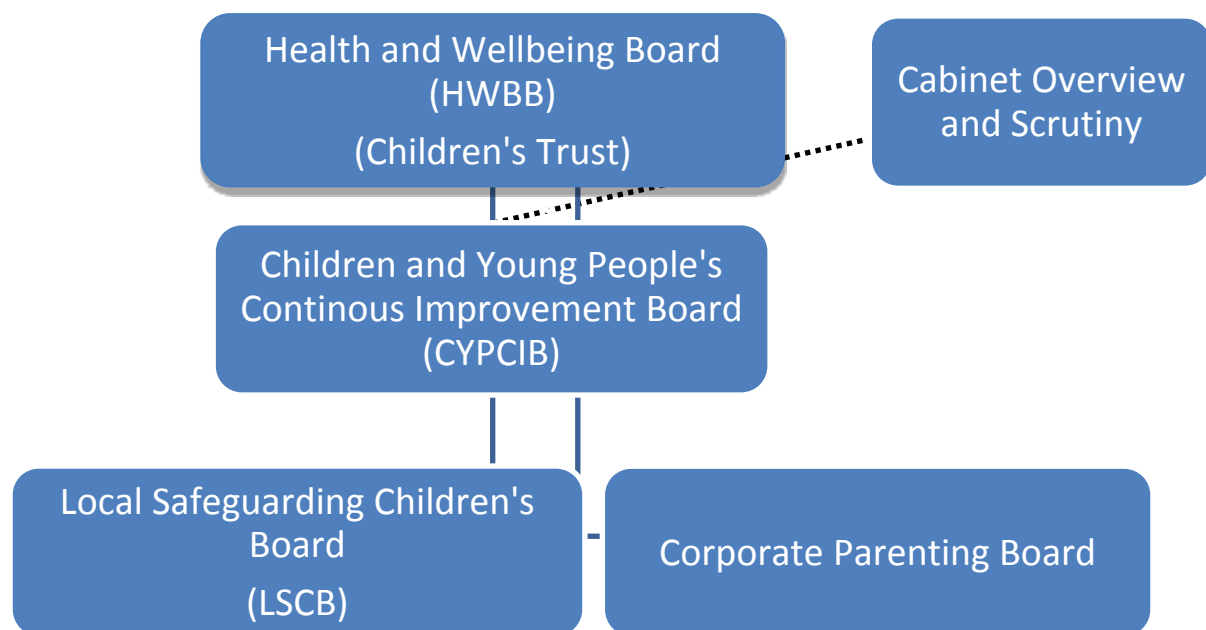


Children's Social Care
Annual Report and Review of
Improvement Plan
1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018

June 2018
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Head of Children's Social Care

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In April 2016 an Inspection took place of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, the report was published in July 2016. The inspection concluded that children's services in Sefton require improvement to be good and made 11 recommendations.
- 1.2 An improvement plan was developed and submitted to DfE and Ofsted in October 2016. The improvement plan was reviewed and refreshed in September 2017. The Plan identified 3 key objectives:
1. Ensure frontline practice is consistently good, effective and focussed on timely, measurable outcomes for children.
 2. To improve management oversight at all levels to ensure services for children and young people receive good quality supervision.
 3. Ensure that frontline services are sufficiently resourced and the workforce appropriately skilled to enable high quality work to be undertaken with children and young people.
- 1.3 Robust governance arrangements remain in place as detailed below and a performance scorecard tracks progress on all actions detailed in the Improvement Plan.

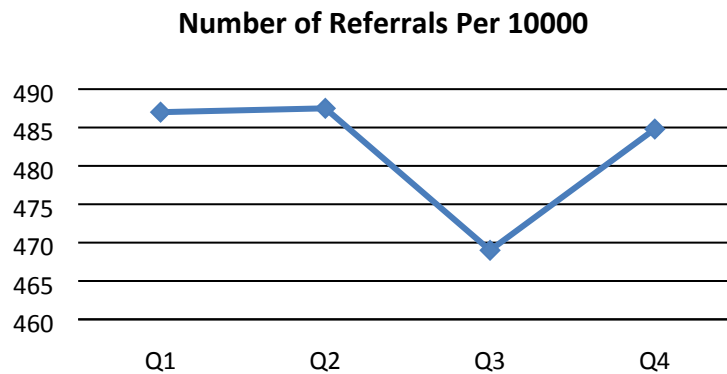


- 1.4 The Children's Social Care Improvement plan is in the process of being reviewed and refreshed, the updated plan will incorporate learning from Children's social care and multi – agency audits, the LSCB independent review of Child Protection re-plans, the LGA Care Practice diagnostic which took place in April 2018 and individual agency learning from Serious Case Reviews and Practice reviews.
- 1.5 It should be noted that there are a range of service annual reports including, Adoption, Fostering, Private Fostering, MASH and the Safeguarding Unit.

