

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	Date of Meeting:	16 November 2021
Subject:	Improvement Board Update		
Report of:	Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education	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:

This report provides an overview of the introduction of the Children's Services Improvement Board in July 2021 as a direct response to the Improvement Notice issued from the DfE IN June 2021.

The terms of reference for the Improvement Board is provided in Appendix A

Recommendation:

That the content of the report to be noted.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The report and the recommendation are as a direct response to the Improvement Notice issued from the DfE IN June 2021.

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

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There has been an investment of £7.3m between 2020/21 budget and 2021/22 in Children's Services. A further approval of £2.0 million was given in September 2021 to invest in the workforce.

A paper was submitted to Cabinet in October 2021 to request an extra £4 million for the workforce which means an additional £7.5 million investment in the workforce this year and a total investment of £13.3m into Children's Services.

(B) Capital Costs

N/A

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): The investment into Children's Services by Cabinet members will support improvements to benefit staff through improvement to IT systems, IT support for staff to complete their work in the most efficient way and the bringing back of staff into offices as business as usual in a Covid safe way.								
Legal Implications: N/A								
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.								
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will								
<table border="1"><tr><td>Have a positive impact</td><td>No</td></tr><tr><td>Have a neutral impact</td><td>Yes</td></tr><tr><td>Have a negative impact</td><td>No</td></tr><tr><td>The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors</td><td>Yes</td></tr></table>	Have a positive impact	No	Have a neutral impact	Yes	Have a negative impact	No	The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes
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The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes							

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Children's Services protect children and young people in Sefton who are the most vulnerable and require protection through targeted and statutory social work services. The purpose of this report is to highlight how the Improvement Board is holding the partnership across Sefton to account for improvements across the whole of Children's Services.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: The role of supporting confident and resilient communities is not the responsibility of one sole agency and needs to be addressed via a partnership approach to meet the multi-faceted needs of Sefton's communities. This support will range from universal, community based, targeted and statutory consistent with the identified needs and risks of children and young people.
Commission, broker and provide core services: Children's Social Care is a core offer which is enshrined within statutory legislation and regulations.
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.6604/21) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4805/21) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

The terms of reference for the Improvement Board are provided in Appendix A.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Introduction/Background

1. Purpose of the Improvement Board.

- 1.1. Following the issuing of an Improvement Notice in June 2021 by the Department for Education (DfE), it was deemed necessary to convene an independent, multi-agency, independent Children's Services Improvement Board to oversee Sefton's response to the Improvement Notice.
- 1.2. The first Improvement Board was constituted in July 2021, chaired by an independent chair who is an experienced ex Director of Children's Services in the North West region. The Board has met monthly since that first Board in July 2021, meeting a total of four times so far.
- 1.3. The purpose of the Board is to address the findings of the Ofsted focused visit of Children Services which was conducted in March 2021, ensure the underlying causes of weakness in practice are addressed and to put in place the arrangements needed to support continuous improvements in practice.
- 1.4. The Improvement Board membership includes Sefton's DfE Advisor and a member of the DfE's Children's Services Improvement and Interventions Unit responsible for providing 6 monthly updates to the relevant Minister. It also includes the Chief Executive, Cabinet members with a responsibility for Children Services and Education, staff representatives and key statutory partners. A full list of members can be seen in the Board terms of reference in Appendix A.

2. The focus of the Improvement Board since July 2021

- 2.1. The Improvement Board has received several diagnostics from the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services and Education which has provided a details lens for the Board to understand the many areas of improvement required across Children's Services.
- 2.2. The August Improvement Board focused on findings from the senior leadership team's diagnostics of services across the journey of the child, the actions which have been undertaken as a result and what future plans are being put in place. This identified strengths, weaknesses and areas of focus and gave the Improvement Board a full understanding of what needed to be done.
- 2.3. The approach of the Improvement Board chair is to use the Improvement Board to inform future agenda items, and the detailed diagnostic received in August informed the September Improvement Board which focused on the Front Door of Children's services and the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- 2.4. The September 2021 Improvement Board received a paper detailing the findings on a deep dive by the new service manager on what was working well, areas of concern and what was working well in the 'Front Door' to statutory social care services. This highlighted the need to strengthen contextual safeguarding and missing services in Sefton, which prompted the chair to request a report on vulnerable children in the October Improvement Board.

