

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP  
SERVICES**

<b>TO:</b>	<b>ADULT CHILDREN AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>13 DECEMBER 2016</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE</b>		
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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on the progress being made in implementing the Council's Improvement Plan, following the June 2016 Inspection of Reading Borough Council services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.
- 1.2 The Ofsted monitoring framework requires local authorities judged to be inadequate to provide a written statement of action (Action Plan) to the Secretary of State and HMCI within 70 working days from the local authority receiving their inspection report.
- 1.3 The Council's Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan was approved at Full Council on 18 October 2016, and endorsed by the independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) on 10 November 2016.
- 1.4 The RAG rating and progress summary was updated at the beginning of November to reflect the progress made to date, and submitted to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector on 10 November 2016. The Plan has been shared with the DfE appointed Commissioner, Mr. Nick Whitfield.

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee scrutinises the progress being made and endorses the strategic approach being taken by the Director of Children, Education and Early Help.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes the current RAG status of key actions, and the prioritisation and sequencing of activities based on the current resource availability.
- 2.3 That a further progress update report is presented to Committee in March 2017.

## 1. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Ofsted's Inspection findings (report dated 5 August 2016) identified that safeguarding needs of children were not addressed through consistent and prompt enquiry. The impact on children being that they are left in situations of unknown risk. Inspectors found children in situations where they had not been seen by social workers and those in situations where their risks were not understood and acted upon with sufficient urgency.
- 3.2 Reading's Learning and Improvement Plan is structured around three key pillars of reform (People and Leadership; Practice and Systems; Governance and Accountability), that incorporates the 18 recommendations for improvement set out by Ofsted in its inspection of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in June 2016.
- 3.3 Ofsted will make quarterly monitoring visits to Reading Borough Council. The first Monitoring Visit was undertaken by Ofsted on 31 October and 1 November 2016. The Council has received the first report (not published by Ofsted), which reflects that early progress in being made by the Council in improving services for its children and young people in need of help and protection. There were no cases seen where children were judged to have been at immediate risk of harm.

## 4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Improvement plan is structured around 3 key pillars of reform with 18 cascading outcomes, consisting of 60 actions. Each action was RAG rated in the initial stages of developing the plan (September 2016) and is reviewed monthly by the Children's Directorate Management Team (DMT) and the Corporate Management Team (CMT). Progress and any proposed changes to the RAG status is scrutinised and approved by the independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB). Table 1 (appendix 1) provides an overview of the RAG rating against the plan.
- 4.2 Progress continues to be made against the majority of the actions within the plan, with the overall direction of travel (RAG status) presenting an improvement since the previous month. A total of 3 actions have been RAG rated **DARK GREEN**, these remain within the plan for 6 months and continue to be monitored by the CSIB to ensure that improvement is sustained. A total of

38 actions are RAG rated **LIGHT GREEN**, these are in progress and on track for completion by the agreed date.

4.3 There are 4 actions that have been RAG rated **RED** as at 1 November 2016:

**4.3.1 (Action 1.1) The creation of an effective and affordable children's services structure;** The new SW service model was implemented on 22/08/2016 and early feedback from Ofsted during the monitoring visit (31<sup>st</sup> October 2016) is that it is already beginning to have a positive impact on reducing caseloads, and improving the effectiveness in relation to the timeliness of management oversight, and meeting statutory timescales. Work has been undertaken to build a new financial model for Children's Social Care which will reflect the need for an increased number of social workers, this has yet to be approved through the normal budget setting process. **This action continues to be RAG rated RED due to the current gap in base budget funding for 17/18 and beyond.**

**4.3.2. (Action 7.4) Implement effective performance management mechanisms to ensure that data and information is timely and used to inform practice;** Interim agency capacity is now in place to support the business critical data extract and reporting tasks, progress is impacted by the Mosaic system issues. A long term solution is required to respond to the capacity and current skills gaps that exist within the service. **This action continues to be RAG rated RED due to the current gap in base budget (performance team) funding for 17/18 and beyond, and the impact of Mosaic system issues.**

**4.3.3 (Action 5.4) Implement restorative practice into the pathways plans and family group conferencing;** To implement a restorative practice approach throughout the Directorate and its partner agencies will have a significant cost implication, including training which will need to be factored into the service budget for 17/18 and beyond. **This action continues to be RAG rated RED due to the current gap in base budget funding for 17/18 and beyond. The timescale for delivery may need to be reviewed and re-prioritised.**

**4.3.4 (Action 12.5) Increase the permanent establishment of the IRO service to reduce caseloads and ensure IROs are able to effectively fulfil their QA responsibilities including undertaking mid-way audits;** progress has been made with the appointment of an interim IRO in September 2016, which has reduced caseloads on a short term basis. **This action continues to be RAG rated RED due to the current gap in base budget funding for 17/18 and beyond to increase the permanent staffing establishment (that reflect the national levels and IRO handbook).**

4.4 There are 15 actions that have been RAG rated **AMBER** as at 1 November:

**4.4.1 (Action 1.2) Implement a workforce strategy to improve the recruitment, induction, and retention of social workers;** The permanent recruitment process continues with 51fte social work posts (inc. managers) still vacant as at 1 November. This assumes the full 16fte being processed pass validation and start at RBC. As at 1 November 49% of social work posts were permanently filled and 26% of SW Team Manager posts and above were permanently filled.

