

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Decision Maker: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 22 September 2014 |
| Title: | Hampshire Children's Services Ofsted Inspection February – March 2014 |
| Reference: | 6013 |
| Report From: | Director of Children's Services |

Contact name: Steve Crocker

Tel: 01962 847991

Email: Steve.crocker@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to advise the Cabinet of the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services for children in need of care and protection. The paper outlines the recommendations for improvement that were identified by Ofsted and the planned responses to those recommendations.
- 1.2. The paper also includes as an appendix, recent performance and activity data for children's social care services.

2. Contextual information

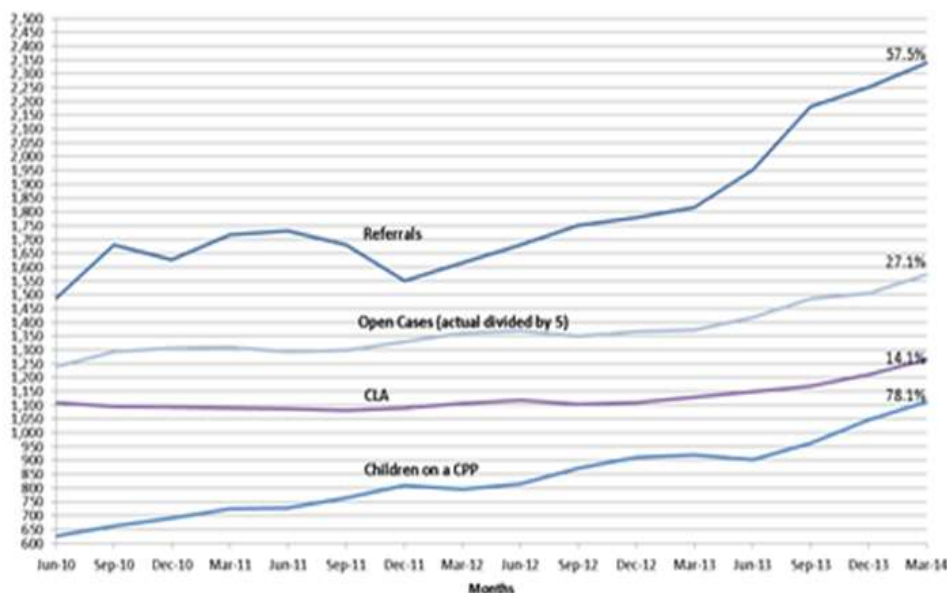
- 2.1. Ofsted inspect all local authority Children's Services Departments on an approximate 4 year cycle, revising the inspection framework between cycles. Hampshire were last inspected in June 2011 under the Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) framework and were found to be 'good' and 'outstanding' against all 22 criteria. This was among the top 5% of all authorities.
- 2.2. The new Single Inspection Framework (SIF) was introduced in November 2013 explicitly as a 'toughened' inspection regime. As one marker of this and in line with the new schools regime, the grade of 'adequate' was replaced with 'requires improvement'. There are fewer domains graded in the SIF, five plus an overall cumulative judgement (which cannot exceed the grade for child protection) alongside a separate judgement on the quality of the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- 2.3. This inspection process is very thorough and forensic, building up a picture of the quality of services through close case by case analysis and practice

observation. For the Hampshire inspection eleven inspectors were involved over a four week period. The first stage was a rigorous, unannounced inspection of 'front door' child protection services. This involved inspectors spending significant time at the Children's Reception Team at Hantsdirect along with equal time at the (then) newly instituted Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which was then in only its second week of operations. Alongside this the inspectors visited all seven front line Referral and Assessment teams. During this first phase the inspection team looked at 86 cases in forensic detail. At this point the lead inspector also highlighted the inspection team's Initial Lines of Enquiry, which are specific issues tailored for each individual authority based on prior evidence. There were 21 of these lines in Hampshire including all recent Serious Case Reviews, actions from the previous inspection in 2011, the impact of the Isle of Wight partnership on Hampshire services..