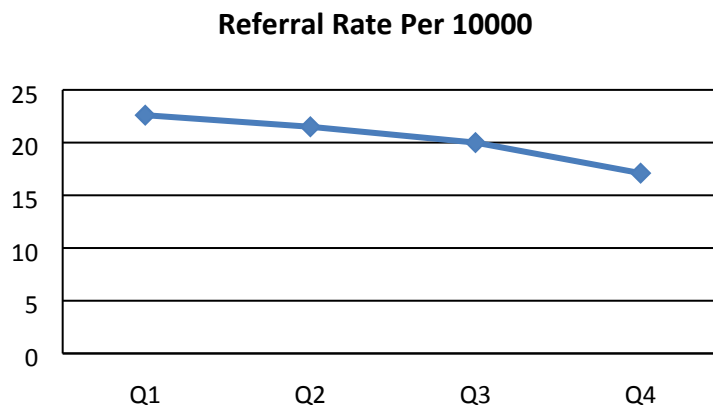
2 Strategic Priority 1 - Ensure frontline practice is consistently good, effective and focussed on timely, measurable outcomes for children Assessment and Planning

2.1 What the data tells us

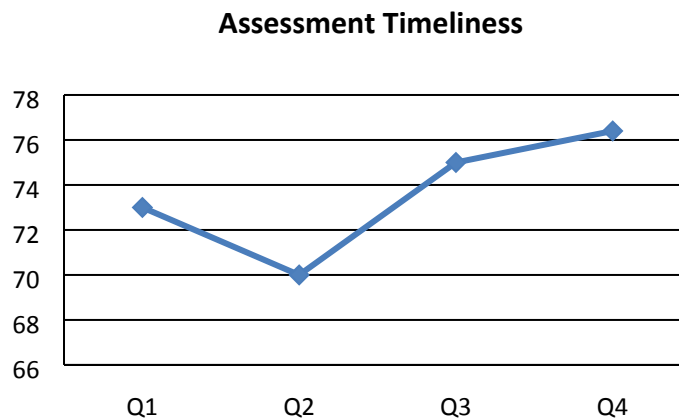
2.1.1 There has been a slight decrease in the rate of referrals (517 – 513.9 per 10000).



2.1.2 Re-referral rates have also decreased to 17.1 (21.6 – 17.1 per 10000), this is an indicator that the initial intervention did result in sustained improvement reducing the requirement for re-referral.



2.1.3 Assessment timeliness remains a strong focus, 76.4% of assessments were completed within 45 days this is a marginal increase on 2016/17 (+4%) and this needs to improve. The number of assessments completed did drop by 13.2% (3248 in 2016/17 to 2819 in 2017/18).



