

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 6 July 2021
Subject:	Children's Improvement Journey		
Report of:	Head of Children's Social Care	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Children's Social Care		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

In 2016 Sefton Children's Services was graded as Requires Improvement under the ILACs framework. In 2019, a Joint Targeted Area inspection took place and identified 4 areas for priority action. In March 2021 a focused visit took place with a focus on 'key decision making points' within the context of the covid 19 pandemic. This was not a graded judgement, however there were 2 areas for priority action and 3 areas for improvement.

This report provides an overview of the improvement journey and areas of change that will be required for Children's Social Care.

The Ofsted report can be found at the following link:
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80550>

Recommendation(s):

- (1) For the contents of the report to be noted
- (2) Further updates on the CSC improvement will be provided.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

N/A

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There has been an investment of £7 million in 2021/22 into the improvements required for Children’s Social Care and to address demand pressures on the service. However, the full cost of this may not be known until further developments and full consideration of the structure of children’s services is undertaken.

(B) Capital Costs

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): There will be implications on our staffing resources and as such other implications will need to be considered including location of the teams and IT	
Legal Implications: none	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
In addition, please provide a short narrative here, or within the main body of the report, setting out the positive, neutral or negative impacts and how any negative impacts will be mitigated where possible.	
Contact the Energy and Environmental Management Team when the proposal;	
1. has a spend above one million pounds; or	
2. identifies negative impacts which cannot be mitigated; or	
3. is likely to have a high climate change impact – including	
o construction project - new build, rebuild, refurbishment, retrofit and demolition proposals	
o proposals which relate to business travel and staff commuting, for example, fleet vehicles and agile working	
o proposals which involve loss of green space, habitat or flood plain.	
For more information contact julia.thorpe@sefton.gov.uk or	

stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk (tel. 0151 934 4552).

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Children's social care department protects those children who are most vulnerable and require protection through child in need, child protection and looked after. The purpose of this report is to highlight the changes that are required in order to make the necessary improvements to the department.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: we want to provide support to families at the earliest opportunity.
Commission, broker and provide core services: n/a
Place – leadership and influencer:n/a
Drivers of change and reform: n/a
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: n/a
Greater income for social investment: n/a
Cleaner Greener n/a

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6445/21) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4646/21) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

none

Contact Officer:	Laura Knights
Telephone Number:	
Email Address:	laura.knights@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

There is one appendix to the report which provides a visual of our improvement plan.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 In March 2021 a focused inspection took place, whilst this wasn't a graded judgement, there were areas of priority action and areas of improvement identified and these are outlined in the Ofsted Inspection letter:

Areas for priority action

1.2 Timely application of the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline where risks for children are not reducing through child protection planning.

1.3 The effectiveness of case supervision and the monitoring of children who are subject to child protection planning, including those children in the pre-proceedings process, to prevent drift and delay.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

1.4 The quality assurance arrangements and senior management oversight of social work practice.

1.5 The strategic and operational focus on achieving change and reducing risk for vulnerable children, including disabled children and care leavers.

1.6 The capacity in social work teams and the number of children on social workers' caseloads

1.7 The Department for Education (DfE) issued an Improvement Notice in late May 2021, which will last for 12 months and a DfE advisor will be appointed. Sefton are required to constitute an improvement board and take action to improve Children's services. An Independent Chair of the Board has been appointed. Paul Boyce the independent chair is a subject matter expert and well respected for his professional knowledge and experience.. The DfE Advisor will report back to the Department of Education on a regular basis about the improvements and capacity to improve in Sefton.

1.8 It is clear we have a committed and dedicated workforce who want to get services right for children and their families and therefore it's important that there is true engagement with the workforce to ensure that they become part of the solution and improvement journey.

1.9 In order to start a process of engaging with the wider workforce, a series of engagement sessions have been undertaken. In addition, an action plan was submitted to Ofsted on the 10th May which sits alongside the overarching Children's Social Care improvement plan. There are 5 areas identified within the improvement plan which are crucial to improving our service and delivering outstanding practice to children and families:

Priority 1: assessment, planning and review

Priority 2: achieving early permanence

Priority 3: continuous practice development and stable workforce

Priority 4: ensuring good quality supervision and management oversight

Priority 5: Quality Assurance/Performance Framework Delivering Improvements

Within each of the priority areas, a number of actions are recommended and in the process of being formulated.

Priority 1: assessment, planning and review

- Work with partners on Threshold understanding
- Children's voice is captured in all assessments. Social workers and family support workers have the capacity to undertake direct work with children and intervention is timely and meaningful.
- All assessments are updated regularly and in line with practice standards.
- Children's plans are reviewed regularly and there is effective engagement and support from professionals working with that family to drive the plan. Training and support will be offered across the partnership including dissemination of 'meeting agreements' that are to be used.
- Develop and implement a Practice Framework and model across the children's workforce which works with an outcome's framework. This will improve practice quality, consistency in service delivery and ability to articulate progress and meeting children's needs.

Priority 2: achieving early permanence

- Clear process for cases to 'step up' and 'step down' between Early Help and Children's Social Care.
- Create a difference between prevention, support services and targeted early help. This means having a separate children's social care resource for supervised contact and for parenting and direct work where no internal referral is required, and no waiting lists exist.
- Review of our Public Law process (PLO) and procedures. Review all those children who are subject to public law outline and increase our capacity within legal services.
- Develop family group conferencing model. Working with families at an earlier stage to support family arrangements and contingency planning as soon as a family become known.

