

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** Cheshire East Scrutiny Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014

**Report of:** Tony Crane, Director of Children's Services

**Subject/Title:** Children's Improvements Plan Update

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## **1.0 Recommendation**

1.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to note overall progress, performance and issues arising against Cheshire East's Children's Improvement Plan.

## **2.0 Introduction**

2.1 This report gives an update on recent improvement activity in the following areas:

- Ofsted Improvement Framework Pilot
- Safeguarding Children Peer Review
- Recruitment and retention of Social Workers
- Internal Audit
- Voice of children and young people
- Transforming Social Work Practice Survey
- Progress against the Improvement Notice
- Performance Book

## **3.0 Ofsted Improvement Framework Pilot**

3.1 There have been 3 Improvement Monitoring visits completed as part of the Council's engagement with the Ofsted Improvement Pilot. The monitoring visits have focussed on key issues in the improvement plan and provide an additional layer of assurance for the Council in respect of improvements to the safety and quality of decision making, management oversight and child centred practice.

3.2 In summary, Ofsted focused on the following themes:

- Identification and management of risk and potential risk at the point of referral to Cheshire East's Consultation Service (ChECS)
- Effectiveness of assessment in ensuring that children receive the right level of help at the right time
- Implementing effective audit arrangements
- The quality and consistency of child in need planning

3.3 Of significance is that at all monitoring visits Ofsted have found that no significant concerns were identified and all children were safe. It is also important to note that findings at both visits correlate with the Authority's own analysis of quality highlighted in reports presented to the Improvement Board.

3.4 Ofsted has highlighted positive improvements in respect of the following:

- There were no cases where children were found to be at risk of harm or not responded to appropriately.
- Improved risk identification and management
- Appropriate decision making by ChECS (front door to Social Care)
- Growing focus on child centred practice
- Effective interface between specialist and early help services
- Improved information sharing
- Improved performance in relation to the timeliness of assessment
- The authority accurately and appropriately reflects its position with regard to assessment quality.
- Audits undertaken by skilled, knowledgeable and independent staff.
- Staff understand the improvement agenda. They support the recent changes, including recent re-organisation, and are positive about senior managers' accessibility and interest.

3.5 Areas identified for further improvement include:

- Implement systems to identify and address over optimism in parental capacity and improve knowledge of risks to children's emotional health.
- Robustness and depth of critical analysis
- Embed outcomes focussed practice
- Continue to improve arrangements around the recruitment and retention of Social Workers
- Develop a culture of professional challenge across partner agencies and oversight by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and improved responses by partner agencies to child sexual exploitation (CSE)

3.6 The outcome of the monitoring visits has confirmed the Authority's own view of its progress and the improvement plan outlines a range of activities that will address the issues highlighted above. The challenge will be to drive consistency across all teams, as practice remains variable, and sustain the learning to effect continuous improvement.

3.7 Ofsted will present the quarterly review feedback to the Executive Group of the Improvement Board, along with the Department for Education (DfE), Independent Chair of the Improvement Board and Independent Chair of the LSCB on 7th March.

#### **4.0 Safeguarding Children Peer Review**

4.1 Arrangements for the safeguarding peer review that will take place in the week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> March are well underway. A one minute guide

attached at Appendix 1 gives further detail, including the peer review team that will be led by Linda Clegg, current Director of Children's Services at Blackburn and Darwen.

4.2 A frontline questionnaire has been distributed throughout the Council and partner agencies. A case mapping exercise has been completed and sent to the peer review team. One of the peer review team carried out a case records review on 7 randomly selected cases. The peer review team will also consider a range of documents

4.3 A draft timetable for the onsite week is attached at Appendix 2. This incorporates a cross section of services and key staff, members and commissioned services at both a strategic and operational level.

4.4 The findings of the peer review will be reported in March.

## **5.0 Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers**

5.1 The Council's recruitment and retention strategy is being reviewed. Work is underway to develop a recruitment campaign which will use a variety of social media.

5.2 Significant work has taken place on developing the induction programme for new starters, in consultation with existing staff. This includes the development of an induction pack, which sets out links to be made and contacts with key partners. The pack has been circulated to existing managers and was formally launched at the Children's Social Care Development Session on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

## **6.0 Internal Audit Report**

6.1 As part of the quality assurance framework, the Council's Internal Audit Team were commissioned to establish whether the Council has adequate governance arrangements in place for implementing recommendations made by external inspections, including the Ofsted report and Improvement Notice, and to further determine whether the actions have been implemented. Overall the arrangements were judged to deliver 'good assurance'.

## **7.0 Voice of Children and Young People**

7.1 Work continues to embed the voice of children and young people in Children's Services. The new Children's Rights and Participation Service, run by the Children's Society, has made good progress in establishing a framework for engagement with children and young people.

## **8.0 Transforming Social Work Practice Survey**

8.1 The annual survey of all social work staff and their frontline supervisors was carried out in October and November 2013. 76% of the workforce completed

the survey – a significant rate of return. The key themes and the proposed response has been fed back to all staff, including:

- Most staff are satisfied or very satisfied with their current job
- Staff report that they generally want to stay with Cheshire East, but the level of change impacts on job satisfaction for some.
- Most feel that the recruitment and retention strategy has had a positive impact on increasing the number of staff with the right skills and experience
- Staff feel they are very busy and would like to spend more time with children and young people
- Staff feel that senior managers are visible and there is an opportunity for them to voice their opinions
- Most feel that recent investments in IT have helped them in their roles, but there is still some frustration with working arrangements such as hot desking, car parking, lack of suitable meeting rooms
- A large number reported a dramatic improvement in supervision, line management and support from senior managers
- Induction needs to be more consistent
- Practice standards have been well received

8.2 A number of actions have been agreed as a result of the survey including:

- Review of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy
- Bespoke management programme for Social Workers
- Launch new induction programme
- Review of the space, permanent desks and meeting rooms available to Social Work Teams
- Carrying out regular floor walks/drop-ins to teams
- Issuing headsets to teams using telephones
- Improved arrangements for business support
- Launch of a practice newsletter
- Facilitate regular feedback/suggestions from teams
- Improve centranet content for Children and Families

## **9.0 Progress against the Improvement Notice**

9.1 Cheshire East's Improvement Notice set out a number of areas. A summary of progress against the Improvement Notice is set out at Appendix 3.

## **10.0 Performance Book**

10.1 The latest performance book attached at Appendix 4 sets out performance against the key measures as at December 2013.