- 2.4. The second week of inspection required the local authority to self-audit 21 cases that had been selected by Ofsted. These were not randomly selected but included children who were placed out of the county, children who had recently returned home from care, children recently placed on child protection plans and children recently removed from plans plus a range of other criteria.
- 2.5. Weeks three and four involved the inspection team coming on site to follow up all of the lines of enquiry, review the cases that the local authority had audited, meet with partners and observe a range of meetings, visits and interactions with services users as well as meeting children and families themselves. During this period the inspection team reviewed, again forensically, a further 120 cases and, visited all offices meeting most of the social work teams. They also interviewed the Leader, the Chief Executive, the independent chair of the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board, the Lead Members and a cross party representation from the Children's Select Committee and the Advisory Panel.
- 2.6. Whilst it was very important and extremely demanding to 'manage' the inspection process by briefing and debriefing staff and partners and responding quickly to the many queries that Ofsted made, there can be no doubt that very many individual social workers and staff responded to the challenge of inspection extremely well, preparing very thoroughly and then representing themselves and Hampshire in a highly professional, articulate and positive manner. Inspectors were struck by how proud social workers were to work for Hampshire and how keen they were to represent themselves and their organisation well.
- 2.7. The outcome of the inspection was very similar to the outcome of the 2011 inspection in that Ofsted assessed Hampshire as being 'good' or 'outstanding' against all criteria. Given the consistency of leadership within the Department it would be reasonable to say that all managers experienced this as a much more rigorous and highly demanding inspection and that the achievement, whilst ostensibly similar, represents a further significant improvement in the quality of services delivered. At this stage, with almost 30 inspections completed, the result for Hampshire remains the best achieved by any authority so far.

- 2.8. The narrative of the report is particularly useful in understanding the strengths and challenges of the Department. In particular two phrases have a resonance. Firstly, Ofsted thoroughly tested our thresholds around child protection and children in care (the two being inextricably linked) to see whether our threshold was too low (ie too many children in care) or too high (not enough children in care and therefore children placed at risk); they drew an explicit judgement that 'the right children are in care'. This is a particularly significant statement in the context of our management of increasing demand for services and increasing pressure upon the decision making managers.
- 2.9. The second phrase that has particular resonance is that social workers are 'caring but no-nonsense', which reflects well upon the quality of social workers, the leadership and organisational culture in Hampshire. That culture is one which seeks to be pragmatic and effective while addressing the needs of children in a meaningful way.
- 2.10. In the circumstances it is appropriate to reflect upon the two Outstanding judgements that were awarded, especially as these are two of only three such judgements to be awarded nationally in the framework so far. Members will be aware that adoption has been a flagship issue for the coalition government and that has attracted significant scrutiny upon all adoption services. Hampshire contributed directly to the development of the national reform programme so this judgement is particularly satisfying. Perhaps of greater significance is the Outstanding judgement for leadership, management and governance. As the narrative clearly shows, this judgement is a reflection across the whole of Hampshire County Council including the political leadership of these highly sensitive and complex services. It is a judgement that has sustained since the last inspection and, while we must avoid any risk of complacency in these services, it should bode well for the future in difficult times.
- 2.11. As with all inspections there are areas for improvement but importantly none of these were surprises and all represent work in progress to some degree. The response to the recommendations for improvement is set out below in Appendix A and the full published report is attached as Appendix B.
- 2.12. One advantage of the timing of the inspection so early in the new framework is that this means that Ofsted are unlikely to re-inspect Hampshire for at least three years. This provides us with an opportunity to rethink aspects of our practice and affords the opportunity to innovate and focus on priorities such as stabilising the number of children in care and driving down costly placements while we explore whether and how we can control the ever-increasing demand for these services through the evolution of early help initiatives.
- 2.13. These demand issues can be seen in the graph below:

5-month moving averages of number of referrals, open cases, CLA and children on a CPP 2010 – 2014



