

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	Tuesday 26 September 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Children's Services Improvement Programme		
<b>Report of:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Children's Social Care		
<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	No	<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Exempt / Confidential Report:</b>	No		

**Summary:**

To update members of the Committee on progress made on the Improvement Programme and to report back on the matters raised at a previous meeting.

**Recommendation(s):**

(1) To consider and note progress made.

**Reasons for the Recommendation(s):**

To ensure that members of Committee are aware of the progress made.

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

NA

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

**(A) Revenue Costs**

There are no direct revenue implications with this report. Members will be aware that the Council's three year Medium Term Financial Plan takes account of this Improvement Programme and the resources required to support it.

**(B) Capital Costs**

There are no direct capital costs associated with the recommendations in this report

## Implications of the Proposals:

<b>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):</b>	
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	
<b>Equality Implications:</b>  There are no equality implications associated with this report.	
<b>Impact on Children and Young People: Yes</b>  The actions in the Improvement Plan are designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in Sefton. The Council recognises that it cannot deliver sustainable change without working together with wider partners across Sefton. Organisations from the public sector, schools, voluntary, community and private sector will need to work side by side to provide the support that our children and young people and their families need. It is our collective responsibility to create the right conditions for vulnerable children and young people to thrive.	
<b>Climate Emergency Implications:</b>  The recommendations within this report will	
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
There are no Climate Emergency implications associated with this report	

## Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: The Improvement Programme seeks to deliver change across Children's Services whose activity protects and supports those children and young people who have complex care needs.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Children's Services work with partners to support families in need of support and improve resilience.
Commission, broker and provide core services: Children's Services commission and provide activity that underpins the delivery of the Improvement Plan.
Place – leadership and influencer: The Council is taking a lead role in work with partners to deliver change in Children's Services
Drivers of change and reform: The Council will work with partners to deliver change in Children's Services.

Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: NA
Greater income for social investment: NA
Cleaner Greener NA

**What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

**(A) Internal Consultations**

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7366/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5566/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

**(B) External Consultations**

The Executive Director Children’s Service and Education and his leadership team engage with partners across Sefton regarding the Improvement Programme. The voice of children, young people and their families will be integral to delivering change.

**Implementation Date for the Decision**

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

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**Appendices:**

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix A Annual Complaints Report

**Background Papers:**

There are no background papers available for inspection.

## **1. Background**

1.1 Members of the Committee will recall that of the Children's Services Improvement Programme continues to comprise of four themes;

- Quality - Ensuring the right staff are in the right place at the right time to deliver a consistent standard of good quality safeguarding services to children and families.
- Improving Implementation of Learning - Using what we know and learn to continuously improve and enhance the services we deliver for children and families.
- Improving Tools - Ensuring we have the right tools to enable the workforce to deliver high quality services for children and families.
- Improving Strategic Partnerships - Effective partnership working to enable the delivery of common goals and a high quality multi-agency response for children and families.

1.2 The Improvement Plan also identifies four key areas that will be strengthened through the actions included; -

- Corporate Leadership
- Governance & Partnerships
- Practice
- Enablers & Resources

1.3 The first three phases have involved significant change in Children's Services, this report updates on progress to date.

## **2. Progress**

2.1 The Council has approved a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which commits to recurrent additional investment for a three-year period improvement programme. The Improvement Plan informed the development of the MTFP with the Director of Children's Services advising the Chief Executive, s151 Officer and Deputy s151 Officer via a series of meetings on the resources required to fund the service. The investment made is intended to ensure that resources remain available to truly embed the change that is needed. Although currently there are only one-year settlements, the Council has prioritised this three-year commitment and provided assurance that this investment will be maintained into years 4 and 5 of this cycle.

The next three-year budget planning cycle will also take place at the same time as the Council's Children's Service Improvement Plan is delivered - this is the priority for the Council. As Members of the Committee will be aware, a recommendation in the Commissioner's report was that the MTFP should be aligned with that Improvement Plan for a period of five years. That process was conducted and reflected in the budget report of March 2023, and this will again be a key feature of this MTFP. Substantial ongoing work is continuing on this budget, with the Chief Executive, s151 officer and Director of Children's Services working collaboratively on the management of the in-year position and longer-term budget plan. This service is now showing signs of stability in terms of financial management with the

Council Financial Sustainability Growth Programme Capital Programme High Needs Budget General Fund Budget Reserves Strategy Wholly owned council companies understanding the key cost drivers of each aspect within the service. These will be developed over the course of this budget planning process and will continue to be aligned to the Improvement Plan and the view of the service around future demand in order to inform the three-year budget plan. This will in turn inform budget allocation, budget realignment in the service as required and how this will influence other budgets across the Council and longer-term investment opportunities.

- 2.2 The Council continues to recognise that recruitment and retention of the workforce as critical. The work to recruit Social Workers from overseas has led to thirteen international Social Workers being in post with a further five are due to arrive in the coming weeks. At the time of writing this report seven of these Social Workers have completed their induction and are now working in operational teams.

October 2023 will see fourteen Social Workers graduate from the first Academy intake and fifteen people have been offered places in the Academy and are due to start in October 2023.

The Council is also working with Frontline, England's largest social work charity, and through this scheme twelve Social Workers will join the Academy. Work is also underway with regard to the Step Up to Social Work Programme and it is anticipated that recruits via this scheme will commence in January 2024. The Council has previously approved a number of retention initiatives and the impact of these initiatives will be assessed in January 2024.

Recruitment activity is continuing, however, it must be noted that recruitment of experienced Social Workers remains a challenge. Officers have liaised with colleagues from Leeds with regards to this matter and both organisations are learning from each other given this is a national challenge.

