

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Mhairi Doyle	Children's Services	November 2023

Children's Social Care

Stability and capacity in the workforce

In line with the Corporate Plan and the Improvement Plan recruitment and retention of a stable workforce remains a priority for the service. A further sixteen people have been offered places in the second annual intake to the Academy and are due to start later in the year. Thirteen Social Workers have graduated from the Academy.

A permanent Assistant Director for Help and Protection has been recruited and has started.

Recruitment activity is continuing; however, it must be noted that recruitment of experienced Social Workers remains a challenge.

Budget

The table below provides the latest budget position as reported to November Cabinet: -

	Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Variance £m	Variance to August £m
Children's Social Care	80.081	85.114	5.033	0.974

The current forecast for the service shows a potential overspend of £5.033m. However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end.

Members will be aware that the 2023/24 approved budget included an additional £21m of investment in the service based on the requirement for additional staffing (including some temporary funding for additional agency costs whilst more permanent staff are recruited to, including International Social Workers and from staff coming through the social work academy) as well as additional resources to reflect the number of packages at the time, some potential growth as well as resource for inflationary pressures.

The current forecast for staffing is an overspend of £0.660m. This will require robust monitoring through the year. There are a clear set of assumptions driving this forecast in terms of when expensive managed/project teams will leave the Council as new staff are onboarded from the International Social Worker cohort and the academy.

If these assumptions change then the forecast will be revised with additional pressure being experienced.

Certain areas of accommodation and support packages are forecast to overspend by £3.472m, partly due to additional packages in the late part of 2022/23 and early part of 2023/24.

As mentioned in reports last year, packages initially have been at a higher cost than previously seen. However, recently improvements in practice have resulted in more children being placed in more appropriate settings at a lower cost. This is expected to continue throughout the year. Work is currently being undertaken to review forecasts for all types of care settings based on a number of children being in higher cost settings for shorter periods, which is expected to significantly impact on the forecast. In addition, where numbers and costs of Children with Disabilities has increased, specialist work is being undertaken to ensure health are making the appropriate contributions to the cost of care.

This is the key aspect of this financial forecast- the service is stabilising and as this takes place the review of placements will also be undertaken. At present the assumption is that all support, unless known otherwise, will continue for the whole of the financial year and for a number of placements this will not be the case. Senior managers are reviewing these, and the forecast will be updated accordingly in addition to the health contributions that are due.

As part of this work a further review of demand will be undertaken. This again will inform the forecast- the service is currently starting to stabilise and that will inform that estimate. Members will recall that in the budget reports it was advised that a tolerance of 5% on the budget could be expected based on advice from the DfE Commissioner- based on the service budget that would amount to £4m. This current forecast is slightly higher than that at present before the outcome of the additional reviews is to be built in.

In considering this forecast, work will also be undertaken to determine if any of this pressure is temporary or permanent in nature and needs reflecting in future budget setting processes.

Elected Member Training

Following the training and development needs assessment undertaken in March 2023 by the Local Government Association (LGA) elected members have received Corporate Parenting training plus members of Overview and Scrutiny Children's Services and Safeguarding Committee have received two training sessions delivered by the LGA and a further session was delivered in October. Feedback from both the DfE Commissioner and council Officers has been positive in regard to the quality and tone of scrutiny in recent meetings.

Help and Protection

Early Help

Officers have visited Leeds to learn more about the set up of their Front Door and will use the learning from this visit to help improve practice.

Team Around the School

Good progress is being made in this area and the impact of the changes being made will be closely monitored.

Cared for Children and Care Experienced

Sufficiency

The Sufficiency Strategy is now published covering 2023 - 2026. Officers now meet on a fortnightly basis to oversee progress against the Sufficiency Strategy with key highlights including:

- The Local Framework PDPS is due to reopen for tender. A feedback session was held on 16th October 2023 which gave positive feedback regarding the impact of the framework on local provision. A full review will be carried out in February/March 2024 to give a full year feedback and data report to the Executive Commissioning Group in April 2024.

A further session to recruit new providers to the framework was held on the 19th October 2023 which was well attended (27) providers. The session was jointly hosted with Procurement colleagues and was well received. It is anticipated the framework will reopen before the end of November 2023 with award by March 2024.