- 2.5. The September Improvement Board also signalled a focus of the Board on the workforce in Sefton following an initial report from the Interim Service Manager, Practice Development and this has since been followed up with a report from the Chief Personnel Officer in the October Improvement Board and a request for a subsequent follow up report detailing approaches to be taken in the November Improvement Board.
- 2.6. Therefore, the focus of the Improvement Board over the last 3 months has been the Front Door to Children's Services and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Vulnerable children, especially those at risk of contextual safeguarding and missing and Sefton's Children's Services.
- 2.7. To get a direct line of sight and a detailed understanding of services which are a focus of the Improvement Board. The independent chair visits relevant teams, services and partners a week before the Improvement Board. He is accompanied every other month by the DfE Advisor.
- 2.8. Standing agenda items include an update from the DfE Advisor and a report from frontline staff practitioners from a monthly staff engagement group. The independent chair and DfE Advisor attend this group on a bi-monthly basis to keep a direct line to the views of staff and the impact of improvement work on them.

3. Progress to date

- 3.1 As a result of the review of the Front Door undertaken in early September, a significant change was made to Front Door services in Sefton. On 27th September, a single front door was implemented which meant there was only one way to refer into Children's Services which took all queries, triaged them and a decision made about the most appropriate cause of action. By the time of the October Improvement Board the new process had only been in place for a couple of weeks and feedback from partners was largely positive.
- 3.2. Police have increased confidence in the new leadership team in Children's Services. This has enabled a move from a monthly missing meeting to a daily missing meeting which takes up a significant amount of time of Police resources. But police see the value of working in different ways to protect vulnerable children and young people and such changes are the start of the development of contextual safeguarding services based around layered support in Sefton.
- 3.3. Sefton has put in place new strategic safeguarding arrangements to replace the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) as prescribed in 'Working Together to Safeguarding Children' (2018). (This guidance set out a shared responsibility between health, the police and the local authority to safeguard children and receive services in a co-ordinated way to achieve the best outcomes). New arrangements were developed, sent to partners for consultation and in October 2021 the first Leadership Group met. This is to be followed with the Sefton Safeguarding Forum and various sub groups.

4. Future focus of the Improvement Board

- 4.1. The Improvement Board has focused on areas which will have the biggest impact on managing risk for children and young people through the Front Door and vulnerable children, as well as Sefton's biggest asset – staff. The Improvement Board will continue to re-visit new arrangements made in the last few months to check they remain fit for purpose and seek feedback from partners, staff and service users to ensure their continued effectiveness.
- 4.2. In November 2021, there will be independent reviews undertaken in the Care Leavers Service and the Virtual School, and the Improvement Board will hear the outcomes of these reviews in January 2022. It then will track actions taken as a result in the months following.
- 4.3. In August 2021, the Interim Executive Director moved the Children with Disabilities (CWD) service into Children's Services and brought in an experienced Service Manager who developed an improvement plan focused on addressing immediate issues followed by incremental improvements. An update on the Children with Disabilities service was due to be heard by the Improvement Board in November 2021, but this has been deferred to either January or February 2022.
- 4.4. The November 2021 Improvement Board is focused on hearing progress against issues identified in the August diagnostics and progress against priority areas from the focused visit. This will support the development of the 6 monthly report written by the Department for Education (DfE) to the Minister about progress against the Improvement Notice. Improvement Boards in 2022 will focus on the content of that report and the response by the Minister which will set out further priorities for the next six months.