The progress made in this area was noted in the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

- 2.3 The second staff survey is in progress. The survey will run until the end of September and the feedback will be analysed during October with an action plan being developed.
- 2.4 There is a comprehensive suite of BI reports produced using Business Objects, which are refreshed and published daily. These reports are then ingested into MS Power BI performance dashboards. Considerable progress has been made to implement ETL (extraction, transformation and load), to take data directly from the Liquid Logic LCS system into the Council's new enterprise data warehouse.

Extensive work has been done to create new data models in the data warehouse, organising data and how they relate to one another. Work has now begun on producing new visuals in Power BI, using the new data models. The Power BI Dashboards will include 'drill-through' functionality, which serves person level data from the dashboards and allows users to navigate directly to a child's record in the LCS system.

Work continues to ensure that a performance culture is embedded across the service.

- 2.5 Clear targets around performance have been set by the DFE Commissioner regarding improvement in quality, referral and re-referral rates and the timeliness of assessments. Positive progress has already been made regarding the targets and a focussed training programme has begun in collaboration with colleagues from Leeds.
- 2.6 Management oversight of unregulated placements has improved significantly since the last report. The number of such placements has reduced significantly and further information is available in a report that appears elsewhere on the agenda.
- 2.7 Since the last report received the Sufficiency Strategy is now finalised and supporting discussion with the market and planning considerations. Delivery will be managed through Strategic Commissioning and operational team activity, with a monthly steering group and delivery plan in place. The Sefton Framework has now been live since May 2023 and this is helping to develop strategic partnerships with key providers.

### **3. Previous Matters Raised**

- 3.1 At a previous meeting members of the Committee asked to receive further information regarding complaints made. Appendix A of this report presents the Annual Complaints Report for consideration.
- 3.2 Members of the Committee are asked to consider the report and associated recommendations that officers will implement.
- 3.3 Members of the Committee also asked to receive further information regarding the work to improve the partnership response to domestic abuse. The Sefton Safer Family Practice Hub (SSFPH) has four key strands of provision;
  - Support the improvement of social work practice in its response to domestic abuse
  - Provision of resource to Children Social Care – Caring Dad’s programme
  - Support Wider Partnership Activity
  - Outcome measurement.

The team has supported over 40 families with over 80 children and supported Social Work teams with reflective practice sessions to support assessment and planning for children.

The Team has used pro social modelling with Social Workers and Family Support Workers working directly with families by supporting joint visits and completing domestic abuse risk assessments and safety plans. The Team IDVA has completed DASH Ric with a total of 16 families equating to 32 children and young people with 11 of these families being progressed to Sefton Multi Agency Risk

Assessment Conference (MARAC) to establish multi-agency safety planning for these families.

The SSFPH Social Work Team has also completed 3 Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments to support safe family time for children. Completing one to one behaviour change with one female parent using harmful behaviour and one male parent using harmful behaviour. Completing one to one victim recovery work with one care experienced female. The team have completed 12 reflective practice sessions.

The team have provided training to the Social Work teams, this has included signs of domestic abuse, risk assessment and safety planning, tools to support victims, parents using harmful behaviours and children and young people. 48 Social Workers have attended the training thus far.

The team are trained & accredited Caring Dad's Facilitators. The first cohort of Caring Dad's started on June with 10 fathers equating to 26 children. The team also providing IDVA support for 13 associated victims of the fathers. The group is within its infancy for any meaningful data to be retrieved however at the time of writing this report no participants have left the programme.

A second programme commenced in July and a third is scheduled for this month.

- 3.4 Members of the Committee also asked to receive further information regarding different ways of working for administrative staff. The new Service Manager for Business Support is now in post and progressing changes in the way that the teams work together. The changes, although many being minor changes, will provide the service with greater resilience and consistency of practice with regard to business support.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 Phase four of the Improvement Plan is now in development and its primary focus will be practice improvement. There are three clear areas of improvement which all staff will be focusing on over the next six months to ensure that the Council meets the targets set by the DFE Commissioner and create long term improvements.

**Relationships** – Previous inspections, external and internal audits and feedback from families has previously highlighted a need to improve our relationships with families. Officers have been working with our Building Attachment and Bonds team and Leeds Council to deliver training which supports the creation of more therapeutic approaches and family led decision making.

**Assessments** – Audits and Ofsted inspections have continually highlighted weaknesses in our assessments. Officers have begun a focused training programme to ensure our assessments are family led, curious and analytical in their assessment of need. Recent inspections have highlighted that our strongest assessments involve good partnership working. Therefore, assessments will be part of the key priorities for the safeguarding partnership.

**Plans** – Although officers are seeing some improvement in plans for child protection and Child In Need plans are generally still weak in regard to care plans. Officers have now delivered focused training to all independent chairs who support the creation of plans so they remain SMART and effective. The review of plans will form a critical aspect of our new working model.

Officers will be continuing to focus on reducing the number of children who have been placed at home on care orders. Or a number of these children the orders are unnecessary and can be revoked through a court process.

Officers are also continuing our commitment to strengthen our offer for foster carers through a revised Special Guardianship approach. Early indications are that for a number of our children who are in long term fostering their needs could be met without the need for statutory intervention.

The review of Early Help and the Integrated Front Door has now been completed and supports the vision of community-based Family Hubs. With work already underway the creation and implementation of these hubs will be done in collaboration with the Early Help Partnership.

- 4.2 The newly appointed DfE Advisor will support the development of Phase four of the Improvement Plan.