- 2.13 Attached as Appendix C is the annual Corporate Performance Report for children’s social care, presented to Cabinet in line with good governance procedures and to provide a clear performance overview to enable the Cabinet to fulfil its role as a corporate parent.
- 2.14 This report sets out some of the recent national policy developments and Hampshire’s response to them. It sets out some of the performance measures and activity data that are used to interrogate the performance of services and the system as a whole. One example of this is in relation to Child Protection Plans. The data shows that, while the numbers of children on child protection plans have grown significantly, fewer children are on child protection plans for longer than two years. This is likely to be good performance because it shows that plans are being implemented and change is occurring with children not allowed to ‘drift’ in the system. However, it is also important to look at the number of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plans. If too many children were coming off plans before change had been embedded then we would expect to see a high number being re-referred and placed on plans for a second time. In fact, the data shows that only 10% of children are placed on a plan for a second time. This is consistent with previous years and a healthy figure in comparison to other authorities. Therefore, there is evidence that the child protection system is performing well. The report sets out a range of other data which are used to interrogate and ensure that the system functions well.

3. Financial and related implications

- 3.1. At this stage there are no direct financial implications from the Ofsted inspection although it should be noted that the inspection required significant investment of time and resource both departmentally and corporately. Some staff were given special recognition payments to denote that they had given enormous amounts of their personal time over a four week period.
- 3.2. It should be noted that Ofsted were concerned about high caseloads in some teams. These case loads were well managed by social workers and their managers but are a pressure nevertheless. Cabinet will recall that additional investment was made in social work teams over the two years 2013-2015 and the full impact of this was not yet felt at the time of the inspection. However, it is also the case that referrals in to the service increased in the region of 50% in the last year.
- 3.3. These are issues which have been explored more deeply in the recent report on the medium term financial strategy presented to Cabinet in July. In recognition of the increased level of case referrals and the subsequent impact on the numbers of children taken into care, an additional £6.5m has been allocated to Children Services cash limit from 2015/16 onwards on top of the original expectation agreed in the budget in February 2014. Additional financial support will be made available in the current year should numbers continue to increase at the same level. In terms of financial impact, the average cost of a child in care is £50,000 per year with some children with complex needs requiring placements that cost significantly more than this. Children's Services continues to work with other local authorities to reduce the average costs of commissioned care whilst continuing to ensure that, as Ofsted noted, 'the right children are in care'.

4. Timelines/next steps

- 4.1. As stated above, Ofsted have set out some areas for improvement and we have a duty to respond to those within a set timeframe. This has been done with the approval of the Executive Lead Member. The Ofsted recommendations and the Department's response are set out in Appendix A.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The Ofsted inspection of Hampshire Children's Services was managed effectively by the Hampshire County Council and with great commitment from many dedicated staff resulting in continued good and outstanding judgments from Ofsted. The regular attention given to the performance of children's social care through the Corporate Performance Report illustrates and supports the findings of the inspection. At the time of writing, of the thirty one authorities inspected under SIF so far, twenty two have been judged as requiring improvement or inadequate thus placing significant additional pressure upon the services and the local authorities.
- 5.2. More importantly this provides external validation and reassurance that the most vulnerable children in Hampshire receive high quality, good value

services that keep them safe when concerns are raised and reflects well upon the continued prioritisation of these services by the County Council.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. That Cabinet note the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services.
- 6.2. That Cabinet endorse and support the County Council's response to the Ofsted inspection as approved by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services.
- 6.3. That as part of the Cabinet's wider corporate parenting role, the Annual Corporate Performance Report for Children's Social Care (appendix C) is acknowledged and welcomed.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

| | |
|---|-----|
| Hampshire safer and more secure for all: | yes |
| Maximising well-being: | yes |
| Enhancing our quality of place: | yes |

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- 1.2. The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- 1.3. Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- 1.4. Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.5. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The Ofsted report and the annual performance report do not require any policy change and therefore there is no anticipated impact on groups with protected characteristics. The Ofsted report gives external assurance that the County Council is protecting the most vulnerable children well.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. There is no identifiable impact on crime and disorder from this report although Ofsted report gives external assurance that the most vulnerable children in Hampshire are well protected from abuse and neglect.