Priority 3: continuous practice development and stable workforce

- Review of our structure within Children's Social Care to ensure practitioners can deliver good quality practice to children and families. This involves growing our establishment and increasing the number of posts across all levels including social workers, family support workers, personal advisors and managers.
- Reinstate positions within the service including assistant team managers and more administrative support.
- Development of a Workforce strategy including a competitive retention and recruitment package, improved external digital presence and advertising of Sefton including a brand, co-production with staff including staff engagement and participation. Ensuring through several mechanisms that staff views are heard and considered.

- Development of a social work Academy with partnership with an academic partner, introduction of *step up to social work* and post qualification routes for staff.
- Development of a *grow our own strategy* for social workers and the wider children's workforce. The development of succession planning is important including a review of routes for promotion and career change whilst continuing to work for Sefton. This is related to the change in structure.
- A clear direction and Vision that resonates with the staff. A communication strategy internally with staff. Keeping staff informed becoming part of the process.
- Appropriate office space that enables practitioners to be based in an office with their peers and managers, whilst ensuring covid compliance.

Priority 4: ensuring good quality supervision and management oversight

- Team managers have the capacity and ability to supervise social workers. The introduction of assistant team managers will support in the development of social workers, especially those who are newly qualified.
- Supervision documents and forms which are used for recording are reviewed and
- Effective supervision monitoring tool to identify when supervision has taken place for all children With effective and regular welfare supervision for staff.

Priority 5: Quality Assurance/Performance Framework and Delivering Improvements

- Performance is embedded within the culture of the service from social workers to the Director of Children's Services.
- Implement an end-to-end review of liquid logic ICS/EHM. Through a diagnostic there will be systems change and rebuild so that the recording is easy for the end user, workflows are statutorily compliant, data is accurate, and children's records are safely viewed. Data cleanse the system. A partner in practice diagnostic is booked.
- Develop accurate and accessible data sets which are coherent with accurate quality assurance evidence and mechanisms.
- Introduce Tri-x for compliance with policies and procedures.
- Review and quality assure the Strategic Safeguarding Arrangements based upon the 2017 Social Work Act and changes to Working Together 2018. The Woods report (June 2021) has recommended now that Ofsted inspect these arrangements and a review needs to occur this summer.

Conclusion:

It is important to recognise the impact covid 19 has had on the workforce and the rising numbers of children who are open to Children's Social Care over the years, has created more demand on an already stretched system. However, we must acknowledge the improvements that are required which have clearly been articulated in the Ofsted focused visit. The department must work at pace to

ensure plans are in place to implement them. Some changes will be more immediate, whilst others will need to be carefully thought through and executed.

The re structure of Children's services a number of years ago has not had the desired impact we hoped for. It is important we reflect on areas that have worked and not worked as effectively and actively seek the views of our workforce, children and families. It is clear that operationally, many social workers are working hard to support children and families but for many, caseloads are too high. The priority around our workforce, is therefore perhaps one of the more important aspects of our improvement journey, in order to create the right environment for good social work to flourish.

The improvement notice has signalled a clear indication from the Dfe that our service needs to improve and this will be overseen through an improvement board which will ensure these changes happen correctly and at the pace that is required. It will therefore be important that Overview and scrutiny will continue to receive regular updates on the improvements within children's social care and have a clear defined data set in order to evidence these improvements.

Appendix 1:

Priority 1: Assessment, Planning and Review

- Develop partner's understanding of Threshold
- Capture Children's voice in all assessments, direct work with children, timely and meaningful intervention.
- Update all assessments in line with practice standards.
- Review Children's plans regularly, engagement with family to drive plan. Training and support across partnership including 'meeting agreements'.
- Develop and implement Practice Framework and model linked to outcome's framework. Improve practice quality, consistency in service delivery, ability to articulate progress on meeting children's needs.

Priority 2: Achieving Early Permanence

- Communicate clear process to 'step up' and 'step down' cases
- Create a distinction between prevention, support services and targeted early help.
- Review of Public Law process (PLO), procedures and children. Increase capacity within legal services.
- Develop family group conferencing model. Work with families earlier.

Priority 3: Continuous Practice Development and Stable Workforce

- Review current structure for deliverer of good quality practice. Grow establishment and increase posts.
- Reinstate positions including assistant team managers and additional administrative support.
- Development of a Workforce strategy including a competitive retention and recruitment package, improved external digital presence and advertising of Sefton. Co-production and engagement with staff.
- Development of a social work Academy in partnership with an academic partner. Introduction of *Step up to Social Work* and post qualification routes for staff.
- Development of a *Grow our Own Strategy* for social workers and the wider children's workforce. Succession planning, career change and promotion routes to be considered.
- Develop a clear direction and vision with staff. Creation of an internal communication strategy with staff.
- Determine appropriate office space, whilst ensuring covid compliance.

Priority 4: Ensuring Good Quality Supervision and Management Oversight

- Ensure Team managers have capacity and ability to supervise social workers. Introduction of assistant team managers to support the development of social workers, especially those newly qualified.
- Review of Supervision documents and forms used for recording
- Introduce supervision monitoring tool to identify when supervision has taken place for all children. Ensure effective and regular welfare supervision for staff.

Priority 5: Quality Assurance/Per formance Framework and Delivering Improvements

- Embed performance within the culture of the service across entire Service area.
- Implement an end-to-end review of liquid logic ICS/EHM. Complete a diagnostic assessment for systems change and rebuild for ease of use and ensuring statutory compliant. Data cleansing of system to ensure accuracy.
- Develop accurate and accessible data sets which are coherent with accurate quality assurance evidence and mechanisms.
- Introduce Tri-x for compliance with policies and procedures.
- Review and quality assure the Strategic Safeguarding Arrangements.