they are receiving.
- 5.2 I have also met with Cumbria Foster Carers Association with the Senior Manager for Children Looked After. We agreed that a relationship based on improving working collaboratively with a focus on outcomes for children and young people would be beneficial. We agreed to produce a quarterly newsletter and to meet on a termly basis. The next formal meeting will also include the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 5.3 There remains a relentless focus on ensuring that only the right children and young people become looked after, for the right length of time and in the right placement. Admissions, discharges and placement moves are

scrutinised on a weekly basis as well as changes in financial forecasting. In addition each area has held a panel scrutinising the plans for children who are looked after 'section 20' i.e. without a legal order and where with additional support they could return home. Despite this, at the time of writing this report, the number of CLA has risen to 660 against a target of 620. However this does not reflect the work undertaken with the 48 children who are now placed with their forever families which if adoption orders were in place would reduce the numbers significantly

- 5.4 Recent positive performance for Children Looked After includes the January performance for Children Looked After Reviews, performance for the latest review in timescale is performing above target (90%) with 93.8% of reviews held in timescale and has been above target since September 2015.
- 5.5 In addition CLA Statutory visits remains within the target range at 94.5%, and has been performing around this figure since September 2015.
- 5.6 However, there continues to be specific challenges around the Initial Health Assessments for Children Looked After with January performance reported as 78.3% compared with the 100% performance we saw in November 2015 – this continues to fluctuate month-on-month.
- 5.7 The Children Looked After Strategy 6 month review was also completed and taken to the Corporate Parenting Board in April. It reflects broad overall progress between September and January. Particular strengths were the emphasis on the children's voice as evidenced through The Pledge, the RESPECT report into standards of care from a young person's perspective, and a report from the IRO service into children chairing their own meetings. A summary of the report will be produced and sent out to all members in early May.

5.0 PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The Children's Trust Board approved the Children and Young People's Plan at its meeting on the 2 February 2016 and launched on 20 April. The Children's Trust Board also agreed to increase the frequency of its meetings and extend the membership.
- 5.2 The early help panels went live from the 22 February 2016. This is another important development across the partnership and should ensure the localisation of early help. The panels fully endorsed by the LSCB need to focus on appropriate early support for those children that require it. Furthermore, they should also have a key role in step down arrangements ensuring the plan for the child/young person progresses and meets their needs.
- 5.3 I have continued to meet and receive support from Stuart Smith, the Director of Children's Services at Calderdale. This support especially through the last two months has assisted me with both focus and the determination to accept that through the evidence progress is being made.

6.0 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- 6.1 The LSCB has initiated a review of the threshold guidance in order to clarify the role of Early Help and to ensure that the guidance reflects changes in the operation in the Early Help Panels and the Safeguarding Hub. This work will be completed in April.
- 6.2 Cumbria has submitted a bid to the Big Lottery Headstart programme which, if successful, will bring resource of over £5 million into the County to support the development of resilience and emotional wellbeing in young people across the County. The bid has been developed by colleagues from across the partnership and is ambitious in its objective of delivering across the whole County and developing into a long term sustainable model.
- 6.3 The Directorate is continuing to support the wider Council in delivering efficiencies and its wider aims. Changes to the commissioning of shortbreaks, delivery of Targeted Youth Support and the structure of the SEND Team will deliver efficiencies but also reshape services to provide greater coherence to children and families. The changes to shortbreaks services have been developed in partnership with the Cumbria Parent Carer Forum. The Directorate has also been working closely with colleagues in public health to integrate the public health offer with early help.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The report evidences significant activity across the partnership and directorate.
- 7.2 Staff across the directorate are working extremely hard to secure and sustain the improvements for children and young people in Cumbria.
- 7.2 There is sufficient external evidence which complements our assessment that sufficient progress is being made. A fact which has been underpinned by the most recent letter from the Minister for Children and Families.

John Macilwraith, 10/5/16

Please ensure that every part of this section where there is an asterisk is completed in accordance with the instructions before sending the report to Member Services, following which please delete this sentence.*

Appendices

Letter from Anthony Crane relating to the Corporate Parenting Board

Previous Relevant Council or Executive Decisions
[including Local Committees]

*List here any previous relevant decisions.

*If none, state “No previous relevant decisions”.

Background Papers

*List here any papers relied on to a significant extent in preparing the report, and delete the next line.

*If none, state “No background papers” and delete the line above.

Contact: John Macilwraith, john.macilwraith@cumbria.gov.uk