3. Climate Change:

3.1. There is no identifiable impact on climate change from this report.

APPENDIX A

Summary Ofsted Improvement Plan

Recommendation *Ensure that all child in need cases receive a prompt and proportionate response to having their circumstances assessed and their needs met.*

Response We will introduce new performance management measures that will ensure that a) all cases are initially assessed by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) within 24 hours and b) that those case that require an assessment by the Referral and Assessment team are seen within 5 days. A new electronic recording method will prompt managers and social workers to ensure that all children are seen within 5 days and this will be monitored by managers and reported to the Performance Action Group (PAG). See also below with regards to additional investment.

Recommendation *Ensure that social workers' caseloads in the Referral and Assessment teams are manageable and regularly reviewed, so that the quality of service experienced by children and families is not compromised*

Response Hampshire County Council made an investment of £2.5m over 2 years from 2013/14. The second tranche of this funding was recruited to after the Ofsted inspection (in March/April) and therefore there is already additional capacity to that which the Ofsted inspectors saw in February and early March.

Notwithstanding this, Ofsted and our own internal monitoring show that the number of new referrals that require some form of assessment is rising sharply. The impact of the new tranche of funding will be evaluated and should caseloads increase further despite this then the matter will be re-considered and, if necessary a further business case developed for increased capacity.

Caseloads will continue to be monitored closely and constructive suggestions from Ofsted inspectors with regards to particular features of that monitoring (eg also reporting the highest individual caseload in a team as well as the average) have already been implemented

In addition, a key issue was that some social workers have not formally or technically closed down cases and assessments when their work was completed which has led to some caseloads being artificially inflated. This was further exacerbated by the necessary introduction of a new assessment model, in line with government guidance, but which sits outwith the existing case management system. At the time of Ofsted's inspection these issues were relatively new and technical solutions have now been found which will enable better performance management in terms of the timeliness of assessments. Training for a relatively new cohort of team managers has also been put in place to ensure that they maintain good throughput.

In the longer term a new IT case management system has been secured which will address the technical aspects of management case flow more effectively.

Recommendation *Ensure that all newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) have a protected and balanced case load in their first year of service, to promote their professional development and maintain the quality of services.*

Response A review of the management and oversight of NQSWs caseloads to be undertaken and a revised structure and process will be recommended to Children and Families Management Team. Of particular relevance will be the balance between offering NQSWs experience in high volume, fast throughput Referral and Assessment teams (experience which is vital), whilst protecting caseloads and ensuring that all cases are closed down appropriately (see above).

Recommendation *Ensure that independent reviewing officers (IROs) have the capacity to carry out all their required duties effectively, including making contact with children between reviews so they can take full account of children's wishes and feelings when planning for their futures*

Response As above, additional capacity was made available in the IRO service from April 2014 and this will assist in ensuring that IROs have sufficient capacity. However, the impact of this additional capacity will be evaluated and a further business case developed as necessary.

Recommendation *Ensure that all looked after children make good or better progress in each key stage of their education over time, particularly in Key Stage 4.*

Response The new measures to route the pupil premium for looked after children to the local authority have provided an opportunity to increase the capacity of the virtual school to improve Personal Education Plans; deliver more training to teachers, social workers and independent reviewing officers, monitor progress more closely and challenge schools with regards to the progress that children in care are making. A detailed delivery programme has been drawn up.

Recommendation *Ensure that all looked after children have regular and timely dental checks, and that the emotional health needs of children and young people are not compromised because they live outside the county.*

Response This has been corrected and an improvement will follow. With regards to children who live outside the county, a clear set of practice guidance will be developed and social workers will receive training on the guidance in order that they understand the responsibilities of health services and an escalation process when problems occur.

Recommendation *Improve the awareness of looked after children and care leavers of their entitlements*

Response A new set of leaflets outlining entitlements have been developed and these will be available in hard copy but also promoted through the new children in care website 'SPARK' which is being well used.

Practitioner guidance will also be updated and there will be training sessions and awareness raising events for practitioners and young people.

Recommendation *Consider how the routine involvement of looked after children and care leavers in key decision-making forums can be developed, so that their views are fully taken into account in the shaping of services*

Response The Deputy Director will work with the Care Ambassadors and Hampshire County Council's Democratic and Member Services team to develop a set of proposals that are meaningful to children in care and also conform to the County Council's constitution.