

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Children's Social Care Improvement Journey - Update September 2024
Meeting date	19 September 2024
Status	Exempt Report
Executive summary	<p>BCP Childrens Services was inspected, under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACs) framework in December 2021. The outcome was an overall inadequate judgement.</p> <p>As a result, the Secretary of State for Education issued a Statutory Direction and appointed a DfE Improvement Adviser to support the Council in their improvement of Childrens Social Care Services.</p> <p>The Childrens Social Care and Early Help Services Improvement Plan is in place to ensure progress is made at pace in Childrens Social Care in line with the recommendations of the December 2021 Inspection and in accordance with the statutory direction notice received by the Council in March 2022.</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny require regular updates on the improvement progress.</p> <p>The report details improvement in Childrens Social Care and Early Help services over 2023/24 with an additional supporting presentation covering the most current priorities and impact up to August 2024.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>For information and scrutiny</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>Childrens Overview and Scrutiny have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions and plans for the service. This improvement update is being presented for scrutiny so the committee can offer constructive challenge, share any voices of concern and support to contribute to the improvement journey and Ofsted inspection preparation.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton, Portfolio Holder Children's Services
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Director of Childrens Services
Report Authors	Rachel Gravett, Director Quality, Performance Improvement and Governance Juliette Blake, Director Safeguarding and Early help Nicole Mills, Service Director Corporate Parenting and Permanence
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Update and Information

Background

1. Since the full ILACS inspection in December 2021, when Children's Services was judged 'Inadequate', Children's services have now completed six Monitoring Visits all evidencing progress and confirmation that Children's Services in BCP has moved out of inadequate.
2. Ofsted have confirmed that they will not be doing any further monitoring visits and the next inspection from them will be a full ILACS.
3. BCP Childrens Services currently have two statutory directions and Sector Led Improvement Partners. For Children's Social Care the statutory direction was issued April 2022, and Hampshire County Council have been the SLIP, unfortunately this partnership ended in July 2024 however, a new partner in Islington has been appointed.
4. For SEND services a statutory direction was issued in February 2024 and Bedford County Council were appointed in September 2022 as the Sector Led Improvement Partner.
5. A DfE Advisor and DfE Improvement Officer are appointed to create a strong framework to guide the improvements required, supporting the Council and Children's Services Improvement. This DfE intervention does not involve a formal commissioner role however the steer throughout has been clear that if progress is not effective and at the pace required structural intervention, such as a Children's Trust could not be ruled out. The DfE adviser has made it clear in his reports, that there were two critical areas following his assessment for improvement, these were:
 - The state of the services themselves; and
 - The corporate and political context in which the service operates.
6. The DfE Advisor throughout the improvement journey has maintained the view of cautious grounds for optimism about the improvement of the service, so long as the pace of progress is maintained. He also stated that it was feasible for the Council to lead its service to improvement, especially with the enhanced leadership capacity and that he was confident that the Director of Children's Services has the right team to continue to deliver the necessary improvements alongside the continued support

of BCP corporate leaders and Councillors. This was further endorsed by positive outcomes from the Ofsted Monitoring Visits, and the DfE Review in October 2023.

7. The Ofsted Monitoring Visits reported that: *“Senior leaders understand what the areas for improvement are and have a credible plan to implement the further changes that are needed to improve children's experiences.”*
8. **The Children's Services Improvement Journey and the move out of inadequate**
9. Children's Services has made progress over the last 24 months, there is certainly good work to celebrate but the service recognise there is still improvement to be made with pace and consistency continuing to be a priority and to reach the aspiration of outstanding.
10. There is very good stability in the extended leadership team and continued evidence of traction from senior managers to service improvement. A far higher number of staff are in permanent positions, and this translates into practitioners having a better understanding of the support children and their families need and how best to provide this help.
11. The service recognises it still has some areas where improvement is not at the pace, they require it to be, children in care for example, however new arrangements are taking effect and an experienced Service Manager from the service has moved to offer stability and improve pace. From a practice perspective, it can still be variable, however QA systems as described by Ofsted are very effective and embedded and the service understands what it needs to do.
12. The corporate centre is engaging more directly with its own duties around the improvement programme. This has been evident in a more robust approach to housing for our care experienced young people and the introduction of a single client system for the service and continued focus on ensuring MOSAIC is fit for purpose through investment and resources within the development team. These issues have been successfully resolved through the joint leadership of Chief Executive and Corporate Directors.
13. The SLIP, Hampshire County Council, has been fully engaged in supporting the improvement work, particularly around developing managers and quality assurance, they report improvement. Phase 4 support has now been agreed by DfE and Islington Council will now take this forward working with the service.
14. Children's Services governance structures are now well embedded, establishing authority, accountability and direction throughout the system.
15. Staff are reporting they feel heard and more valued, they are committed to the improvement journey and want to do their best. They know their children and young people well.
16. Senior leaders have improved relationships with partner agencies, with a focus on how this underpins better outcomes for children. There is more to do collectively to convert these efforts into a cogent strategic approach to children most at risk. Positively, schools are becoming increasingly open to being involved in next steps for children and working alongside the LA.
17. **Demonstrating progress and successes**
18. Recruitment and Retention of Social Work staff – has seen a significant success with the implementation of a pay supplement for all social work staff and ASYEs we have been able to turnaround the agency vs permanent workforce recruitment and if

we include Adoption and Youth Justice Service, we have a 70% permanent to 30% agency staff ratio. At the previous ILACS it was 30% Permanent and 70% agency.

19. Children and young people no longer have multiple changes of social workers and practice across the service is now of a higher quality and more consistent.
20. Quality Assurance and Management Oversight – the service have now embedded the Quality Assurance Framework which assures the service of the quality of practice which is monitored monthly through robust governance arrangements and gives the opportunity for all managers across Children's Social Care to come together and understand practice across the journey of the child. High support/high challenge analysis of practice is discussed with practice change and expectations set. In July 2024 Practice Learning Reviews demonstrate 96% Good or Require Improvement (RI) with only 2 or 4% at Inadequate. When breaking down core practice management oversight and supervision continues to be strong at 94% good /RI
21. Improving and evidencing child centric practice – Through auditing processes and evidencing the increasing improvements of the quality of work demonstrating impact and outcomes for children and families. Records are now written to children and young people, and the service now use the lens of the lived experience of children to inform and review our practice
22. Monitoring Visits – six monitoring visits have been completed by Ofsted across the service in 18 months which have assured us of improvement across Children's Social Care. Ofsted have confirmed they will not carry out any further monitoring visits, and our next inspection will be an ILACS.
23. Monitoring visits have focussed on the journey of the child.
 - MV 1 Front Door – June 022
 - MV 2 Children in need of protection and those subject to a Child Protection Plan - October 2022
 - MV 3 Children in Care - children who have recently come into care, including the significant number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) wrongly placed in hotels as adults in Bournemouth - March 2023
 - MV 4 Children in Care -Long Term - August 2023
 - MV 5 Care Experienced Young People – November 2023
 - MV 6 Front Door, Assessment and Out of Hours - February 2024
24. Building Stronger Foundations – a £4m transformation programme for Children's Services. It is in its second year of delivery, and has established a multi-disciplinary programme team, deploying internal people within BCP, and continues to support external short-term transformation and change capacity where there is a gap.
25. Introduction of a single client system MOSAIC – the service now has one client system rather than 2, MOSAIC, which is huge step forward for the service and workforce. There has been a significant shift in the corporate support to ensure we have a system fit for purpose and work continues to develop MOSAIC into a system that works for our staff.
26. Leading the way with Supporting Families work – we have embedded the single outcomes framework across the system so we can measure outcomes for all children and young people using the data to help shape future delivery and

understand demand. We were asked to show case this innovative work in the southwest region and were able to share with DLUHC.

27. Corporate Parenting Board – is co-chaired by our Lead Member for Children and Young People and one of our Care Experienced Young People. The Board is embedding work with the voice of our children and young people at its heart and each meeting is well attended by representatives from our Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People Service, who led one agenda item each session.
28. Children's Attainment and progress by the Virtual School – we have seen a positive increase in the percentage of our post-16 young individuals engaged in Education, Employment, and Training, rising from 70% in September 2023 to 86% in March 2024.
29. Housing for our young people – Joint Housing protocol – written and launched in collaboration with Housing colleagues this is ensuring better quality Needs Assessment and planning for our young people from an earlier stage, giving practitioners a clear framework and outlining our offer for our CEYP. The number of intentionally homeless decisions has reduced significantly (to zero in Q4) and senior leadership oversight is ensuring more robust and equitable decision making.
30. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People – have benefitted from diverse recruitment of staff into the CEYP Service. One of our stand-out initiatives has been the forming of an FA registered football team, run by staff across services on a voluntary basis to bring our Asylum Seeking CEYP together. The young men have grown in confidence, developed friendships and built support networks with others in the local area through the power of team sport.

31. Core values

32. We are working hard to ensure our core values are embedded and our services 'start with the child and stay with the child', whether our involvement is brief or lengthy. Our core values are;
 - I. **We will ensure we put the child or young person at the front and centre of everything we do.** We will recognise the child's history and lived experience and ensure it informs our assessments, plans and interventions. We will ensure we hear and act on their voice. We will be aspirational for our children and young people and want as much for them as the best parents do, for their own children. We need to feel the heartbeat of the child in all our work.
 - II. **We will build authentic and positive working relationships with children and families.** We will be reliable and punctual. We won't make promises we can't keep. We will be honest, clear and respectful to children, young people and families. When we need to have the difficult conversations and ask the tough questions, we will do this with empathy, humility, clarity and respect.
 - III. **We will use language that children, young people and families will understand, avoiding professional jargon, acronyms or patronising statements.** Our plans will be SMART and focused on outcomes for the child/young person. Plans will be undertaken in genuine partnership with families, not doing to or for. Our plans will also clearly explain what will happen if things don't change.
 - IV. **We will work flexibly as part of a multi-agency partnership based on timely information sharing and effective targeted service delivery focusing on the importance of early help.** We will safeguard and improve outcomes for children

and young people by ensuring they never fall through service gaps. Our interventions will be solution-focused, and strengths based. Our systems and partnerships will be promoted that support trust, collective effort and a shared responsibility.

- V. **In our quality assurance work we will explore whether a real sense of who the child or young person comes through our recording and how well our practitioners know and understand them.** We will develop an organisational culture that welcomes feedback and learning. We all own quality. We will always ask for feedback and from that we will learn how to improve what we do.
- VI. **We will provide emotionally intelligent, reflective and focused supervision and management oversight.** Working with vulnerable children, young people and families can be complex and challenging. Practitioners should be given all the support they need to consistently achieve high standards of practice. Whilst there is no place for practitioners who do not take individual responsibility for their practice, our core principle is that we are a learning organisation, and we will work together to improve.

33. **Children Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan Update**

- 34. The Childrens Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan was reviewed and updated in March 2024.
- 35. Progress is demonstrated within this report and the through the accompanying presentation **Appendix 1 Moving from Inadequate – The Children’s Social Care and Early Help Services Improvement** which shares a summary of the current priorities and progress against these from the plan.

Options Appraisal

- 36. Not applicable

Summary of financial implications

- 37. Not applicable

Summary of legal implications

- 38. BCP Council Children’s services is under Statutory Direction from the Secretary of State pursuant to their powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 Act, the Secretary of State directs the Council as follows:
 - a. To comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State and/or the Improvement Adviser in relation to the improvement of the Council’s exercise of its children’s social care functions and provide such assistance as the Secretary of State or the Improvement Adviser may require.
 - b. To co-operate with the Improvement Adviser and any Sector Led Improvement Partner (“SLIP”), including on request allowing the Improvement Adviser and SLIP at all reasonable times access:
 - i. any premises of the Council.
 - ii. any document of, or relating to, the Council; and
 - iii. any employee or member of the Council,

- iv. which appear to them to be necessary for achieving the purposes of and carrying out the responsibilities set out in the Terms of Reference.
- c. To provide the Improvement Adviser and any SLIP with such amenities, services and administrative support as they may reasonably require from time to time for the carrying out of their responsibilities in accordance with the Terms of Reference, including:
 - i. providing officers' time or support; and
 - ii. providing office space, meeting rooms or computer facilities.

This direction will remain in force until it is revoked by the Secretary of State.

Summary of human resources implications

39. Not applicable

Summary of sustainability impact

40. Not applicable

Summary of public health implications

41. Not applicable

Summary of equality implications

42. EIA completed on then production of original improvement plan

Summary of risk assessment

43. Not applicable

Background papers

44. ILACS inspection report and monitoring visit reports

[Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted](#)

45. Statutory Direction - Children's Social Care

[Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Statutory Direction \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

46. Children's Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny – Presentation *Moving from Inadequate – The Children's Social Care and Early Help Services Improvement Summary* – 19 September 2024