

**Meeting of the Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

**Report of the Strategic Director People**

**Medium-Term Improvement Plan for Children's Services**

**Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the Medium-Term Improvement Plan for Children's Services, and to provide Cabinet with an overview of the emerging planning and improvement process for the Children's Services division. This follows the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services undertaken in October / November 2018 (formal report published by Ofsted 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018).

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - Note the formal report of the Ofsted Inspection (attached)
  - Approve the Medium-Term Improvement Plan (attached), subject to any required amendments
  - Note that the Medium-Term Improvement Plan will be supported by an Operational Action Plan (a requirement of Ofsted within 70 working days of publication of the original inspection report). The Action Plan will provide a performance tool to support delivery of the Improvement Plan and is in the process of being agreed by the Director of People and Portfolio Holder, subject to formal approval by Ofsted in March 2019.

**Background**

3. The Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in October / November 2018 (formal report published December 2018) has confirmed the significant positive progress that Dudley Council and our partners have achieved in improving and strengthening Children's Services since the 'Inadequate' judgement of early 2016. Whilst Ofsted in 2018 provided an overall judgement of 'Requires Improvement', analysis of the findings indicates that Dudley is on the cusp of securing a 'Good' outcome and can reasonably aspire towards 'Outstanding' over the next 2-3 cycle.

4. It is a particular strength to note that our comprehensive Self Evaluation Form report (SEF), undertaken prior to the Ofsted inspection, presented a close match with the Ofsted findings, indicating a good level of self-awareness within the Council of our strengths and critical improvement priorities.
5. Ofsted's report showed that, as a result of commitment and investment by political leaders together effective work by senior management, staff and partners, Dudley's Children's Services is now providing better outcomes for children and families.
6. Overall effectiveness has been rated as 'requires improvement to good' with two out of the three sub categories being rated as 'good', compared to an inadequate rating in 2016.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and Requires improvement protection to be good	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

7. This is a huge and very welcome achievement, demonstrating the commitment of all partners and staff and to helping the children and families of Dudley achieve the best possible outcomes.
8. We know that Children in Dudley are now safe and the scale of the improvements made is enormous, with only three other councils having ever made greater progress from being found to be Inadequate.
9. Ofsted said:

*“A recognition of the importance of preventative services and considerable joint work with partners has meant that children and families benefit from an **effective early help service**. If their needs escalate, children receive a considered and timely response from social care. **Risk to children is recognised and effective action is taken to minimise that risk**. Areas of service identified as inadequate in the last inspection have been turned around and now deliver **better quality and more focused and child-centred practice**.”*

*“In particular, this has resulted in good-quality planning for children in care and better long-term outcomes for them. Children who come into care have plans made to safely return them home or to ensure that there are good alternative long-term caring arrangements made for them, including adoption. When young people leave care, they are well supported by personal advisers.”*

10. The Ofsted judgement, our SEF and good leadership of the children’s services (specifically cited by Ofsted) provides Dudley Council with a strong platform from which to drive progressive positive transformation of our services.
11. It is now imperative that we take clear strategic and operational steps without delay to secure the momentum of improvement and to embed and build from our strengths. This will segue into longer-term strategic and financial planning for Children’s Services in alignment with corporate and partnership plans, thereby supporting delivery of the Dudley Vision.
12. The attached Medium-Term Improvement Plan (and the supporting Operational Action Plan) are designed to ensure an immediate focus on Children’s Services improvements, including targeted action on the areas identified by Ofsted in 2018, as an entry point for longer-term strategic planning.
13. Key features of the attached plan include:
  - A brief overview of our main areas of strength and critical improvement priorities
  - Statement of alignment with the Dudley Vision and Dudley Council Plan
  - A strong emphasis on maximising our combined resources and investment in services, with a particular focus on stabilising the Children’s Social Care workforce
  - Clear governance oversight of the plan, with a ‘golden-thread’ from Cabinet-level through to operational delivery
  - Agreement on a balanced scorecard of critical indicative KPI’s to guide our activity and assess impact for local people
  - A focused action plan that addresses the Ofsted 2018 findings (required by Ofsted for submission within 70 working days of inspection report)
14. An Operational Action Plan that addresses the Ofsted 2018 findings and supports delivery of the wider Improvement Plan is required by Ofsted for submission within 70 working days of the inspection report. This Action Plan is in the process of being agreed by the Director of People and Portfolio Holder, subject to formal approval by Ofsted in March 2019.
15. In parallel with implementation of the attached Medium-Term Improvement Plan, the Council is taking steps with our partners to agree a 3-year strategic plan for children from the autumn of 2019. It is anticipated that this will form the basis of a report to Cabinet in the summer of 2019. Our attached Medium-Term Improvement Plan will segue into the wider strategic planning process and will avoid a ‘hard break’ in critical operational activity going forward.

## **Finance**

16. The financial consequences of children's services having previously been assessed as inadequate have been significant, requiring very substantial investment in extensive and wide-ranging improvement action over the past three years. The improved performance seen by Ofsted during the inspection can be expected to lead to greater stability in the cost of the service and a stronger ability to control expenditure within the available budget, while delivering good outcomes for children and families.
17. The attached Improvement Plan and supporting Operational Action Plan include specific reference to resource and financial priorities. This reflects wider Council pressures and resource imperatives to secure the best possible positive outcomes for local people by maximising the impact of shared resources across the partnership. For Council purposes, the attached plan sets out priorities and management action for securing targeted budget savings, for prudent and accurate forward budget-setting and for progressively shifting the culture and practice of resource management within the Children's Services division to reflect best local and national practice.

## **Law**

18. The attached improvement plan has no direct requirement in law. However, Children's Services operates within a well-defined statutory and regulatory framework. This is reflected in specific component parts of the plan.
19. The effectiveness of Dudley Council and partners in fulfilling the statutory requirements for Children's Services provision is scrutinised by Ofsted and partnership regulatory bodies. The attached Action Plan specifically relates to the Ofsted requirement to produce a clear action plan for the authority within 70 working days of the publication of the Ofsted report.

## **Equality Impact**

20. The Improvement Plan will continue to reflect the Council's strong commitment to securing the best possible outcomes for vulnerable and diverse children, young people and their families. At this stage it is not anticipated that the plan will result in any specific additional equality impact. Any subsequent developments or proposals arising from the improvement plan will be subject to rigorous equality impact assessment in line with the Council's best practice.

## **Human Resources/Transformation**

21. At this stage it is not anticipated that there will be any immediate foreseeable HR or service transformation implications arising directly from the Medium-Term Improvement Plan. There may be subsequent issues arising from commissioning and operational delivery plans which will be subject to robust impact assessment including HR/workforce issues.

## **Commercial Implications**

22. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

*Martin Samuels*

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**Martin Samuels**  
**Strategic Director People**

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## **Appendices**

1. *Ofsted Inspection Report*
2. *Medium-Term Improvement Plan*