This action continues to be RAG rated AMBER due to the proportion of SW posts that remain vacant as at the beginning on November 2016.

- 4.4.2 (Action 1.4) Complete a skills audit across the workforce to determine the current levels of professional competence, and inform the design of the learning and development offer; In order to ensure that this action is completed and delivered in the most economical way, the skills audit will be delayed until Spring 2017 when it is anticipated the fuller complement of permanent social workers will be in place. Any identified un-met need will be responded to within the 17/18 training year. This action has been revised to an Amber RAG rating due to the planned delay in completing the action when a fuller complement of permanent staff are in place.
- 4.4.3 (Action 1.6) To deliver a leadership and development programme for all managers (team managers and above) through the Virtual Staff College; The first phase of managers to complete the leadership and development programme has been completed. A second phase will be required following the permanent recruitment of SW managers. This action continues to be RAG rated AMBER, due to the delay in establishing and training a permanent complement of SW Managers.
- 4.4.4 (Action 7.2) Determine manageable caseloads for social workers, so that they can respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the needs of children and young people; Intensive work has been undertaken over the last 3 months to strengthen the MASH arrangements and appropriately step down cases that no longer meet tier 3 thresholds to Early Help. This has resulted in stepping down 131 cases to Early Help Services (approx. 6 SWs caseloads) from August to end October 2016, reducing the original requirement of an additional 15 SWs to 7 SWs (based on current demand) to achieve safe and appropriate caseloads across the system (18 to 22). This continues to be RAG rated AMBER due to the permanent staffing establishment issues set out in action 1.2 and 1.3 above; which includes base budget funding implications for a permanent and fully funded establishment.
- 4.4.5 (Action 7.5) Mosaic system to be reviewed to ensure that the recording tools to support the accurate and timely recording of management oversight and supervision are fit for purpose, and are used consistently across the service; and (Action 2.1) Review the workflow on Mosaic to ensure that the casework system meets the recording needs of assessment, strategy discussion, and section 47 investigations (including a structured recording template for minutes); and (Action 17.4) Improve the business process and recording tool on Mosaic for pathway plans, ensuring that they reflect the needs and aspirations of young people, which involves them in the planning process; Progress in improving functionality and data quality in the Mosaic system remains limited. A paper is being presented to the December Mosaic Programme Board setting out a proposed long-term solution for application support. These actions continue to be RAG rated AMBER due to the limited progress, and awaited confirmation of 'Business as Usual' functions for Mosaic database administration and system development to meet the business needs.

- 4.4.6 (Action 6.2) Ensure that children and young people are seen regularly, in line with agreed timescales, and that their views, wishes and feelings are recorded and used to inform assessments, care planning and reviews; There has been progress since the inspection and an improvement in the timeliness of children being seen. Performance at 1 November 2016 across the 4 Safeguarding Teams for CP visits within timescale was 98%, 81%, 77%, and 62%. This continues to be RAG rated Amber given the current higher caseloads than the statistical neighbours and performance not yet at target level (100%).**
- 4.4.7 (Action 10.1) Revise the CSE screening tool and provide training to frontline staff to embed its consistent use; ensuring through SEMRAC that the CSE profile of Reading recognises the full spectrum of risk; The CSE Screening tool has been revised. A refreshed training pathway with differing levels of training provision has been agreed and ongoing training to RBC frontline staff continues this financial year. Audit activity is being completed in December 2016, led by the CSE co-ordinator, findings will be reported to the LSCB QA sub group and main Board in January 2017. This action continues to be RAG rated Amber due to the awaited funding confirmation for the CSE co-ordinator post from LSCB for 17/18.**
- 4.4.8 (Action 12.6) Complete 'Project 50' which will review arrangements for all children who are looked-after under voluntary care arrangements (S20) to ensure the most appropriate destination; Progress is being made against this action, however this continues to be RAG rated Amber due to the limitations and delay in pace set out in action 14.1 and 14.2 below; which focuses on effectively stimulating and managing the LAC placement market.**
- 4.4.9 (Action 14.1) Update the Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy (based on a strategic needs assessment) to ensure the local authority has sufficient breadth and quality of placements to meet the needs of children looked-after; A proposal to develop an Access to Resource Team has been put forward to CMT and on to Budget-Sub and is awaiting approval. A new Placement Officer for Children's Services has been appointed from within Adult Services. This action has been revised to Amber (from Red) based on the allocation of one placement officer and on the balance of the CMT decision regarding the creation of single Access to Resource Team.**
- 4.4.10 (Action 14.2) Implement improved commissioning arrangements to secure a broader range of housing options for care leavers, and further embed the Staying Put Policy across Reading; As above This continues to be RAG rated Amber due to the limitations set out in action 14.1.**
- 4.4.11 (Action 14.3) Support the Children in Care Council (Your Destiny Your Choice) to develop their role so they are able to engage, support, and represent the views of all children and young people who are looked-after in line with Every Child Matters outcomes; and (Action 15.1) Deliver a development programme to support the Children in Care Council to promote its purpose; review its terms of reference; create an annual programme of activity;**

