

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: Monday 2nd September 2013

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

Subject/Title: Director of Children's Services Highlight Report

1.0 Recommendation

1.1 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is asked to note overall progress and performance to date against Cheshire East's improvement plan.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 This report gives an update on improvement activity since July. Additional supporting information is provided in the Performance Book, Plan on a Page and evidence to support recommendation sign off.

3.0 Improvement Notice

3.1 Discussions with DfE regarding the Improvement Notice have been constructive and agreeable. The notice is a fair reflection of the areas for improvement needed in Cheshire East. The planning and actions already underway cover the vast majority of the issues identified in the Notice.

3.2 The inclusion on page 3 of the Notice of Adoption specific measures are a result of Cheshire East's performance regarding two discrete timescale issues which are measured on a 3 year rolling average.

Current progress against the Adoption Improvement Plan is summarised below:

- This year on year increase in adoption continues in Cheshire East and is on target, this year to deliver the most adoptions to date – this being 31
- In regard to those children entering care since January 2012 performance, on the aforementioned timescales, is significantly better than the current national average
- Adoption Services were inspected by Ofsted in December 2012 and were rated good

4.0 Key Highlights

- ChECS continues to embed and improve
- Combined assessment measures are showing significant improvements in meeting timescales.

- Maximum caseloads are reducing
- Recent successful recruitment of key staff
- First meeting of LSCB Executive Group met on 12 August
- Quality assurance framework and evidence documents produced

5.0 Key Challenges and Risks

- Inconsistency of practice continues to be a key issue
- Evidence of recording activity is still too variable
- Whilst the quality of agency social workers has improved, the percentage of permanent staff in CAT, CIN/CP continues to be high
- A slight dip in the number of CAF's
- Need to ensure the improvement plan incorporates the requirements of the improvement notice

6.0 Plan on a page

6.1 Good progress is being made against activity to achieve the Ofsted recommendations. The majority of actions are on target, with a significant number already complete. Work to revise the complaints process has been delayed due to further consideration regarding how this ties into the new advocacy service, expected timescale for completion is now the end of September 2013.

6.2 Other timescales have slipped regarding the roll out of IT equipment to social workers due to supplier problems. Feedback from children linked to LSCB – also to be completed by the end of September 2013.

7.0 Performance Book

7.1 Overall performance continues to improve in the main, with most indicators within acceptable limits. The Performance Book highlights some legacy issues regarding initial and core assessments which are now subsumed into the new combined assessment. The target tracker highlights the issues mentioned earlier of the reliance on agency social workers.

8.0 Executive Group

8.1 An Executive Group to the Improvement Board has been formed and continues to meet on a weekly basis with good attendance and engagement from partners. In July/August, the Executive Group has:

- ✓ Completed actions from July Improvement Board
- ✓ Agreed the August Board agenda
- ✓ Commented on the draft improvement notice
- ✓ Developed the quality assurance framework
- ✓ Produced the list of evidence for sign off against each Ofsted recommendation
- ✓ Agreed the content of the quality of practice focus report
- ✓ Endorsed the standing items and forward plan for future Board meetings

- ✓ Noted the requirements of the communication strategy

8.2 In addition, each Member of the Executive Group has been tasked to collate information from their organisation on the following areas:

- Agency view of ChECS
- Any issues with CAVAs/ referrals
- Agency engagement in child protection work, eg attendance at multi-agency meetings (child protection conferences etc)

8.3 The findings from this exercise will be collated into the partners' reports in September which will be presented to the Improvement Board.

9.0 Effective Front Door

9.1 The ChECS Service continues to embed and improve; the number of consultations by telephone has increased to 76% which is a positive indication that Partners are appropriately contacting ChECS. The largest number of consultations came from schools and the police with family members making up the next highest group. There have also been significant improvements in the number of cases passed to social care within one working day, which is a 10% increase compared to previous months.

10.0 Quality of Practice

10.1 The Quality of Practice Focus report looks in detail at 4 keys areas; Workforce, Performance, Major Case Audit and Case Studies. The audit, which whilst it found no child to be unsafe, did highlight inconsistencies and variability in relation to practice and quality.

10.2 The set up of the children's rights and participation service is continuing to make good progress. Following Bidder interviews, the Council has issued a notice of intention to award to the contract, with a view to starting the contract in mid-September ahead of the December schedule.

11.0 Partnership, Challenge and Scrutiny

11.1 Significant activity is underway to improve performance, scrutiny and challenge within the Council and LSCB, including:

- ✓ Corporate Scrutiny Committee continues to provide support, with the Improvement Plan a standing agenda item
- ✓ Monthly meetings have been set which the Leader, Chief Executive, DCS and LSCB Chair will attend and monitor progress
- ✓ The establishment of a new LSCB Executive Group (first meeting 12/8/13)
- ✓ The LSCB performance report has been revised and will be operational from September 2013
- ✓ Young person representative recruited to the LSCB
- ✓ Development of a LSCB frontline reference group to be established

- ✓ Additional Board scheduled for August to consider the improvement plan in more detail
- ✓ Arrangements for Section 11 and multi-agency audits agreed

12.0 Evidence to Support Progress

- 12.1 Appendix 1 – Evidence to support recommendations sign off - provides a matrix to clarify the range and type of evidence to be presented to the Board for sign off. Discussions at both the Executive Group and with regional colleagues on other Improvement Boards warn against the danger of 'perpetual limbo', this being that ultimately the acid test of progress will be confirmed by a full Ofsted inspection.
- 12.2 Therefore the matrix signals the timescales for which evidence will be presented to enable discussion and challenge in order for the Board to determine progress. Improvement Notice issues will be added to the Ofsted report recommendations highlighted in the matrix to ensure the Board fulfils its role in securing improvement.