

Report for information

Cabinet – 14 June 2017

Update on latest Ofsted Monitoring Visit

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Frances Nicholson – Cabinet Member for Children and Families Division and Local Member(s): All

Lead Officer: Julian Wooster, Director of Children’s Services

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	Seen by:	Name	Date
	County Solicitor	Honor Clarke	
	Monitoring Officer	Julian Gale	12/6/17
	Corporate Finance	Kevin Nacey	12/6/17
	Human Resources	Chris Squire	12/6/17
	Property / Procurement / ICT	Richard Williams	
	Senior Manager	Julian Wooster	12/6/17
	Local Member(s)	All	
	Cabinet Member	Cllr Frances Nicholson	12/6/17
	Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Jane Lock	
	Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr Leigh Redman	
Forward Plan Reference:	Not applicable as this is a report for information.		
Summary:	<p>This report summarises the findings of the Ofsted monitoring visit to Somerset County Council Children’s Services on 2nd and 3rd May 2017.</p> <p>This monitoring visit focused on how casework is progressed when it is transferred into the Children Looked After teams. The Ofsted Inspectors assessed the quality of social work practice for children looked after. The visit considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, supervision records, routine management information reports provided to managers, the missing persons’ protocol, observations of social workers, a team manager and an operational manager, and other information provided by staff and managers.</p> <p>This is the third in a series of monitoring visits which will culminate in a full re-inspection.</p> <p>Ofsted noted that, ‘The key challenge for Somerset is to align and implement key inter-agency processes to create effective working practices in relation to children who go missing and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) procedures, to ensure that social work practice improvements in the children looked after service move beyond compliance and to maintain consistency across social work practice.’</p> <p>In addition to improving consistency of social work practice Ofsted noted that improvements needed to be made in the following specific areas:</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timeliness of completion of health assessments for those young people who have been in care for more than one year is currently below statistical neighbours. • The mental health needs of some young people are not being effectively met. • The timeliness of return home interview for children who go missing and quality of the interviews are not sufficiently robust or effective, and do not ensure that the outcomes for children are improving consistently. • The proportion of children who have been looked after for more than 12 months and who have been persistently absent from school is high, at 6%, compared to statistical neighbours, at 4.5%. • Placement (foster care & residential care) choice remains limited, particularly for young people aged 13 and above, and too many are being placed out of area. <p>Overall Ofsted commented that, ‘Senior leaders are accurate in their assessment of key strengths and weaknesses across the service, and have responded by developing new operational procedures and better ways of working across the service. As a result, overall outcomes for children are improving, supported by the strategic improvement plan. The local authority is energetic in its approach, yet is realistic about the improvements that are still required to raise outcomes for children in Somerset.’</p> <p>The overall findings from this monitoring visit and the previous two demonstrate that the Local Authority is making adequate progress in improving services for children and young people in Somerset.</p> <p>Further assurance and oversight of the improvement progress continues to be provided through Cabinet, Scrutiny, Corporate Parenting Board, the Somerset Safeguarding Children Board and the Quarterly Performance Review Meetings chaired by DfE Advisers.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>Cabinet welcomes the confirmation from the Ofsted monitoring visit of the progress in improving services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and notes the need for continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Reasons for Recommendations:</p>	<p>To receive the latest update regarding the progress being made in improving services for children in need of help and protection.</p>
<p>Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:</p>	<p>The Children’s Services Improvement journey has been a key priority for the local authority since the Ofsted inspection in 2015, focusing on improving practice and quality of services throughout 2016/17 and into 2017/18.</p>

	<p>Somerset Children & Young People's Plan 2016 -19 (CYPP)</p> <p>http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/children-and-young-peoples-plan/</p>
Consultations undertaken:	<p>There is continuing involvement in the implementation and monitoring of the CYPP by the Cabinet Member, Opposition Spokesperson, Children's Scrutiny and Children's Trust Executive and Board members.</p>
Financial Implications:	<p>The Children and Young People's Plan is fully costed and was approved at Cabinet in May 2016.</p> <p>The CYPP has been prepared in a climate of continuing financial austerity for the public sector. The seven priorities outlined in the plan are to be met within the agreed budgets and staffing resources of SCC and its partners, taking into account anticipated reductions over the next three years. For SCC this plan is costed to look at the average spend of a "good" local authority utilising the CIPFA benchmarking tool and modelling what SCC's budgets over the next three years should look like based on expected activity levels. SCC's commitment to protect services that support Somerset's most vulnerable children and families is reflected by the investment of an additional £6m in the Children's Social Care base budget.</p> <p>Ongoing financial monitoring of the CYPP is reported by the Director of Finance through his regular reports to Cabinet.</p>
Legal Implications:	N/A
HR Implications:	<p>Workforce is the main theme of Improvement Programme 7 and the HR/OD Director has submitted his findings as part of the quarterly reporting arrangements.</p>
Risk Implications:	<p>The principal risk lies in the failure to secure improvement which would not deliver the Council's ambitions in relation to improved outcomes for children and young people in Somerset. This could also result in further intervention by the Secretary of State.</p> <p>There is a Corporate Risk for Safeguarding Children (ORG0009) and its current score is 20. There are a number of management actions and mitigations for managing this risk. SLT and the Cabinet Member regularly monitor the management of this risk.</p>
Other Implications (including due regard implications):	<p>These implications have been considered on an ongoing basis as part of the delivery of the 7 Improvement Programmes.</p>
Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):	<p>The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee receive quarterly performance reports against each of the 7 improvement programmes.</p>