and (Action 15.2) Revise the participation and engagement strategy for children and young people, with a focused forward plan for continuous improvement, to include a review of advocacy arrangements; the Participation Officer and the Service Manager Specialist Youth are both leaving RBC at the end of December and the resulting reduction in capacity will impact on timeliness. The RAG ratings on these actions have been revised to Amber as there is likely to be a delay on meeting the timescale.

## Other Options Considered

4.5 There are no other options being considered at this stage. The Council is required to undertake these actions under central government direction.

## 5 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 This report is in line with the overall direction of the Council by meeting the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
2. Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living.

## 6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The Ofsted Inspection Report is a public document and is widely available to provide the community with the judgement of Reading's Children's Services.

6.2 The second and subsequent quarterly Ofsted Monitoring Visits will be published and as such will be public documents that will be available to provide the community with an update on the progress child.

6.3 The community have not been engaged in the preparation of the immediate improvement response to the Ofsted report publication. However, the improvement plan will be implemented in conjunction with partners, particularly Thames Valley Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Berkshire Health Care Foundation Trust, Royal Berkshire Hospital and Public Health, Schools and The Foster Care network.

6.4 Particular attention will be paid to the voice of the child which will be represented through the improvement journey outlined in the improvement plan. Work has already been started to strengthen the role of the independent Reviewing Officers, and to strengthen the Children in Care Council.

## 7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An Impact Assessment is not relevant to the preparation of this report.

## 8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Whilst there are no legal implications in relation to this report, it is important to note that under Children's Services Legislation, we are required under a general duty of the Children's Act 2004 to address the quality of services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## 9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Most of the resources associated with the actions identified in the plan are identified in the plan. The Council is currently working under significant financial constraints (as have been outlined to Policy Committee), so as far as practical the action plan will need to be resourced within already approved resources during 2016/17.

9.2 Formally the Council's budget for 2017/18 is set in February 2017, and at that stage the council will need to prioritise the resources necessary to deliver this plan in that year within the context of its budget as a whole. It is anticipated that the budget proposal for DCEEH will include the resources indicated in this plan.

## 10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding board.

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/reading>

Monitoring local authority children's services judged inadequate.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-local-authority-childrens-services-judged-inadequate-guidance-for-inspectors>

Putting Children First: Delivering Our Vision for Excellent Children's Social Care

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

Improvement Plan

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/6028/item07/pdf/item07.pdf>

Table 1: Improvement Plan RAG Rating

Initial RAG-rating September 2016		Previous Month October 2016		Current Month 1 November 2016	
RED	5	RED	5	RED	4
AMBER	15	AMBER	15	AMBER	15
LIGHT GREEN	40	LIGHT GREEN	40	LIGHT GREEN	38
DARK GREEN	0	DARK GREEN	0	DARK GREEN	3
COMPLETED	0	COMPLETED	0	COMPLETED	0
TOTAL	60	TOTAL	60	TOTAL	60

<b>RED</b>	Action not yet started/significant delay in implementation/delay due to resource availability. The action must be prioritised to bring it back on track to deliver improvement.
<b>AMBER</b>	Action started but there is some delay in implementation. The action must be monitored to ensure the required improvement is delivered.
<b>LIGHT GREEN</b>	Action is on track to be completed by the agreed date. Evidence is required to show that the improvement has been sustained.
<b>DARK GREEN</b>	Action completed and there is evidence that the improvement required has been made. The action remains in the plan for monitoring.
<b>COMPLETED</b>	Action completed and there is evidence that the improvement has been sustained. Approved by CSIB Chair to be removed from the plan.