

For General Release

REPORT TO:	Cabinet 20 November 2017
SUBJECT:	Children's Improvement Plan
LEAD OFFICER:	Barbara Peacock, Executive Director, People Department
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Learning
WARDS:	All

CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT

Croydon Corporate Plan 2013-18

The recommendations address the following Corporate Plan 2015-18 priorities:

- To help families be healthy and resilient and able to maximise their life chances and independence
- To create a place where people feel safe and are safe

AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON & WHY ARE WE DOING THIS:

The Independence and Liveability Strategies 2015-18 set out how the Council will achieve the commitments made in the administration's 'Ambitious for Croydon' election manifesto in respect of independence and liveability.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

£2m has been allocated from earmarked reserves to support the targeted improvement work over the remainder of this year. The impact on future years budget of the improvement work will be considered as the 2018/19 budget which will be presented to Cabinet in February 2018.

FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.

This is not a key executive decision.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 1.1 Approve the Children's Improvement Plan (November 2017) and Delegate to the Executive Director of People in consultation with the Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children, Young People and Learning authorisation to make final amendments to the plan ahead of this being submitted to Ofsted by the 11th December.
- 1.2 Note the action that has been taken through the transitional action plan in response to the findings of the Ofsted inspection.

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| <p>1.3 Receive further reports and updates on the Improvement Plan on the council's response to the findings of the inspection and the action being taken to improve Children's Services in Croydon.</p> |
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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 On 4th September 2017, Ofsted published its report providing an overall judgement that Children's Services in Croydon are inadequate. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was also judged inadequate, as inspectors found that the LSCB had not fully established effective arrangements to discharge its statutory functions. The Council fully accepts the findings of the report.
- 2.2 On 4th September 2017, the Minister for Children and Families at Department for Education (DfE) issued Croydon Council with a Direction which requires the council to co-operate with a commissioner. The Secretary of State has appointed Eleanor Brazil as commissioner for Children's Services in Croydon for an initial three-month period, who will make recommendations to the Minister on the best course of action for the service going forward. The Commissioners Report will be submitted to the Minister on 4 December. It will not be a public document at this point and the decision when to publish the Commissioners Report and the Ministers response sits with the Minister. There is no standard agreed timeframe for publication.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 18 September 2017, Cabinet was provided with an update on the inspection outcome. This report seeks to provide an update on the action we have taken since the inspection to strengthen services, update on all key performance and practice issues and to seek Cabinet approval for the improvement plan to be submitted to Ofsted and the DfE.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 In accordance with the Single Inspection Framework, every local authority must produce an improvement plan of how it intends to respond to the inspection recommendations, regardless of the final inspection judgement. The local authority must send this plan within 70 working days of receiving the final report. For the council, this plan must be submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education by the 11th December 2017.
- 3.2 Ofsted will review the plan and confirm to the Director of Children's Services whether it reflects the inspection findings and recommendations.
- 3.3 Following the approval of the improvement plan, Ofsted will test our progress against the plan during a programme of quarterly monitoring. The Commissioner will also write a report to the Secretary of State on our capacity to deliver, including areas of progress and concern which should be addressed.

4. UPDATE ON THE TRANSITIONAL ACTION PLAN

4.1 As a result of the feedback received during the inspection, a corporate improvement programme led by the Chief Executive, was established to develop and deliver a transitional action plan, which has sought to target and take forward priority improvements the first three months after the inspection.

4.2 A summary of the action taken since the inspection is set out below:

Support for the improvement programme

4.3 A Shadow Improvement Board, Chaired by the Leader of the Council took place in August 2017 to ensure there was strong start to the improvement journey in Croydon and we did not wait until our newly appointed Independent Chair who was commissioned to convene the first meeting in September.

4.4 An Improvement Board has been established, chaired by an Independent Chair Edwina Grant, which met for the first time in September and will now take place monthly.

4.5 Membership of the Improvement Board includes the Chief Executive and all Council Executive Directors, the Lead Member for Children and Young People and Lead Member for Finance & Treasury, partnership representatives (police, health, and schools), the new interim chair of the Croydon Children's Safeguarding Board (CSCB), Department for Education Caseworker, the Commissioner appointed by the Minister, and a front-line staff representative. The membership of the improvement Board will change over time and will be led by our Independent Chair.

