

Title of Report:	Update on Children's Services Improvement Plan
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny & Management Commission 15th September 2015
Forward Plan Ref:	

Purpose of Report: To update on the progress of Children's Services subsequent to their Ofsted grading of 'inadequate' published on 18th May 2015.

Recommended Action: That the OSMC:

- i) Endorses the progress being made by Children's Services subsequent to their Ofsted Inspection
- ii) Be informed of the improvement journey to ensure Children's Services becomes 'good' in line with the Council's Strategy

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority(ies):

CSP1 – Caring for and protecting the vulnerable

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Strategy principle(s):

CSP8 - Doing what's important well

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy priorities and principles by:

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Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	3 September 2015

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2015, Ofsted carried out an inspection of West Berkshire's Children and Families' Services. The outcome of this inspection was that our "services for children in need of help and protection" were judged to be "inadequate" and therefore the local authority's overall effectiveness in delivering children and family services was judged to be "inadequate" too.
- 1.2 The Ofsted report contained 17 recommendations which we must implement effectively. Of these, four were for "Priority and Immediate Action" and a further 13 are considered "Areas for Improvement".

2. West Berkshire's Response to the Ofsted Inspection

- 2.1 The Improvement Action Plan (See Appendix A) written in response to this inspection makes clear our vision for children, young people and families. It then outlines the five highlighted domains by Ofsted and within them a number of improvement commitments. These are statements of intent which demonstrate our commitment to getting to "good" for our safeguarding practice and achieving our vision.
- 2.2 The Improvement Plan shows how our Improvement Commitments link to Ofsted's recommendations and in a section headed "How will we know we have done it", shows what will be measured, monitored, observed or established to demonstrate that we have met our improvement commitments.
- 2.3 For each domain, the Improvement Plan shows how the improvement commitments are translated into SMART actions. These detailed actions have a target date, a lead officer with responsibility for completing them, a RAG status (except for those actions which haven't yet been initiated) and a Status Update which outlines our progress to date.
- 2.4 This Improvement Plan was approved by the Department for Education in August 2015 and is the core document against which Children and Families Services improvement is being monitored and evaluated.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 3.1 No formal equalities consultations have taken place on this plan, but the work of Children and Families Services impacts on the most vulnerable children, young people and families in our district, including some who have protected characteristics under the Equalities Act. The Performance Plan has however been widely shared with the recognition that as the focus of the work is on improvement, any change seen is likely to be beneficial.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 An Improvement Plan is mandatory in response to an Ofsted "inadequate" judgement. It records and evidences the progress that is being achieved and in deciding our improvement partners to advise on the Council's work, the Secretary of State has shown confidence in our ability to improve with only minimum intervention. It has therefore been accepted as a constructive tool to track our improvement journey.

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2015, Ofsted carried out an inspection of West Berkshire's Children and Families' Services against the "Single Inspection Framework" (known as a SIF inspection). The report was published 18th May 2015.
- 1.2 The outcome of this inspection was that West Berkshire was judged to "require improvement" in relation to services for looked after children and care leavers, leadership management and governance and for our Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). However, "services for children in need of help and protection" were determined to be "inadequate". Because this is what is known as a "limiting judgement" the local authority's overall effectiveness in delivering children and family services was judged to be "inadequate" too.
- 1.3 The Ofsted report contained 17 recommendations which the local authority must implement effectively. Of these, four were for "Priority and Immediate Action" and a further 13 are "Areas for Improvement".
- 1.4 The Ofsted recommendations were considered by West Berkshire Council in discussion with LSCB partners and mapped to five work streams.
 - 1) Improving Leadership, Management, Governance and Partnerships
 - 2) Improving the Quality of our Practice
 - 3) Strengthening, Stabilising and Improving the Quality of our Workforce
 - 4) Improving Service to Children in Need of Help and Protection
 - 5) Improving Services to Children Looked After and Care Leavers

2. West Berkshire's response to the Ofsted Inspection

- 2.1 In March 2015, at the same time as the inspection, new appointments were made to strengthen the management and leadership in Children's Services. Dr Mac Heath started as the new Head of Children and Families Services in June 2015 and Andrea King was appointed into the new post of Head of Prevention and Community Development.
- 2.2 These posts were recognised as key in leading much of the improvement work required and to support partners, including the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 2.3 After the inspection had finished, but before the report was published, a Quality Assurance (QA) Board was formed to act promptly on the inspection findings. Further, a Children's Services Improvement Programme (CSIP) Board was put in place to monitor the progress against specific improvement actions.
- 2.4 The CSIP directly addresses the Ofsted Action Plan written in response to our inspection and allocates a workstream for each domain of improvement. Each workstream with a specific sponsor and operational lead.
- 2.5 The main section of the improvement plan takes each workstream in turn, and for the improvement commitments within the workstream, outlines which Ofsted recommendations the commitments relate to.
- 2.6 The plan shows what will be measured, monitored, observed or established to demonstrate that we have met our improvement commitments. For example, in the

"Improving the quality of our practice" workstream, we measure the effectiveness of our improvement by showing improved timeliness of single assessments, initial child protection conferences, child protection reviews, LAC reviews and child protection visits. Within this workstream there are also eight other measurable components which will also be used to demonstrate our improvement.