- Providers of post 16 accommodation and support are beginning to submit their Ofsted registration numbers to us as registration awards are made. This is being monitored as Ofsted are saying that capacity to complete regulation is an issue.
- We are now in the Stage 2 phase of Ofsted registration with two Sefton providers of residential homes for children in Borough. Registration is anticipated on 10 new bedspaces by December 2023.
- The market of children's services is still saturated and this has now begun to impact on fostering through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) as well as residential homes. In the last ¼ we only made 5 fostering arrangements with IFAs compared to 14 in 2022/23 and 15 in 2021/22.

Quality Assurance of Commissioned Placements

Quality assurance visits continue in all post 16 provision, this includes provision for our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Officers are also undertaking quality assurance visits on our 10 most expensive placements. This will be undertaken by Commissioning Officers in partnership with Social Care colleagues. Alongside the more routine quality assurance checks we will be reviewing the individual placement agreements and looking for ways to support our children to:

- Move back into Borough where it is safe to do so
- Step down into a fostering home
- Ensure they have the correct package of support as identified in their Care Plan.

Other quality assurance visits undertaken have largely been in response to concerns raised regarding the quality of provision or Ofsted notification of a decline in judgement. The outcomes of all visits are recorded and shared with Social Care.

Unregulated and unregistered Placements

There has been a steady decrease in the number of children and young people placed in these types of homes over the last 12 months. Changes in legislation means that any provider of supported housing must apply for regulation by 14th October. As of 20/10/23 every provider bar 1 supporting our young people in these provisions has applied and been given an URN by Ofsted. The one outstanding provider is supporting a young person who is in the process of moving out by 2/11/ 23.

Despite a slight rise by one up to three young people in unregistered settings during October as of 27th October there is only one child remaining in an unregistered setting. Of particular note is the move on of a young person who had been in an unregistered setting for 18 months is now placed under parents' regulation.

Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance

Practice Week

Practice Week was a success with learning events reaching 500 people over the 4 days and positive feedback. Sefton Family members joined 2 events to share their lived experience which provided rich learning and opportunity to build on family participation in the future.

We plan to reintroduce quarterly Practice and Performance Meetings with staff close to Christmas allowing for audit findings to be shared and considered alongside data and good practice examples. Direct work resources are being provided to practitioners to support creative direct work which needs to be strengthened. Plan on a Page has been shared with teams and managers with clear focus on 5 aspects of practice.

Quality Assurance

The monthly 'line of sight' audits, practice observations and focused dip sampling combine to produce a comprehensive programme of quality assurance. The Quality assurance framework has been amended following the outcome of monitoring visits as well as feedback from the DfE advisor to include these variations - the framework will continue to evolve as we develop and learn from experience.

Youth Justice Service

Performance - Compared to last year (Quarter 2) there has been a small increase in first time entrants. In the latest quarter, 50% entered the criminal justice system for assault of possession of an offensive weapon. Reoffending rates look promising, for the tracked children from January to March 23, none have reoffended at the 3 or 6 month stage.

Key Performance Indicators – reporting against the new KPI's has commenced. YJS is reviewing children's educational offers and school absence and with Education colleagues will develop plans to promote engagement and attendance.

Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) Serious Youth Violence

Nationally, there has been a rise in serious youth violence (SYV) and research has shown that the impacts extend beyond those directly involved. The recently announced JTAI is intended to evaluate the effectiveness of local multi-agency responses to serious youth violence. It will identify how effective partnerships are in making a real difference to the safety and well-being of children and highlight aspects of multi-agency work that need to improve. The agencies within the scope of this inspection are the Police, Children's Social Care, Education, Youth Justice Services and relevant health services.

JTAI Headlines

- Relates to violent crime committed by or affecting children outside of the home including homicide, knife and gun crime.
- Likely to take place in LA areas where violence is prevalent and there are concerns relating to county lines and drug activity.
- At strategic level they will look for the partnership's response to SYV – therefore looking at Community Safety Partnerships, local Violence Reduction Partnerships and MASA/safeguarding arrangements and how effectively they work and connect.

The Merseyside Serious Violence Strategy is due to be released in draft (Nov 23) and from this Sefton will develop and implement a local plan to address and prevent serious youth violence.

New HMIP Inspection Framework

HMIP have released a draft inspection framework which is due to commence in January 2024. There are changes to the framework for example a greater focus on victims and quality of work over process. The YJS and the Partnership Board will attend development workshops in preparation for inspection.