

REPORT TO: Health and Wellbeing Board

Date of Meeting: 20th October 2015

Report of: Kath O'Dwyer, Director of Children's Services and Deputy Chief Executive

Subject/Title: Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

1 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Health and Wellbeing Board 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 6th to the 30th July 2015, with the report being published by Ofsted on 15th September 2015.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of this paper and Ofsted's report at Appendix 1, in particular, the recommendation and comments in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Board set out at para 5.8;
- b) Consider what action it needs to take in response to the findings of Ofsted's report; and
- c) Endorse the proposal that the Health and Wellbeing Board transitions to become the 'accountable body' for the Children's Improvement Plan when the existing Improvement Board is disbanded as set out in para 5.16.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board has a statutory responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing of the children, young people and their families in Cheshire East, reduce health inequalities and promote the integration of services. It is important that the Health and Wellbeing Board is appraised of the strengths and areas for improvement within Children's Services and is assured that arrangements are in place to develop, implement and scrutinise plans that meet the areas for improvement.

- 3.2 The Health and Wellbeing Board is ideally placed as an overarching Board to oversee arrangements to ensure that the work of the key partnerships including the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Corporate Parenting Board and Children's Trust address the recommendations of Ofsted's inspection report to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

4 Impact on Health and Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

- 4.1 Outcome one of *The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the Population of Cheshire East 2014 - 2016*, 'Starting and Developing Well' sets out the Health and Wellbeing Board's priority to ensure that children and young people have the best start in life; they and their families or carers are supported to feel healthy and safe, reach their full potential and are able to feel part of where they live and involved in the services they receive. Ofsted's inspection report sets out in detail Cheshire East's areas of strength and improvement in relation to this priority area. The children's improvement plan that is being developed to address the areas of improvement will need to align closely with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

5 Background and Options

Ofsted Inspection Framework

- 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 in this area and the Department for Education (DfE) 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.
- 5.2 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'.

- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.

Cheshire East's Inspection

- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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

- 5.7 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.

Ofsted Comments in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Board

- 5.8 Ofsted's report makes a number of specific references to health, in particular, for cared for children and care leavers and includes the following references to the Health and Wellbeing Board:

"The key priorities within the children's improvement plan, the LSCB business plan, the children and young people's plan and the health and wellbeing plan are appropriate and aligned." (para 141)

"The Health and Wellbeing Board....takes an active interest in some key areas such as commissioning of domestic abuse services and child sexual exploitation, but its overall focus on children, including cared for children, is less well developed." (para 143)

"There are clear lines of governance between the recently formed Joint Commissioning Group, the Health and Wellbeing Board, Children's Trust Board and the LSCB." (para 148)

The LSCB Review states that *"Strategic links with the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) are not explicit and the children's agenda within this body is not sufficiently developed."* Ofsted made a recommendation to the LSCB that it: *Improve the influence of CESC in the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that safeguarding is embedded within its priorities.*

Areas of 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.

Areas for Improvement

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.

Engagement with Key Stakeholders

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, including the Children's Improvement Board, The Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. A number of staff engagement sessions have taken place, both to update staff on Ofsted's findings, and to seek their input into the improvement plan. In addition, discussions are currently underway with Ofsted around holding an improvement planning seminar to ensure that the improvement plan addressed their recommendations and areas for improvement.

Single Inspection Improvement Plan

- 5.14 The Council is required to submit a detailed improvement plan to Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) by 22nd December 2015 setting out how we intend to address the recommendations in the Inspection report. To date the Children's Improvement Board has been responsible for monitoring, scrutinising and challenging progress against the Children's Improvement Plan and will sign off the final Improvement Plan at its meeting on 20th November.
- 5.15 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 advice from the DfE officials and the Chair of the Improvement Board and the Improvement Board and the existing governance arrangements will continue to operate for the duration of the Notice to Improve.

Proposed Role of the Health and Wellbeing Board

- 5.16 Delivery of the Improvement Plan will sit with a number of key partnerships. When the existing Children's Improvement Board is disbanded, it is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board becomes responsible, as the overarching partnership, for monitoring, scrutinising and challenging the progress and effectiveness of the these delivery plans to address the recommendations and areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.
- 5.17 As the 'accountable body' it is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing receive quarterly updates on progress against actions, performance and quality assurance information. It is proposed to adopt the methodology of the previous improvement plan, whereby there are two levels of sign off; Phase 1 sign off, whereby the Board is satisfied that the activity to address the recommendation has been completed; and Phase 2 sign off, whereby the Board is satisfied that the quantitative and qualitative information evidences improvements in the quality of practice.
- 5.18 It is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board also receive the risk register and will be expected to request further more detailed reports where performance suggests there are risks or issues in delivering on the improvements.

6 Access to Information

- 6.1 Ofsted's Inspection Report is attached at Appendix 1.

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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