

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>Recent Ofsted visit outcome</b>
Meeting date	26 January 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The focused visit to Children's Services made by Ofsted in October 2020 resulted in a formal published letter on 27 November 2020. The letter, which is appended to this report, set out serious concerns about the quality of services, concerns which warrant urgent and immediate attention. Appendix A - the 15-point action plan - is the response to those concerns.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) That the Committee add points into the action planning process, which is active and continuous</li> <li>2) That the Committee decides how it wishes to scrutinise delivery of the Action Plan over the next few months</li> </ol>
Reason for recommendations	To achieve maximum constructive scrutiny given the importance of the issues for vulnerable children and young people in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
Portfolio Holder(s):	<p>Cllr Mike White - Lead Member, Children and Young People</p> <p>Cllr Nicola Greene – Portfolio Holder for Covid Resilience, Schools and Skills</p>
Corporate Director	Elaine Redding, Interim Corporate Director - Children's Services
Report Author	Elaine Redding, Interim Corporate Director - Children's Services
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For information

## Background

1. The action plan contains all the areas for improvement needed for the service to reach the level required by the time of the next visit by Ofsted, which will be in the form of a full ILACS inspection (inspection of local authority children's services). This

inspection is likely during 2021 though the continuing problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic make predictions about timing difficult.

2. COVID-19 is affecting delivery of the action plan, as it is all aspects of public service and business. Management capacity for the improvement plan is being compromised due to the need to maintain business as usual (BAU) services. For example, our visiting patterns have to change as a result of BCP being put into Tier Four and now the national lockdown. This needs a general risk assessment and risk assessments for each front-line visit as well as extra support and monitoring of vulnerable children not in school. We are using the learning from the 2020 lockdown to speed up the process as much as we can do safely. Considerable improvement work is happening but not as much as would be possible in normal times.
3. Delivery of the action plan has a robust governance structure. An Improvement Board has been set up, chaired by the DfE Children's Services Improvement Adviser. This met for the first time on 18 December and will be meeting six-weekly. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet members, the Chief Executive, the interim Director of Children's Services, a DfE representative, the LGA-appointed chair of the SEND Improvement Board and BCP's Director of Finance are core members. Group Leaders are being briefed on an equally regular basis and one of many positives about the current situation is that all groups have committed themselves to supporting the Action Plan in any way they can.
4. Overview and Scrutiny will receive regular reports and will be invited to support the programme in any way they can, using a high support, high challenge and problem-solving approach to complex issues. Overview and Scrutiny also has a clear holding to account function which the political leadership and officer group welcome. Quite simply we have to get it right so this is a time for hard work, plain speaking and taking difficult decisions transparently.
5. Another strength of the current situation, acknowledged by the DfE adviser, is the political and corporate commitment to this action plan. The administration has made the delivery of this plan one of their top priorities.
6. Staff in Children's Services are unsurprisingly bruised by what has happened, but they are also committed to making the improvements needed as rapidly as possible. The failures have mostly been in leadership and management. Staff deserve better leadership and management. The interim leadership team in children's services is working hard to deliver this model of leadership which is also based on high support and high challenge.

## **Conclusion**

7. Finally, in this overview note, the Action Plan is deliberately short-term as rapid improvements have to be made in the next few months. At the same time, a longer-term BCP strategic plan for children and young people is being developed, to be ready by March 2021. This will be subject to a separate short consultation process. This is a requirement placed on BCP by the LGR process. The plan will be a 3-year plan, from 2021-24 and will incorporate the Children's Services and SEND action

plans. That plan in draft form will be coming to Overview and Scrutiny in February before going to Cabinet early in March.

### **Summary of financial implications**

8. An action plan of this gravity inevitably involves extra costs, especially in the short-term. There are part-year costs in 2020/21 and part to full year costs in 2021/22. The main areas of extra spend are as follows:
  - a) Interim leadership in key areas of children's services
  - b) Agency practitioners and front-line managers to keep services running
  - c) Recruitment and retention payment to support the strategy of developing stable teams of permanent staff – many teams do have this stable core, but others do not
  - d) Development of essential functions such as quality assurance and adolescent safeguarding, for example against the risk of involvement with county lines and the threats to personal safety that brings
9. DfE have given a small amount of support to the council this year in recognition of the need to improve. A business case will be submitted to them in March seeking a higher level of support to put in place a sustainably good service. The Government will be asked to put in funding to match the commitment of the council. Given the demands on the DfE budget there are no guarantees the bid will be successful so the council will need to make the necessary commitment next year in a strategy that will aim to stabilise the service and its budget by the start of the 2022/23 financial year.

### **Summary of legal implications**

10. None

### **Summary of human resources implications**

11. Workforce capacity, capability and morale will be kept under continuous review as the programmes goes forward. Improvements in each are built into the action plan as these will be both a pre-condition of improvement and a consequence should developments go to plan.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

12. None.

### **Summary of public health implications**

13. None.

### **Summary of equality implications**

14. A fundamental improvement in children's services inevitably impacts positively on the life chances of disadvantaged children, young people and their families, given

how the children's services caseload is weighted heavily towards children and young people who have been subject to adverse childhood experiences.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

15. There are no specific extra risks apart from the obvious risks of not delivering the action plan. This will clearly increase the risks to children and young people and to the council if it is not capable of making the necessary improvements.

### **Background papers**

16. None.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Ofsted letter published on 27 November 2020

Appendix 2 - BCP front-facing Action Plan