4.6 An improvement programme team has been set up under the management of the Programme Director – Commissioning and Improvement. This team works to the Board, maintaining the schedule of meetings and liaising with the Chair regarding agenda items. Members of the project team are responsible for drafting and updating the plan and supporting the staff engagement mechanisms. A longer term Programme Director is being recruited.

Leadership and governance

4.7 The span of control of the Executive Director of People who holds the statutory Director of Children's Services role has been reviewed and interim arrangements have been put in place to reduce this and enable more time to be focused on children's improvement, from 2nd October for 6 months whilst a longer term review takes place.

4.8 A new interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care has been appointed and started full time on 2nd October. Philip Segurola brings capacity and strong experience having led Kent from Requires Improvement to a Good Ofsted judgement.

4.9 A new interim Chair of the CSCB has been appointed and started in September. Di Smith brings considerable experience as a previous DCS but also as a Chair of an Improvement Board in another authority. A

development session with the LSCB led by the new Chair has already taken place and clear step forward in starting to set a stronger and clearer direction.

- 4.10 A decision has taken place, with partners, to separate the Chairing of the Adult Safeguarding Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board for the next 2 – 3 years. This is to ensure full attention is given to children's improvements, whilst ensuring adult safeguarding has the full attention that is needed. Adi Cooper, London Care and Health Improvement Adviser, is acting as the temporary Chair of the adults board whilst we recruit a new Chair. The advert for the new Adult Safeguarding Board Chair is now live.
- 4.11 A meeting has taken place between the Director of Law, Executive Director People, and members of the judiciary to support improvement planning around court work. A number of activities are taking place to progress this work, including a schedule of meetings between the service and the judiciary, development of the court proceedings action plan and data set. Croydon has agreed to be part of the LIFT project with South London and Maudsley NHS, NSPCC and the Judiciary to start 16th October. Internally a new Head of children's and education law has been appointed and has taken up this permanent role.
- 4.12 The LGA is supporting our work with Elected Members. LGA training and support is open to Members and will include a focus on scrutiny.
- 4.13 Research on Corporate Parenting Panels is progressing and will be completed and agreed by the Lead Member for Children's Services ready for the next Corporate Parenting Panel in November. New strengthened duties under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are coming in and Corporate Parenting Panel will need to be strengthened to meet new duties and drive improvement.
- 4.14 The new Children in Care Council launched during October half term, including a new membership cohorts of children (8-12 and 13-18).

Workforce actions

- 4.15 An additional team of six social workers and a Unit Manager has been created within Care Planning to manage the workload and take immediate action to reduce caseloads in this part of the service. This is a temporary team for 6 months whilst a longer review takes place in relation to the number of social workers and managers needed to have a workload that allows good social work to take place.
- 4.16 A second 'surge team' has been agreed and will be in place in November to address additional demand in the system.
- 4.17 A new ASYE forum has been established and the first meeting took place in September. 24 ASYE's have successfully completed their year since Ofsted and a celebration event has been scheduled for 1 December 2017.

- 4.18 A retention payment of £1500 has been made to children's social workers, Unit Managers, PAs, Child Protection Chairs and IROs as an interim measure ahead of a review of employment package for social workers to include proposals for pay and benefits. A rolling recruitment campaign is in place, along with a programme of work to convert agency staff to permanent positions.
- 4.19 Two new interim Consultant Practitioner posts have been established who will have a focus on audit. Staff are now in post and increasing the focus on auditing to ensure children's lived experiences are much clearer and greater visibility on quality of practice.
- 4.20 A Service Leader training programme, commissioned through National College, has commenced and a Unit Manager Development programme started at end of September, with many aspects of the programme being mandatory for staff.
- 4.21 Achieving for Children has been commissioned to provide support for the development of a robust quality assurance framework and contribute to our work on a new model of social work practice. Achieving for Children sit on our Improvement Board.

Social work practice actions

- 4.22 The role of the Principal Social Worker was established in July 2017. This role is key to developing social work practice.
- 4.23 The Principal Social Worker has set up a task and finish group of staff to support the work on the social work practice model. This group reported at the end of October and Achieving for Children will add challenge to our thinking to ensure we have fully worked through our proposals and fully considered our implementation plans for the new model. The preferred emerging model is Strengthening Families, underpinned by a suite of tools, including Graded Care Profile 2, to assess risk associated with neglect. This work on neglect has been supported by CSCB and who also agreed to adopt the neglect tool across the multiagency.
- 4.24 A 'Deep Dive' review on missing and Return Home Interviews has taken place and was reported to the Improvement Board on 3rd October and Children and Young People's Scrutiny committee on the 17th October. Elected members have agreed additional resource to support this work.
- 4.25 A new pre-birth assessment and PLO workflow process is being developed to ensure more timely decision making around permanence and care for new born children. This was the 'Deep Dive' review at the Improvement Board in November.
- 4.26 The PLO training module has been reviewed and updated to incorporate the feedback from Ofsted. A rolling programme of training is in place.
- 4.27 A legal planning meeting framework and an aide memoire to support PLO work has been developed and is in the process of being rolled out.

- 4.28 A permanency planning process has been drafted and is under consultation.
- 4.29 A new recording format for supervision has been developed and incorporated into the Children's Recording System (CRS), which launched in October.
- 4.30 An increased focus on auditing is now being established and the additional new auditing capacity has already meant we can and have done more audits.
- 4.31 Two new permanent Heads of Service were appointed during Ofsted. Iain Lowe - Head of Service for Early Help and MASH and Hannah Doubty - Head of Service for Targetted Services both join on 30 October. A new interim Head of Service for Quality Assurance - Tom Stevenson has been appointed and will start with on 1 November. This much strengthened senior team in Children's Social Care will provide capacity to take the service forward.

Systems and support actions

- 4.32 The roll out of smartphones to all social workers completed in October.
- 4.33 A number of changes to CRS have been identified and initial quick wins have been implemented. A number of longer-term options are now being scoped.
- 4.34 A review of Business Support is underway and some immediate actions have been taken to improve support to social work teams. The intention is to free social work time to spend with children and families.
- 4.35 A pilot is underway to test integrated tablet technology and initial feedback has been received to shape further development and consideration in November 2017.

Communications actions

- 4.36 There has been focus on increasing staff engagement and there have been many staff engagement sessions. A number of new, on-going staff engagement forums have been launched and first meetings have taken place including:
- Staff Reference Group
 - ASYE Forum
 - Social Work Forum
 - Practice Development Group

This will help build and sustain a more open system where front line staff feel heard and will enable the DCS to have direct line of sight to the front line. Freeing up the capacity of the DCS has been important to achieve this and will need to be addressed in any long term future arrangements.

- 4.37 A varied programme of engagement activities has been taking place to involve staff in designing, prioritising and implementing quick wins and longer

terms solutions that will be included in the children's improvement plan. These have included;

- Briefing meetings during the week following the publication of the inspection report
- Holding a five week programme during September and October of two 30 minute 'sprint' sessions per week with staff, focusing on different topic areas
- Setting up a 'Wall of wisdom' in different office locations for staff to add to outside of formal settings.
- Suggestion boxes on social work floors
- Setting up a dedicated email inbox

4.38 Staff have given positive feedback on the sprint sessions with over 500 staff (social workers, managers and business support officers) taking part in the sessions so far. The key messages that social work staff have told us are that they want reduced caseloads, more regular supervision, investment in technology, better training and effective business support.

4.39 Feedback from the sessions is being shared with all staff on a weekly basis through an email from the Executive Director People and more formal feedback was provided during the week commencing 9 October. A number of 'quick wins' suggested by staff have already been implemented. These include smart phones, regular meetings with managers and improved business support to teams.

5. WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE OFSTED

5.1 It is usual that an authority who receives an inadequate judgement then sees a surge in demand following publication of the Ofsted report. This is made up of increased referrals and addressing issues in cases as a more forensic approach is brought to considering actions that may be needed. Croydon is no different to other authorities and has seen increases in demand.

5.2 The information below illustrates the increase in work within the core social work services:

Demand areas	June 2017	October 17
Numbers of Children on Child Protection Plan	369	459
Numbers of indigenous Croydon LAC	407	453
Numbers of UASC LAC	349	324

5.3 There has been much focus on social work caseloads. At the time of the Ofsted inspection the average case load was 19. This however, masked the inconsistencies across the service.

5.4 The w/c 30th October the breakdown was as follows:

- Average caseload in Assessment 30.5
- Average caseload in Care Planning 17.7

- Average caseload in Permanency 13.8
- Average caseload in Leaving Care 20
- Average caseload in Children with Disabilities 20

5.5 We would expect caseloads to be different across the service, however we accept that 30.5 in assessment is too high and we are seeking to secure additional staff to reduce these numbers.

5.6 Action has been taken to respond to the pressure on caseloads. Two additional teams have been put into Care Planning. The social work team from Best Start will be moving to the Assessment Service the week commencing 22 November. This means that each team in Assessment will be on a rota one week in six rather than one week in five.

6. DEVELOPING THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

6.1 We are required to develop and publish a Children's Improvement Plan, which sets out the key priorities and areas of focus for the next 2-years.

6.2 For us in Croydon we are clear our Children's Improvement Plan will be the single plan across the council and partners to drive improvement. The improvement programme has significant scale and complexity with work spanning across the service, corporately across the Council and with partners. The plan needs to be fit for the future, and respond not only to Ofsted's specific recommendations, but also to the future needs of our children and young people and future direction of government policy.

6.3 We need to be receptive to the feedback from the inspectors that we did not prioritise effectively on practice issues, which created delays in our improvement journey. This means that we will need to focus on making improvement in the right areas which builds the necessary momentum to change the lives of children and young people. In addition, we will need to develop a clear set of priorities so that we focus our resources in the right places.

6.4 Inspectors also said that we need to put more focus on improving the lived experiences of children and young people, whilst ensuring there are appropriate systems and processes in place. This means we will need to think carefully about how we put the needs and aspirations of Croydon's children and young people at the heart of our improvement programme.

6.5 The ownership of the plan among front-line staff and partners will be key to the delivery of the improvement programme. We will need to balance the complexity and pace of change with the need to engage with staff and partners so that they feel part of our improvement journey. Ongoing

communication to the wider children’s workforce will be an essential part of the programme, as has been their input into shaping the plan.

Draft Improvement Plan

- 6.6 It is important to recognise that this is a 2-3 year improvement journey. This will take a sustained effort if meaningful change is to be achieved. We are still reviewing the timelines in the plan to ensure we are setting deliverable targets.
- 6.7 As part of the improvement planning process, we have engaged with staff, elected members, partners and children and young people to ensure that the plan is aligned to the views and aspirations of all stakeholders, and this engagement will be an ongoing feature of the improvement programme.
- 6.8 Following a detailed review of the inspection report and engagement with staff and stakeholders we have developed a set of draft improvement areas based on the following themes and priorities:

WORKSTREAM	PRIORITY
Practice	1. Ensure consistent, high quality social work
	2. Improve the quality of practice for children who need early help and protection
	3. Improve outcomes for looked after children, including planning for permanence
	4. Improvement outcomes for care leavers
	5. Protect vulnerable adolescents including those at risk of CSE, children who go missing and those at risk of serious youth violence
People and Performance	6. Strengthen leadership and governance
	7. Develop a stable and skilled workforce
	8. Strengthen management oversight and ensure robust quality assurance and performance management
	9. Strengthen strategic commissioning
Partnerships	10. Improve Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB)
Platforms	11. Establish ICT systems and support that enables high quality social work

- 6.9 In order to keep the Improvement Plan on track and fulfil our vision and ambition for children in Croydon we have developed a performance dashboard, which will provide the improvement programme and our Elected Members with a set of metrics by which we can assess progress and judge the overall level of performance at regular intervals over the next two years.

Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny

- 6.10 The draft Improvement Plan and priority performance indicators which sit alongside the plan were discussed at the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 31st October. Amendments were made to specific actions in the plan and the main comments received were in relation to the performance indicators. The Committee felt they were too process focused, and further data on workforce, including how staff are feeling were key. Both the Chief Executive and Executive Director of People, agreed to schedule additional sessions on workforce, recognising that having a stable, skilled and confident workforce with manageable caseloads and clear career pathways was a critical part of the improvement journey.

7. MONITORING THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 7.1 Following the submission of the improvement plan in December, Ofsted will undertake a programme of quarterly monitoring visits and a re-inspection once the period of monitoring has ended. The quarterly monitoring visits will commence in December and the findings will be reported to the council.
- 7.2 The Department for Education will also provide an additional level of scrutiny to support and challenge the council to improve. The DfE has appointed Eleanor Brazil as the children's commissioner to Croydon for an initial three-months to give advice to ministers about the council's progress on improvements. The children's commissioner will write a report to the minister on her findings, which will be published on the DfE website. It is anticipated this report will be completed early December, 2017. The DfE will review the local authority's progress towards improvement every six months.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the improvement plan will be submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education who will give it final approval.
- 8.2 The Council is exploring the development of a partnership arrangement with a local authority graded as 'good' for children's services, who can work with us to support and add capacity to our improvement journey.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is central to social work practice and service improvement. Croydon has a range of mechanisms to engage and consult with children, young and their families. This includes the delivery of its Youth Engagement Strategy which sets out a number of new initiatives to ensure that children and young people have a voice, including our first Youth Congress held in July 2017 and the Children in Care Council, which will be relaunched in October 2017.
- 9.2 Listening and responding to the experiences, wishes and feelings of children and young people has been identified as one of the priorities of the improvement plan and will be central to the improvement programme. The plan will include actions to strengthen how the views and experiences of

children, young people and their families influence service design. This feedback will also help monitor the impact of improvement activity.

- 9.3 There will also be ongoing engagement, consultation and Council wide communication with staff and partners about the inspection result and in the development of the Improvement Plan. This has already started and a Council staff reference group is being established which will feed into the improvement board to ensure the connection and ownership of the improvement programme.
- 9.4 The Improvement Plan will be a single improvement plan and include improvements that need to be made to the Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Board. The delivery of improvements will need to be delivered by the whole Council and with partner agencies to ensure action is undertaken in a joined up and effective way. Partners are included in the Improvement Board to support this.

10. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 Transformation funding of £2m has been allocated this financial year to children’s improvement work following the recent Ofsted inspection. This funding will be used to support the areas of work identified in the Ofsted Report as needing investment and are detailed in the table below. This investment also includes additional staff resources as follows:-
- 12 social workers and 2 unit managers
 - 2 quality assurance workers
 - 2 return home interviewers
 - 2 lawyers
 - 12 business support officers

Improvement Plan Priority	£'000 Committed
Develop a stable and skilled workforce	446
Improved outcomes for children	127
High quality social work	484
Strengthened management oversight and performance management	202
Programme Resource	429
Enhanced ICT systems and support	379
Protection of vulnerable adolescents	202
Improving the Safeguarding Board	17
	2,286

- 10.2 Funding for the service in future years will be reviewed and managed as part of the budget setting process that is currently taking place and being reported to Cabinet in February 2018.

Approved by Lisa Taylor, Director of Finance, Investment and Risk.

11. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

The Solicitor to the Council comments that there are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Approved by J Harris Baker, Director of Law and Monitoring Officer.

12. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

The improvement we are working for across childrens services will not be possible without the council having a stable workforce that is well supported and with manageable caseloads . The actions identified in the improvement plan are relevant and will be key to achieving this.

Approved by Sue Moorman Director of Human Resources

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 13.1 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation.
- 13.2 Croydon has a diverse population of children and young people. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 57%, compared with 30% in the country as a whole. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language across primary schools is 44% (the national average is 18%).
- 13.3 Social workers recording and planning in relation to inequalities is inconsistent and therefore the action plan addresses the additional work which needs to be done to ensure that children's diversity and identity needs are met.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

There are no direct implications contained in this report.

16. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

- 16.1 Authorisation to complete and submit the Improvement Action Plan is recommended as the local authority is required to submit a 'written statement of action' to the Secretary of State and HMCI (to be submitted by the 11th December 2017).

17. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

N/A

CONTACT OFFICER: Sarah Warman, Head of Commissioning & Improvement

Background papers: none

Appendices

- Appendix 1. Children's Improvement Plan
- Appendix 2. Children's Improvement Performance Tracker (sample)
- Appendix 3. Improvement key performance indicators