

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 7
16 JANUARY 2012	Public Report

Report of the Executive Director of Children’s Services

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CHILDREN’S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Improvement programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1
- To consider the draft Improvement Plan
 - To note the core strategy and the early steps being taken to deliver progress

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy identifies “Improving Health” and “Supporting Vulnerable People” as priorities. Improvement in Children’s Social Care is key to the delivery of these priorities.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Following an Ofsted Inspection in August 2011, the Council has engaged in a programme to secure rapid improvement. This improvement will be driven by three key elements:

- The Children’s Services Improvement Programme
- The Core Strategy which focuses effort on what we must prioritise
- The leadership of Members and officers in delivering the required changes

4.2 The Council’s progress will be closely monitored both internally and externally by this Committee, the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and the External Improvement Board.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The Council has established an External Improvement Board independently chaired by Jane Held, a former Director of Social Services with LB Camden. Membership of the Board includes the Council’s Chief Executive, Director of Children’s Services and representatives from the police, health organisations, schools, the Department for Education and the Peterborough Safeguarding Children’s Board. The Improvement Board met for the first time in December and received a report on progress by the interim Director of Children’s Services and a draft copy of the revised Improvement Plan.

5.2 The Council also received a first draft of the Improvement Notice in December. This is attached as Appendix 1 and will inform the final content of the Improvement Programme. The draft Improvement Plan is attached as Appendix 2. It has been constructed under six key themes which will support sustainable improvement.

These are as follows:

Theme One: Providing confident leadership across children's services

Theme Two: Putting in place effective front-line practice

Theme Three: Creating an organisation fit for purpose

Theme Four: Strengthening partnerships to make a difference

Theme Five: Becoming the employer of choice in the region

Theme Six: Robustly managing performance

This Improvement Plan will deliver sustained improvement across all of children's services leading to improved outcomes for children and young people in Peterborough. Our core strategy, however, focuses on tackling those areas of greatest risk first and laying the foundations for more effective practice.

The core tasks are as follows, and will be implemented over the next six months:

1. Bring in additional staff to reduce the number of unallocated cases, reduce numbers of incomplete assessments and restore timely assessment timescales.
2. Restore reasonable workloads by rebasing the establishment to ensure sufficient qualified staff and team managers
3. Strengthening the quality of work undertaken in the assessment teams through better organisation and supported by robust supervision, audit and performance monitoring.
4. Reducing workloads by restoring throughput, pruning caseloads and reducing the number of children in need.
5. Making structural changes for handling contacts referrals and assessments and introducing family support teams.
6. Strengthening leadership, accountability and the quality of supervision through recruitment, training, and performance management.
7. Implementing an effective management information and quality assurance framework.
8. Filling resource gaps by more effective recruitment and putting in place a compelling workforce
9. Building an effective commissioning framework and range of preventive services
10. Providing front line teams with suitable ICT arrangements, business support and working arrangements

5.3 Early steps have been taken to progress elements of this core strategy. We have commenced the procurement of a peripatetic team of experienced social workers to help with the high workloads across the service and in particular within the Referral and Assessment Teams. We have strengthened the leadership of the service by appointing Ann Goldsmith as the interim Assistant Director, following the departure of the previous post holder Andrew Brunt and prior to Christmas, the Employee Committee appointed a permanent Assistant Director Mrs. Sue Westcott to the permanent role. Mrs. Westcott is a highly experienced officer and has a track record of supporting improvement in a number of authorities. It is anticipated that she will commence her post in March of this year. A review of the business processes within the Contact Centre was undertaken with support from Hertfordshire County Council and this has led to an immediate improvement in effectiveness and we have re-engineered the working processes within the Referral and Assessment Teams to improve productivity. A new suite of performance reports has been developed to provide a transparent view of performance and a new audit tool is being developed to monitor the quality of the service provided.

5.4 The improvement programme will be closely monitored by Members. The first meeting of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group met in December and this will continue to meet on a monthly basis and will receive all reports that go the External Improvement Board. In addition the Director of Children's Services has initiated weekly performance monitoring meeting with senior and middle managers to ensure that a clear focus and grip is kept on the programme.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The cost of the improvement programme can be met from within existing budgets. Resources are available to secure improvement in the immediate and longer term.

6.2 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory notice if he is not satisfied that sufficient progress is being made.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 Partner agencies, parents and children will be involved in the improvement activity.

8. NEXT STEPS

8.1 This Committee will continue to receive a regular update on progress and the Task and Finish Group will meet monthly to support the improvement.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1
- Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding: Peterborough 6th September 2011
 - Ofsted Unannounced Inspection of contact referral and assessment arrangements 3rd March 2011
 - Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked after Children Inspection: Peterborough 21st May 2010

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - Improvement Notice
Appendix 2 - Peterborough City Council Safeguarding Improvement Plan – December 2011

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