- 2.1.4 The number of children subject to child protection plans has remained stable, with a 1% increase from 2016/17, however there has been an increase in the number of children subject to repeat child protection plans indicating that the plan did not result in sustained change for the child and family. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board have focussed on this issue and an independent review was undertaken to look at this issue. As a result of this a multi – agency action plan is now in place to address this. There is an increase on children subject to child protection plans as a result of neglect, (30%), this is an indication that the neglect strategy has had an impact and neglect is being recognised.
- 2.1.5 Timeliness of reports to Child Protection conferences is a concern and will be a key priority for 2018/19. The practice standard states that reports should be available 3 days prior to conference, this allows reports to be shared with families, only 28.5% of reports were available 3 days before and this will be included in performance monitoring and refresh of the improvement plan.
- 2.1.6 Children seen within 5 days and 10 days of referral needs to improve, with only 46% of children being recorded as seen within 10 days of referral, this will be a focus of performance meetings. There has been an increased focus on assessments that are concluded as No Further Action and there has been an overall reduction of 7.5%, compared to last year.
- 2.1.7 There has been an increase in the number of children Looked After by approximately 4% to 486 children on 31st March 2018, despite this challenge placement stability has improved slightly with 10% of children experiencing 3 or more placement moves, this tends to be older children who have complex issues including CSE and Missing. Positively the number of children placed at home on full care orders has reduced by 3% and this continues to be an area of focus.
- 2.1.8 There continues to be challenges in relation to placement sufficiency for Looked after children and this is a national issue. We are working hard with colleagues in commissioning to work with the local provider market to ensure when safe and appropriate Sefton children remain in Sefton. We are looking at how we can enhance our offer to inhouse foster carers so that they are able to care for some of our older and more complex young people.
- 2.1.9 There has been a focus on Initial Health Assessments for looked After Children in partnership with CCG and provider colleagues, this has led to an increase of 18.6% of IHA's completed, this will remain a focus for the coming 12 months in relation to all health checks.
- 2.1.10 There has been an increase in the number of children adopted during the year to 13 children, with a further 15 children placed for adoption, this improvement in performance was acknowledged in a letter from the minister.
- 2.1.11 We have developed and published our local offer for care leavers. 91.2% of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation which is comparable to last year's figure of 92.7%, (custody is not deemed as suitable accommodation), positively there have been no care leavers in emergency accommodation e.g. bed and breakfast, and 9% increase in care leavers who are in Education, Employment or training.
- 2.1.12 During 2017/18 Young Advisors were asked to undertake a piece of work to understand the experience of children and families in the Child in Need and Child Protection Service. The findings from their report have been taken forward and an

action plan developed. Ensuring we capture the voice of children and their lived experience remains a key priority.

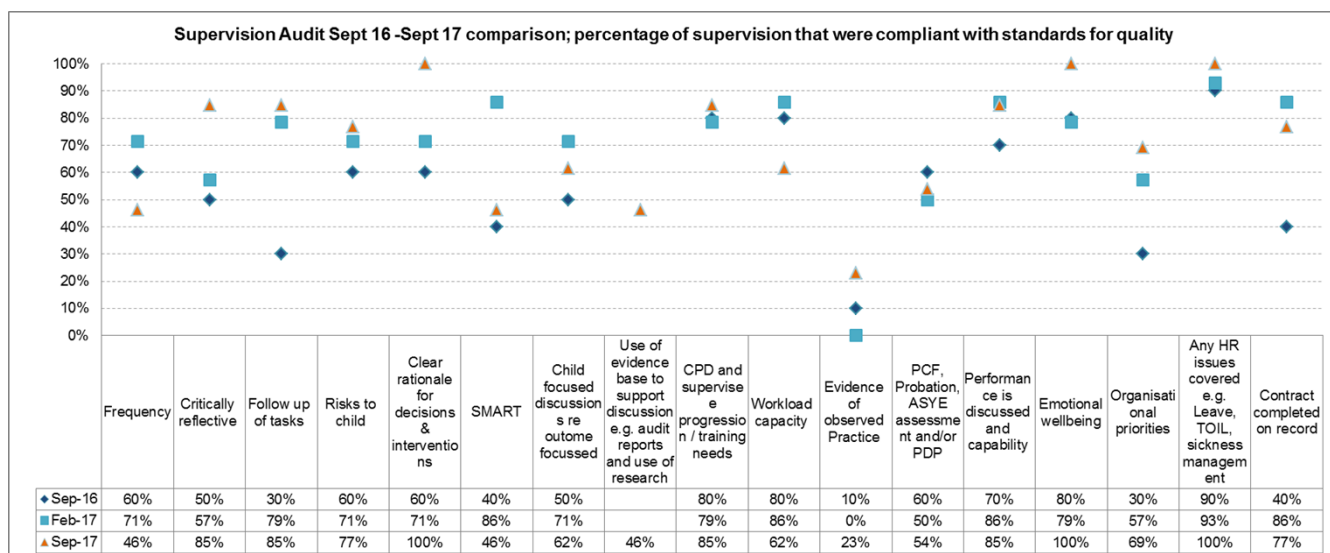
2.1.13 The LSCB commissioned an independent review of children subject to second or subsequent child protection plans, the review made a number of recommendations which children’s Social care are addressing alongside the LSCB partnership. One Serious Case Review was started during the year and the findings of this this is due to be reported to the LSCB in July 2018. A common theme from audit and review is the sense of over optimism in some cases which can then then lead to drift and delay in care planning for children. A review is being undertaken of our current Signs of Safety approach which is a strengths based model, to look at what other tools and models are needed to support practice and effective decision making across the whole partnership.