- 2.7 For each improvement workstream the Improvement Plan also shows how the improvement commitments are translated into SMART actions. One of our workstreams; "Strengthening, Stabilising and Improving the Quality of Our Workforce", has two improvement commitments in it: having a stable and secure workforce and securing consistency in practice and working relationships with children, young people and families. These improvement commitments in turn have smart actions each in order to secure progress against the commitment.
- 2.8 All these detailed actions have a target date set against them, a lead officer with responsibility for completing them, a RAG status (except for those actions which haven't yet been initiated) and a Status Update which outlines our progress to date.
- 2.9 The main governance points for this work are threefold:
 - LSCB – this has multi-agency oversight of the whole children's safeguarding system
 - Council / Executive – this has the political oversight of what we are doing, and where decisions may be made about resources and policy and owns the council's vision for children, young people and families
 - Children's Service Improvement Programme – this is the practical programme management vehicle for making sure the changes are carried out within the service
- 2.10 We anticipate that all three bodies will require regular updates of the progress on the Improvement Plan.
- 2.11 In addition, we will want to make use of other bodies such as relevant LSCB sub-groups, an increased role for children's scrutiny, and the QA Board to help us drive the service improvement.
- 2.12 Ofsted have acknowledged that West Berkshire recognised its weaknesses and failings and acted appropriately to tackle them. It was therefore vital the service responded by maintaining the focus and momentum at a time when so many services have a post inspection 'dip'.
- 2.13 This approach was further endorsed by confirmation in August 2015 that West Berks would be subject to only minimum, external intervention to secure its improvements.

3. Progress of Improvement Journey to ensure Children's Services achieves 'Good' in line with the Council's commitment

- 3.1 The key milestones in our improvement journey are mapped on our Action Plan (Appendix A) but there are a number of key developments that further evidence our progress.
- 3.2 At the start of April 2015, the first cohort of our Social Work Academy started. The academy is part of the recruitment and retention package that Ofsted called "ambitious and creative"; part of our response to the difficulties we were having in stabilising our workforce and reducing our reliance on agency staff. This is part of a

wider Recruitment and Retention Strategy to increase our permanent social work workforce. Our current agency rate shows an improved 33% from a reported 50% of qualified social workers since the inspection.

- 3.3 Since April we've also been noticing steady improvements in our performance data. The percentages of assessments completed within 45 days have improved. All our initial child protection conferences, child protection reviews and looked after children reviews are on time, with a significant improvement on timeliness of our child protection visits (97% in July).
- 3.4 We still have important improvement work to do with our health partners to make sure that all the full health checks and dental checks are done for the children in our care and to make sure that child protection conference reports are provided to families on time. We have only managed to provide reports on time in 48% of cases overall this year, although for last month's conferences we improved to 67%. This continues to be a priority for us
- 3.5 In May, at a Council meeting the day after publication of our inspection report, the Council gave a firm commitment to our improvement work. We also incorporated our response to Ofsted's recommendations into our LSCB business planning, to ensure that our multi-agency partners also had the opportunity to challenge and support us on our improvement journey. The LSCB is the main body for independent scrutiny of our improvement.
- 3.6 In June, our first meetings with the Improvement Advisers attached to us by the Department for Education (DfE) took place. They pressed us hard for evidence of the work we had done, the changes we had made and the positive impact that was happening. By this time we had held two further QA Boards and developed the first draft of the Improvement Plan that we would later submit to the DfE and Ofsted. This enabled us to show our progress. The advisers could see that we were confident in our capacity to improve and the draft plan was circulated to all the staff of the Communities Directorate and to all schools in the district to evidence our ambition.
- 3.7 In July our Improvement Plan received approval at a special Council meeting. Although much of the improvement work could be managed within our existing resources, tackling some of the more challenging issues required investment, and we needed to satisfy the Council both that our plans were sound and that any investment would be sharply focused. These were approved and we had a further evidence gathering visit from the Improvement Advisers to enable them to make their recommendations to the DfE about the level of intervention and nature of Improvement Notice the department should issue to us.
- 3.8 Throughout July and August we have maintained a continuing, steady effort to evidence improvements and where we have made them and to push harder in areas where we are still not performing as we would want.
- 3.9 On 24th August we submitted our Improvement Plan and it was publicly confirmed by the Secretary of State that our Improvement Partners to work alongside us in our Ofsted Improvement work will be an organisation called Exploring Choices, who have been working with us over the last three months to support the development of our improvement.
- 3.10 In deciding on our Improvement Partners, and not to appoint an Improvement Board to advise the Council's work, the Secretary of State has shown confidence in our ability to improve with only minimum intervention. It is recognised that by the time of the inspection the need to improve had already been acknowledged and the

service has shown a strong commitment and ability to be able to deliver on improvements, but we also acknowledge that there is some important work to do to put us in the best position to fully achieve our aim.

3.11 The plan which commits us to providing a 'Good' service for vulnerable children and their families will build on this initial progress by, amongst other things:

- Utilising the £600k investment into the service for additional support and new posts
- Progress the recruitment campaign to increase stability
- Increase support to ensure cases are dealt with in agreed timescales and practice is consistently good.

3.12 Overall, however, it is understood that the key to our success will be to create a service that is supportive, has clear processes and systems in place, provides the tools needed to do our job well, where we see good practice as a habit, not a goal and is focussed on the outcomes for the children, young people and families with whom we work.

4. Conclusion

4.1 In the last five months since our Inspection, Children and Families Services have worked hard to implement the service infrastructure and governance arrangements which support the strengths and principles outlined in our Action Plan. We do recognise however that these improvements need to be embedded across all areas to ensure the service is able to sustain and build further on the improvements already evidenced.

5. Recommendations

5.1 For OSMC to consider Children's Services progress and be informed of the journey of improvement being undertaken to ensure Children's Services become 'good' in line with the Council's ambition.

Appendices

Appendix A - Improvement Plan

Consultees

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted:

Trade Union: