

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

SUNDERLAND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report on the progress being made on the Safeguarding Children Learning and Improvement Plan; focusing on the Improvement Plan priority to provide coherent and coordinated early help services to children and their families.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Learning and Improvement Plan was developed by the Children's Services Improvement Board in response to the areas of improvement highlighted by the Ofsted Inspection Report.
- 2.2 The Learning and Improvement Plan has been developed around seven key priorities for improvement:-
- Recruiting, retaining and developing a skilled and confident social care workforce
 - Providing coherent and coordinated early help services to children and their families
 - Improving the quality and timeliness of assessment and care planning
 - Ensuring high quality support and services for looked after children and effective permanency planning
 - Putting the voice of the child at the centre of social care practice
 - Supporting young people leaving care to have a positive and successful transition to adulthood and independence
 - Embedding strong quality assurance and governance mechanisms to drive continual improvement of service
- 2.3 The Children's Services Improvement Board monitors the Improvement Plan on a monthly basis. Members of this Committee also receive the agenda for the Sunderland Safeguarding Board.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 At its meeting on 6 October 2016, the Committee agreed that future monthly update reports should focus on one of the seven priorities contained in the Improvement Plan.
- 3.2 Alex Hopkins (Director of Children's Services) will therefore provide an update on the Improvement Plan priority for Looked After Children and Permanency Planning.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The report will provide members with an overview of the progress being made in implementing the Safeguarding Children Learning and Improvement Plan focusing on the Looked After Children and Permanency Planning.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the progress being made.

6. Background Papers

Safeguarding Children Learning and Improvement Plan

Overview of Progress against the Learning and Improvement Plan for CLA & Permanence

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The Ofsted inspection of Sunderland Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers took place between 11th May and 4th June 2015 and the final report was published on 20th July 2015. Following the inspection, a Learning and Improvement Plan was developed in response to the Ofsted inspection report. The plan identified seven priority areas, encompassing the 27 recommendations made by Ofsted together with other improvement areas identified in the narrative of the report.
- 1.2. This report provides an overview of progress made against priority areas four, five and six which are those focused on CLA and Permanence.

2. Priority 4: Ensuring high quality support and services for looked-after children (CLA) and effective permanency planning

- 2.1. Following the 2015 inspection, a review was conducted of all cases where children are looked-after under voluntary care arrangements (S20) to establish whether this legal basis is sufficient to ensure their safety and emotional security. Immediate actions were taken to address the identified issues. Section 20s continue to be reviewed regularly.
- 2.2. A permanence tracker has been developed to provide assurance that every child with a plan for long-term care has a robust plan for permanence. A life story tracker has also been developed to ensure effective life story work is progressing. Performance relating to the percentage of CLA with an up-to-date care plan (within 6 months) has remained consistently high over the last year. Life story work is progressing in accordance with the age and circumstances of each child but remains a priority for the service. In October 2016, the Commissioners review of Children's Services recognised that direct work with children could still be improved.
- 2.3. Our Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy has been updated to increase the placement choice for children looked after. The number of CLA with unplanned placement moves and the percentage of CLA who have experienced 3+ placement moves in the last 12 months continue to perform well and are below the latest reported statistical neighbour and national average.
- 2.4. A review of the arrangements for supervised contact has been concluded and changes have been implemented. Practice standards will be amended by the end of December 2016 to reflect the new working arrangements. Plans are being considered to relocate the team to more suitable accommodation. It is envisaged that the new arrangements will be more appropriate to meet children's needs.
- 2.5. Progress is being made to strengthen the Virtual School but improvements are still needed. We have implemented mechanisms to track the progress of all looked-after children and care leavers, however the service needs to continue to seek ways to reduce the gap between CLA and other children at all stages. In October 2016, the Commissioner for Children's Services and Department for Education (DfE) undertook a review of our Children's Services and concluded that the educational needs of CLA were not well enough understood or addressed. During this visit the service was able to demonstrate how they were going to address the issues and what action was to be taken. By January 2017 we expect to see some positive impacts arising from those changes.

- 2.6. Following our Ofsted Monitoring Visit of Care Leavers in August 2016, Inspectors concluded that although young people were receiving appropriate support to access education and college, Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are not consistently provided or updated. Since the monitoring visit a new template has been provided for PEPs and a self-assessment sheet has been shared with schools to allow them to monitor their own PEP quality before submitting them to the Virtual School. Increased monitoring of the plans is also taking place. Children Looked After with a PEP has significantly increased from 69% in June 2015 to 80% in November 2016; however improving the quality of the plans remains a priority.
- 2.7. We have put in place a system to ensure that all foster carers have formal written confirmation of their delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions for the children in their care. We have also implemented an awareness campaign with our agencies to promote private fostering requirements. Websites have been updated, information has been disseminated across partner agencies, artwork is on display in public buildings, adverts have been placed on TV screens within our customer service centres and posters have been launched.
- 2.8. A recruitment strategy for adopters is in place together with a comprehensive post-adoption support offer which provides children and adopters with support that meets their needs. Guidance for the adoption panel chair on the requirements of reports has been welcomed. Guidance has been produced for the adoption panel chair and the fostering panel chair on the requirements of their reports so that the panels are able to demonstrate the impact of their work on achieving permanency for children. This guidance has been welcomed.