3 Strategic Priority 2 - To improve management oversight at all levels to ensure effective services for children and young people and that frontline staff receive good quality supervision.

3.1 An audit of supervision was undertaken in September 2017. A further audit will be undertaken in July 18.

3.2 What the data tells us

3.2.1 In the supervision audit, 75% of the supervision records audited did not meet good overall, this had increased from 50% in the previous audit. No cases were judged to exceed good although in one case the auditor noted that the supervision would have exceeded good if had occurred more frequently. Areas that were highlighted for improvement in the previous audit had demonstrably improved in most areas.



3.2.2 Frontline managers are currently reviewing the supervision policy and templates for recording supervision to ensure that they are helpful to them and support them in evidencing reflective supervision. What is clear when talking to frontline practitioners is that formal and informal supervision takes place regularly but is not always well recorded and reflective discussions captured.

3.2.3 There continues to be a focus on leadership and management across the organisation. Practice and Performance Workshops are held quarterly led by the Head of Service,

and all frontline staff are invited to attend, these workshops provide opportunities to share learning from audits including multi – agency audits, share good practice and ensure that social workers are afforded an opportunity to influence the development of plans to improve practice.

3.2.4 Performance meetings are held monthly with Team Managers to ensure that we continually scrutinise data and translate this into what it means for children and families.

3.2.5 There is robust scrutiny and challenge at all levels in the organisation as detailed in the governance structure above.

4 Strategic Priority 3 - Ensure that frontline services are sufficiently resourced and the workforce appropriately skilled to enable high quality work to be undertaken with children and young people.

4.1 In October 2017 Children's Social care restructured its services. The aim of the restructure was to address the following,

- Children experience too many changes of social workers at important transition points.
- Caseloads are too high in some areas, (assessment, Corporate Parenting and IRO's)
- Management Oversight and supervision needs to improve.

4.2 There has been a dip in performance since the restructure as new approaches 'bed – in'. Locality Social Work teams now have a wider remit, whilst over time this will be positive for children as they should not experience changes of social workers at key decision points, it does mean that team managers and social workers are undertaking areas of practice that they have not necessarily undertaken before. We are working closely with team managers to support them in the development of their teams.

4.3 The new structure also supports clear lines of accountability within teams and support to develop frontline managers is in place. There has been mandatory training for frontline managers and quarterly development meetings. We believe that investing in the development of our frontline managers is key to raising practice standards. The new structure should help to create the culture and environment for continued improvement.

4.4 As we have recruited to vacancies and increased numbers in social work teams there has been an increase in the number of newly qualified social workers in their Assessed and Supported year in Employment, (approximately 20 social workers). This is positive in many ways as we are growing our future workforce however it does mean there are increased challenges as they should have protected caseloads, increased supervision and support to develop which puts an extra burden on team managers. We have secured some resource to provide additional support to this cohort of staff to ensure they meet the requirements of the programme and relieve some of the burden for Team Managers.

4.5 We have increased our support to Care leavers as part of the restructure, creating a team that provides this service and increasing the number of personal advisors. This should help us to meet the requirements of the Children and social work act 2017 with support to care leavers up to the age of 25.

5 Summary and Conclusions

- 5.1 Raising Practice standards and improving the consistency of core practice remains a priority focus. Standards of recording have improved which to demonstrate through audit that there is a tangible outcome on children's lives. We must now ensure that here is momentum and change gathers pace moving forward.
- 5.2 Management oversight and supervision must strengthen further to have an impact on quality of practice.
- 5.3 Recommendations from audits, serious case reviews, the Local Government Association Peer Review Care practice Diagnostic and independent review of children subject to repeat child protection plans will be incorporated into a reviewed and refreshed improvement plan for the service to ensure we continue to drive improvements in practice and improve the lived experiences of our most vulnerable children.