

Meeting of the Cabinet – 27th June 2018

Report of the Strategic Director People

Children’s Services Ofsted update

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the actions and progress made to date with regards to the Children’s Services Improvement Programme. It will also set out the next steps in terms of preparation for the full Ofsted inspection expected in October 2018.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:-
 - Cabinet endorses the contents of this report
 - Cabinet continues to provide its invaluable support to the Children’s Services Improvement programme

Background

3. The Ofsted inspection in January 2016 assessed Dudley Children’s Services as providing inadequate services for children in need of protection; children looked after by Dudley children services and adoption. Dudley was seen as ‘Requiring Improvement’ for work with our young people who have left our care but subsequent analysis has evidenced that this was not a strong ‘requires improvement’ judgement and a significant amount of work is ongoing to improve outcomes for this vulnerable cohort of young people.
4. Prior to this Inspection, that then Strategic Director, Tony Oakman, realised that services were in a very poor state and had already put in some measures to improve them. It is this and a positive post inspection report from the Department of Education’s (DfE) appointed commissioner post that allowed Dudley to manage its own improvement programme.
5. Since that time Children’s Services has been the subject of six Ofsted monitoring visits during which they have scrutinised most aspects of our service. It is pleasing that they have assessed us as making ‘Positive Progress’ in every visit. This is undoubtedly a testament to the hard work of every member of our staff group. Services are also scrutinised by the DfE’s improvement advisor, our DfE civil service link and the independently chaired Children’s Services Improvement Board. The latter is attended by partner agencies including Police, Health and Education. It is true to say that we practice in the spotlight but again overall comments have been positive and identified areas in which we have still to make progress.

6.	The report of the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit is attached to this report for information and comment. The visit focused on the Early Help Offer and the threshold between Early Help and statutory social work. The next monitoring visit is on the 7th and 8th August. It will focus on services to Care Leavers although this is subject to final confirmation. It can change as Ofsted plan their programme of scrutiny. All indications are that we will be the subject of a full inspection in October 2018. Although there is no room for complacency, we are ambitious for our children and are aiming for Ofsted to assess us as providing 'Good' services for Dudley's children's services.
7.	Ofsted's judgements reflect on the council as a whole as every service has either a direct or an indirect impact on children's lives. Children's Services have benefitted from the support of colleagues across the council and would like to continue to build these working relationships both in the run up to the full inspection and afterwards.
8.	The most significant challenge remains the recruitment and retention of social work staff and the use of more expensive agency staff to fill social work vacancies. This is a national problem but is more difficult for local authorities such as our own where agency workers can move from borough to borough with ease.
9.	Corporate Board can be assured that every effort is being made to recruit permanent workers.
<u>Finance</u>	
10.	For 2018/19 there is a Local Authority Revenue Budget of £1.3m to support the Children's Services Improvement Programme.
<u>Law</u>	
11.	The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.
<u>Equality Impact</u>	
12.	This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.
<u>Human Resources/Transformation</u>	
13.	A recruitment and retention working group has been set up to deliver on the objective to increase the number of permanent social workers, and reduce the reliance on agency workers. The HR/OD Business Partner for Children's Services is part of the working group ensuring that there is a link to corporate HR Resourcing, and that the Recruitment and Selection Policy is being adhered to.

Martin Samuels

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Martin Samuels
Strategic Director - People

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List of Background Papers

Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter