

<b>CABINET</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM No. 10</b>
<b>10 JULY 2012</b>	<b>PUBLIC REPORT</b>

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Scott, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Director of Children's Services	Tel: 01733 863606

**IMPROVING CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE**

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>FROM :</b> Director of Children's Services	<b>Deadline date :</b> N/A
1. That Cabinet notes the improvement activity and progress within Children's Services	

**1. ORIGIN OF REPORT**

1.1 This report is the third quarterly update on progress in implementing the actions and recommendations arising from the Ofsted Inspection.

**2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT**

2.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet with details of improvement actions undertaken since the March Cabinet meeting in response to the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding carried out in August 2011.

2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.3. To take a leading role in promoting the economic, environmental and social well-being of the area.

**3. TIMESCALE**

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	<b>NO</b>
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**4. PROGRESS REPORT**

4.1 This report provides the Cabinet with an overview summary of the Council's performance since the last quarterly report to Cabinet in March 2012.

4.2 At the January meeting of Cabinet the core strategy was explained – based on ten core tasks. These focus on tackling those areas of greatest risk first and lay the foundations for more effective practice. We set ourselves six months to complete these tasks and it is very heartening to see that in a little over four months we had completed the majority of them.

- **Tackle backlogs by bringing in additional staff**

4.3 In January, we brought in the Sanctuary peripatetic team to act as an additional pod in the Referral and Assessment Teams. This additional capacity has been a major contributor to clearing up the entire outstanding initial and core assessments. By March, their work complete, the staff were absorbed into vacant posts and we resumed to working with three pods. By the end of April the total backlog of initial assessments out of timescale had been

reduced from 235 in December to 0 and the number of core assessments out of timescale from 125 to 5.

- **Make structural changes to front door**

4.4 We have re-engineered the working processes within the Contact Centre and between the Contact Centre and the Referral and Assessment Teams. We have also introduced the Early Intervention Service which has successfully diverted families into the 8-19 service and the early years' service.

- **Restore reasonable workloads by rebasing the establishment**

4.5 The establishment was increased from 56 staff to 81. This, alongside the clearing up of backlogs has had a dramatic impact on workloads - reducing the caseloads in Referral and Assessment from on average 30 per worker to 17 and in Family Support from 27 to 20.

- **Strengthen the quality of work undertaken in the assessment teams**

4.6 The introduction of the three pod system, a duty manual and three strong managers has considerably strengthened the quality and timeliness of assessments undertaken. We also adjusted the arrangements so that all core assessments are completed within the Referral and Assessment team.

- **Reduce workloads by restoring throughput, pruning caseloads and reducing the numbers of open children in need cases**

4.7 In December we had 1486 open children in need cases - at the end of April this had been reduced to 1000; a reduction of nearly 500 cases.

- **Strengthen leadership and accountability**

4.8 We quickly appointed two new and experienced Assistant Directors who commenced end of March/early April. This has added considerable leadership capacity. We have introduced a suite of performance reports which track progress on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. The weekly improvement board exercises accountability and the monthly Governance Board oversees progress on the broader improvement plan.

- **Implement an effective quality assurance framework**

4.9 The quality framework was completed in April; this will be a key driver for our work over the next 6 to 12 months.

- **Put in place a compelling workforce strategy**

4.10 We have completed the workforce strategy, rolled out a marketing campaign and set up a micro-site. We have moved from a position of no-one applying for jobs in Peterborough to a regular stream of experienced applicants. At the time of writing, four new staff have already commenced and 16 appointments are in the pipeline (i.e. have been offered a permanent post and are currently waiting to start).

- **Building an effective commissioning framework and range of preventive services**

4.11 There is still more to be done on this and this will be driven by the new Assistant Director Wendi Ogle-Welbourn. Since her appointment she has already established the panel system presented to the board in April and commenced discussions with the PCT and CCG on setting up a joint commissioning unit.

- **Providing front line teams with fit for purpose ICT, business support and working arrangements**

4.12 We have successfully implemented the Liquidlogic ICS product and provided additional dedicated administrative support as well as floor walkers to support the introduction of the new system. We have also dispensed with hot-desking, relocating the teams on the second floor into team structures.

## **PHASE TWO**

4.13 Given the progress we have made on the ten core tasks, we now need to move into Phase Two of our improvement programme, providing a new focus to accelerate us to the next stage. This second phase is a tougher challenge addressing the root causes of poor performance. It will fundamentally focus on the quality of case work and support services and on putting in place long-term sustainable improvement.

4.14 Phase Two is built around seven steps:

- 1) Ensure initial and core assessments are completed on time to an adequate quality and ensure all cases are allocated appropriately
- 2) Focus on raising the quality of casework
- 3) Put in place a range of preventive services to avoid unnecessary family breakdown
- 4) Improve care planning and outcomes for Looked after Children (LAC)
- 5) Strengthen the multi-agency use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Team around the Child
- 6) Put in place a permanent management structure and workforce
- 7) Improve the impact of partnerships

## **Progress on Phase Two**

4.15 We have made a good start to Phase Two. In April and May we completed 99% of initial assessments within the 10 day statutory timescale and 92% of core assessments within 35 days. We have completed nearly 600 "Assurance" audits primarily on long-term cases. This has flushed out 13% of inadequate cases which are now receiving attention. We have launched the Social Work Forum and the opening meeting was attended by the Leader of the Council. The Peterborough Access to Services Panel commenced in April and has been well received by practitioners. We have commenced the commissioning of high level family support and allocated £200,000 to meet this demand. There has been a significant reduction in admissions into the care system following the introduction of the panels.

4.16 The service has been pleased to host a visit from Jane Held, the Independent Chair of the External Improvement Board and she has provided a progress report to the Minister, Tim Loughton. Jane Held concludes in her report back to the Minister:

*"The Council has continued to progress its improvement activity robustly and swiftly. This is demonstrated, not only by the data, but by what social workers are saying 'on the ground'. There is a clear understanding politically of the tasks ahead and the determination to sustain the trajectory."* (The report is attached as an appendix to this document)

## **Challenges**

- 4.17 Although we have made significant progress this year, the Cabinet cannot underestimate the considerable challenges that remain. While the serious shortcomings within the service have been tackled, there is still much to do. We are now on the long road of assuring ourselves that casework is of sufficient quality, that our performance systems are tackling poor practice and that our staff and managers are all able to meet the required standard. Alongside this we need to strengthen multi-agency working, improve the early offer of help in Peterborough and build up a permanent management structure and workforce. Addressing these issues will be a long-term project and we anticipate will take at least a further twelve months- nonetheless we have made rapid progress over the past six months and I expect this pace to continue.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Partner agencies through the Peterborough Safeguarding Children's Board and the External Improvement Board are involved in the improvement activity. Members, led by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, continue to be actively engaged in challenging and supporting this improvement activity. A Member Task and Finish Group continues to meet regularly to examine the improvement programme and the evidence around for progress. Regular progress reports have also been considered by the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee.

## **6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

- 6.1 The improvement activity has been planned to secure the following outcomes laid out in the Children's Services Improvement programme:
- Providing confident leadership across children's services
  - Putting in place effective front-line practice
  - Creating an organisation fit for purpose
  - Strengthening partnerships to make a difference
  - Becoming the employer of choice in the region
  - Robustly managing performance

## **7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 The Council needs to secure immediate improvements to safeguard children and in the longer term put in place a sustainable high quality Children's Service in Peterborough.

## **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 Not applicable

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory notice if he or she deems this is required to secure the necessary improvements within a failing service.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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

None.

### **Report by Jane Held, Independent Chair of the External Improvement Board, to Tim Loughton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.**

#### **Introduction**

This short report provides a brief update on the progress being made by Peterborough City Council with its partners to inform the Minister's visit to the Authority.

#### **Summary**

The Council has continued to progress its improvement activity robustly and swiftly. This is demonstrated not only by the data but by what social workers are saying 'on the ground'. There is a clear understanding politically of the tasks ahead and the determination to sustain the trajectory.

#### **Phase one**

The first phase of improvement has progressed sufficiently satisfactorily to move to a second phase although the work underway in phase 1 will need to be maintained. Strong leadership at second tier is rapidly bringing additional capacity to support the programme of improvement. The immediate issues arising from huge backlogs, significant delay, and excessive workloads have been addressed. Work is being progressed swiftly and thoroughly. I recently tracked one case from first contact to transfer to family support and felt reassured that the new system positively supports good assessment, analysis and case planning. Case loads have dropped to reasonable levels.

Staff in the referral and assessment teams tell me they 'feel supported' with good supervision and access at all times to managers. Their workloads are, they say, now 'good' and the new processes help them to feel supported and secure in what they are doing. They are also finding the new computer system helpful although there are inevitably some minor teething problems. Key messages from staff include the fact that 'we can get out and see the children quickly'. Those R and A staff I met who were long serving members of staff were extremely positive about the difference over the last 6 months.

Partners are being more actively drawn into the process. New panels to provide access to multi-agency resources although very recent are already according to the staff I met 'making a difference' and 'helping me to think through the best plans for children'.

The increased effectiveness of referral and assessment has significantly increased the pressure on the newly reconfigured family support teams. Staff here are not feeling quite as positive as those in R and A, although they too tell me that 'their caseloads are well managed and they are getting good supervision'. They like being co-located in teams with managers close by and feel the new computer system will be a significant improvement. They are positive about the forward trajectory they feel there is but say they will need to 'wait and see' before they are convinced real change is underway.

#### **Phase two**

The second phase will present considerable challenges as it is addressing some of the root causes of Peterborough's poor performance and will require sustained and committed management as well as strong political support. It will need to drill down into the quality of case work and family support services and this will inevitably shine a light on the more intractable issues within the system.

There is a slowly increasing awareness among partners that they too have a role to play but there is a lot still to do particularly with regard to early help, CAF, and thresholds. However positive signs of progress include the new multi-agency panels and the early start to work on joint commissioning. Staff tell me they find the police increasingly responsive to work with.

#### **Workforce**

The primary challenge ahead is achieving sustainable recruitment, retention, stability and permanence amongst staff and workforce development. There are also challenges in relation to the ongoing raising of expectations about the quality of practice and of the competence of some staff. The authority is aware of this and the leadership are resolute in their will to address these

issues swiftly. A strong recruitment campaign is underway. However it needs to be kept under regular review as Peterborough has historically been hard to recruit into. There are effective processes in place to deal with capability and the Unions are well engaged and agree with the need to improve competence and professional quality.

### **Quality**

The Authority has undertaken a total quality audit approach which will provide a very strong baseline for forward improvement although may initially increase the challenges ahead. A comprehensive quality assurance framework will also provide ongoing QA processes. The consequences of really understanding what practice looks like on a consistent basis will raise the bar for practitioners. It could negatively impact at first on the currently much improved morale but will be a necessary step forward that will require sustained investment

### **Leadership**

The Leader is strongly committed to the improvement programme and to achieving long term sustainable change. The potential for instability arising from recent local elections has been avoided, and he has supported the continuation of the current lead member which will help with sustaining progress. He is taking an active interest. The strong leadership of the Chief Executive and Interim Director together with the strong push corporately to support the improvement programme is very positive. I am satisfied from my recent conversations that there is also a real recognition that this will require more than short term improvement support. Succession planning discussions are well underway. There is a recognition that the appointment of a suitably permanent DCS is a critical stage for Peterborough and will require considerable attention.

### **Internal Challenge**

As the second stage begins to bed down partners will need to consider how best to ensure there is sustainable robust internal challenge built into the system. The leadership are aware of this and steps are being taken to develop the LSCB role to ensure it can take on that responsibility more effectively. However there has been a noticeable increase in self awareness across all levels in the Council, with much better identification of what there is to do rather than just setting out what has been done indicating internal challenge is becoming a more usual cultural norm already. Political challenge especially through scrutiny processes is in place but may need strengthened towards the end of phase two.

**Jane Held**

**26 May 2012**