

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Cabinet

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> October 2015
<b>Report of:</b>	Kath O'Dwyer, Director of Children's Services/Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Rachel Bailey, Children and Families

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report updates Cabinet on the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Cheshire East and the review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) undertaken between the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015, with the report being published by Ofsted on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The overall judgement from the inspection is that services 'require improvement' to be good but the significant improvements made and progress since the last inspection are recognised and noted by the inspectorate.

### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Cabinet is recommended to

- a) note the contents of this paper and Ofsted's report at Appendix 1;
- b) confirm the Council's ambition and commitment to achieve a service that is good/outstanding for Cheshire East's children and young people; and
- c) note the role of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in providing oversight of delivery against a revised improvement plan.

### 3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. The findings and next steps in relation to Ofsted's inspection report have been presented to a number of key boards and stakeholder groups including the Children's Improvement Board, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), the Corporate Parenting Board, and the Council's Children and Families Scrutiny Committee. Plans are in place to also present the report to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children's Trust.
- 3.2. As the Children and Families Scrutiny Board is already closely scrutinising aspects of children's services, the proposal is that it provides oversight to

ensure that the children's improvement plan delivers the required outcomes on behalf of the Council. For the partnerships, the areas of responsibility will be set out in the improvement plan and in line with the inspection recommendations, accountability resting with the Health and Wellbeing Board when the Improvement Board is disbanded.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1. The Council has a statutory responsibility to co-ordinate arrangements to ensure the effectiveness of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Cheshire East and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). It is important that Cabinet is appraised of the strengths and areas for improvement within Children's Services and is assured that arrangements are in place to both develop, implement and scrutinise plans that meet the areas for improvement.

#### **5. Background/Chronology**

- 5.1. All Children's Services authorities are subject to regular inspection by Ofsted. Cheshire East's last major inspection was in April 2013 and focussed specifically on the local authority's arrangements for the protection of children. Ofsted judged Cheshire East's arrangements to be inadequate and although they found no children had been harmed, they identified poor and inconsistent practice in this area.
- 5.2. As a result of the inspection outcome and finding the Department for Education issued a formal notice to improve to the council. As a result, the Council was required to develop a children's improvement plan setting out how it intended to address the areas of inadequacy and to establish a Children's Improvement Board with an independent chair to scrutinise and challenge the effectiveness of our improvement plans. Significant work has taken place over the past two years to address the inspection recommendations and the requirements of the improvement notice to improve outcomes for all children and young people.
- 5.3. A new Ofsted single inspection framework, published in September 2013, covers a broader area of children's services from early help through to adoption and includes a review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). This new framework 'raised the bar' and is designed to be much tougher with 'good' becoming the new standard and expectation; Councils that would previously have been judged 'adequate' are now judged as 'requires improvement'.
- 5.4. Ofsted's definition of 'requires improvement' is that *there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm and the welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted*. However, it also means that the local authority is not yet delivering 'good' protection, help and care for children, young people and their families. Almost 90 grade descriptors of good are set out in the framework. Depending on findings in these areas, Councils are judged as either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

- 5.5. To date, 67 local authority areas have been inspected under the single inspection framework. Almost a quarter of those inspected have been judged as inadequate, over half have been judged as 'requires improvement', less than a quarter are good and none have been judged outstanding.
- 5.6. Cheshire East was inspected for the first time under the single inspection framework in July 2015 and the inspection report was published on the Ofsted website on 15th September. The Inspection, which was carried out by 10 Ofsted Inspectors, took place over a four week period and inspected the following key areas:
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
  - The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving; permanence, including graded judgements on
    - i) adoption performance; and
    - ii) care leavers;
  - Leadership, management and governance; and
  - A review of the LSCB.
- 5.7. The methodology adopted by the inspection team was detailed and probing and included:
- An audit of 20 cases by the local authority (tracked by Inspectors)
  - Case sampling – looking in detail at cases based on a theme
  - Visiting 2 children and young people out of borough
  - Analysis of key documents and data (Annex A); over 200 documents were requested by Inspectors
  - Observations of practice, eg, conferences and reviews
  - Meetings/calls to key stakeholders, including children, young people and families/carers, partner agencies
- 5.8. Ofsted's judgement was that Cheshire East requires improvement to ensure it is providing good services in the above areas; however, Inspectors were impressed with the Council's adoption services, which they judged to be 'good'. Inspectors found that planning for permanence is improving with a good focus on adoption and children are well supported in their new families. They also stated that support for adopters is a strength.
- 5.9. The following strengths of the local authority were identified by Inspectors:
- There is a strong commitment and ambition for children and families to receive the best help and support
  - Plans, resources and political commitment is in place
  - There is active involvement of young people in strategic decisions and plans.
  - The local authority knows itself well and uses external scrutiny and challenge to inform improvement
  - Plans are in place to address areas of improvement

- The strategic response to children who go missing or are at risk of child sexual exploitation is strong
- Multi-agency understanding of the threshold for services in Cheshire East is better
- The identification and referral to children's services for assessment, intervention and support is swift
- There is improved stability and reduced caseloads for most social workers which has led to greater continuity for children.
- Child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers have good oversight of individual cases
- Planning for permanence is improving with a good focus on adoption.
- Support for adopters is a strength.