3. Priority 5: Putting the voice of the child at the centre of social care practice

- 3.1. To ensure the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are fully considered we have improved our capacity and monitoring processes. This has allowed children to be seen more regularly in line with agreed timescales. In November 2016, 97% of CLA had had a statutory visit within the last 6 weeks compared to 70% in June 2015.
- 3.2. The support arrangements for Change Council have been further developed to enable Children to engage, support and represent the views of all children and young people who are looked-after. A Mind Of My Own (MOMO) app has been launched to improve communication between young people, their social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) to increase participation with their care planning. Young people are invited to attend the Looked After Senior Management Team and do so on a quarterly basis. We have six pledges for looked after children and have adopted the Care Leaver's Charter. Each pledge is owned by a young person and is linked with a member of Corporate Parenting Board and a senior manager. Regular meetings take place with the young people to monitor progress and to feed back to the corporate parenting board.

4. Priority 6: Supporting young people leaving care to have a positive and successful transition to adulthood and independence

- 4.1. In August 2016 Ofsted conducted our first Monitoring Visit which reviewed the progress made in respect of the experiences and progress of care leavers. The report concluded that the local authority is making significant progress to improve services for care leavers.
- 4.2. We have a clear policy that informs care leavers about their rights and entitlements. The report from our recent Ofsted monitoring visit identified that care leavers are consistently provided with information about their rights and entitlements. This includes them being provided with all key documents, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

- 4.3. The Next Steps Team moved into new premises in June 2016 to allow care leavers to have drop-in access to the service. Young people were part of the decision making process for the relocation to the city centre. The new premises support social workers and personal advisors to keep in touch with care leavers. In November 2016, 75.8% of care leavers had a contact within the last 8 weeks compared with 30% in June 2015.
- 4.4. Pathway planning has been a priority for the Next Steps service to ensure that care leavers' needs are identified and action is taken to provide support. The pathway plan template has been revised in consultation with Care Council. In November 2016, 80% of care leavers had a pathway plan compared with 69% in November 2015. Whilst the number of pathway plans has improved, a recent sampling exercise has shown that the quality of plans is not consistently good. This was noted as an area for improvement in the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit and is a priority for the service.
- 4.5. Arrangements to monitor the education, employment and training status of care leavers have been strengthened. A team has been created with staff from Next Steps, Sunderland Virtual School and Connexions to support care leavers into Education, Employment and Learning (EET) (ELEET Team). This team works with Young People who are currently Not in Education, Employment or Trainign (NEET) to provide them with a number of Education/Employment opportunities, including apprenticeships. The ELEET Team is consolidating partnership working by the co-location of multi-agency partners within the Next Steps building. The number of care leavers who are NEET has improved from the time of inspection from 85% to 54.5% in November 2016, however progress is slower than expected and performance is still outside of national and statistical neighbour averages.
- 4.6. We have started to develop closer working relationships with Sunderland College and we will be exploring apprenticeship opportunities and further education opportunities for care leavers. The number of apprenticeships has doubled since the 2015. There are on-going discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to supporting care leavers in accessing benefits and working with DWP to prevent sanctions.
- 4.7. Following a review of housing commissioning arrangements, care leavers have a greater choice of accommodation options. During our recent monitoring visit, Ofsted inspectors recognised how our increased use and promotion of staying put arrangements and supported lodgings has helped to ensure that care leavers have a better range of options. In May 2015 only 44% of care leavers were living in suitable accommodation compared with 69% in November 2016.
- 4.8. The health needs of care leavers are addressed within the pathway planning process. However, care leavers do not always receive their medical histories or health passports, despite raising this with our health partners. The lack of health passports is an issue and we are working with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to obtain these for care leavers at their final health assessment. The CCG has recruited a dedicated CLA Nurse who is starting at the end of October 2016.

5. Summary

- 5.1. Whilst much progress has been made since the 2015 inspection, there is more to do to ensure we continue to learn, improve and make the required progress.
- 5.2. Following each Ofsted Monitoring Visit, actions are being identified to address any weaknesses reported by Inspectors. Those actions are contained in a post-monitoring visit action plan and any significant areas of improvement are reported to the Improvement Board with a request for inclusion into the Learning and Development Plan.

6. Glossary

CLA: Children Looked After

DfE: Department for Education

PEP: Personal Education Plan

EET: Education, Employment and Training

NEET: Not in Education, Employment and Training

DWP: Department for Work and Pensions