5.10. Ofsted also identified the following strengths in the LSCB:

- Significant progress has been made, especially over the last year
- There is a clear commitment from everyone to improve the effectiveness of the Board
- There is significant evidence of the Board holding partner agencies to account
- The voice of the child central to board work and is "innovative and influential"
- Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is well coordinated and effectively delivering the multi-agency strategy
- There is a clear learning culture using external scrutiny and challenge well to help its development
- There is a comprehensive range of training
- Procedures are comprehensive, up to date and interactive
- The website is accessible, easy to navigate and well used.

5.11. Ofsted identified 17 recommended actions for the local authority and partners. They identified the following areas for improvement:

- Improving frontline management oversight and challenge of casework
- Consistency in the quality of practice (including management recording)
- Continuing to improve workforce stability
- Focus on cared for performance
- Use of return home interviews to inform planning
- More timely access to early help when families do not meet the threshold for social work intervention
- Commissioning arrangements (accommodation for care leavers, health provision for 16+, initial health assessments, advocacy services for children in need and family group conferences).
- Timely identification, assessment and monitoring of private fostering and connected persons' arrangements
- Impact of challenge from Child Protection chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers

- Achieving permanence quicker
- Life stories and the reasons for decisions.
- Make clearer delegated decisions to foster carers.

5.12. Ofsted also identified 8 recommendations and the following areas of development for the LSCB:

- Complete the work around the performance management framework
- Increase scrutiny of services for cared for children
- Evaluate the impact of the neglect strategy
- Improve links with the Family Justice Board
- Review the arrangements for monitoring the quality of private fostering arrangements
- Improve the influence of the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Develop a female genital mutilation (FGM) strategy
- Implement a protocol around notifications, Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and the national panel.

5.13. Following the publication of the report, Officers have engaged with key stakeholders and have presented the findings to a number of key boards and groups. Discussions are currently underway with Ofsted around holding an improvement planning seminar to better understand their findings and identify the best possible responses to these. The Council is required to submit a detailed improvement plan to Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) by 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2015 setting out how we intend to address the recommendations in the Inspection report.

## **6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members**

6.1. The recommendations will affect a small percentage of children and young people across all areas of Cheshire East, mostly concentrated in the areas of highest deprivation, but they are the most vulnerable.

## **7. Implications of Recommendation**

### **7.1. Policy Implications**

7.1.1. The new improvement plan is likely to impact on the existing policies and procedures of the council as a number of these will be reviewed in relation to improving practice, for example those around the recruitment and retention of Social Workers.

7.1.2. A focus on working in partnership around early intervention and prevention is key to reduce future need and improve outcomes for young people, in particular around reducing the number of vulnerable young people who not in education, employment or training.

## **7.2. Legal Implications**

7.2.1. The judgement of requires improvement does not automatically mean that the DfE will lift the notice to improve. This will be the decision of the Secretary of State based on advise from the DfE officials and the chair of the improvement board. The Improvement Board and the eixsting governance arrangements will continue to operate for the duration of the Notice to Improve.

## **7.3. Financial Implications**

7.3.1. The ambition to ensure that children's services deliver services which are good and outstanding requires an ongoing financial commitment from the Council. In addition, it is important to note that improvements in safeguarding responses have resulted in an increase in the number of children in care. This has significant current and future financial implications for the Council.

## **7.4. Equality Implications**

7.4.1. None at this stage. The improvement plan is expected to improve outcomes for the Borough's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and their families.

## **7.5. Rural Community Implications**

7.5.1. None directly identified at this stage.

## **7.6. Human Resources Implications**

7.6.1. The recriutment and retention of high quality Social Workers and managers will continue to be a challenge for the local authority and will require the support from HR colleagues to deliver the strategy in relation to this.

## **7.7. Public Health Implications**

7.7.1. The improvement plan will support positive public health outcomes.

## **7.8. Other Implications**

7.8.1. None

## **8. Risk Management**

8.1. Children's social care service delivery remains an area of high risk both in terms of reputation and costs. The recruitment and retention of high quality Social Workers and front line managers remains a risk on the corporate and LSCB risk register.

## **9. Access to Information/Bibliography**

9.1. Ofsted's Inspection Report is attached at Appendix 1

## **10. Contact Information**

Contact details for this report are as follows:

<b>Name:</b>	Kath O'Dwyer
<b>Designation:</b>	Director of Children's Services/Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Tel. No:</b>	01270 3 71105
<b>Email:</b>	Kath.O'Dwyer@cheshireeast.gov.uk