

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 MARCH 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is one of a series of reports to ACE Committee from the Independent Chair of the Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB). The CSIB was established to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan and service improvements in Children's Social Care.
- 1.2 The CSIB meets monthly and this report covers the period from the publication of the Ofsted report in August 2016 to the end of February 2017.
- 1.3 During this period the CSIB has overseen the development of the Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan developed in response to the 18 recommendations for improvement identified in the Ofsted report which found Reading children's services to be 'inadequate'. The Learning and Improvement Plan also includes a number of other improvement actions identified by the local authority based on the narrative within the Ofsted report.
- 1.4 Since the development of the Learning and Improvement Plan, and its submission to Ofsted, the CSIB has focussed on monitoring the performance and delivery of actions in the plan in order to demonstrate improvement to Ofsted, the Department for Education, the Council and the wider community.
- 1.5 In September 2016, the Secretary of State for Education appointed a Commissioner to undertake a three-month review of Reading children's services and its capacity to improve. This review period has been extended for the Commissioner to assess the best way to ensure sustainable improvements

in Reading children's services. The role of the CSIB in supporting improvement has been acknowledged by the Commissioner who has requested an increased focus on ensuring that quality assurance is applied systematically during this period.

- 1.6 The CSIB provides support, challenge and oversight of the Learning and Improvement Plan together with its comprehensive performance dataset. A highlight report is produced for each CSIB meeting summarising progress against each of the actions and indicating a RAG rating. Where actions have been RAG rated RED or AMBER management action to secure improvement is included.
- 1.7 In addition to monitoring the Learning and Improvement Plan, the CSIB has also focussed on impact and quality assurance activity to ensure that all improvements identified are well evidenced and secure. This has been particularly important in relation to improving the quality of social work practice.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the report be noted.
- 2.2 That Members identify any issues that they would like to see as a focus in any future report from the CSIB.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 At the ACE Committee on 29th June 2015 it was agreed that a Children's Services Improvement Board be set up to oversee the implementation of the Children's Services Improvement Plan. Since the publication of the Ofsted report in August 2016 the CSIB has focussed on providing support, challenge and oversight of the Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan.
- 3.2 The Terms of Reference and **objectives** are attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The Board continues to be supported and attended by key partners and is well served by officers.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 4.1 The work of the CSIB is aligned with the Strategic Priorities of Reading Borough Council as set out in the Corporate Plan and in particular 'safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable'.

5. PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The Learning and Improvement Plan has been developed around three key priorities: People and Leadership; Practice and Systems; Governance and Accountability.

- 5.2 People and Leadership - the CSIB has recognised that securing and maintaining a stable senior leadership team is essential to ensuring sustainable improvement in children's services. This has continued to be a challenge in Reading and has impacted on the pace of improvement. The Acting Director of Children, Education and Early Help Services and the senior leadership team have reported to CSIB with improved rigour and clarity on the progress in implementing the Learning and Improvement Plan. As a result, the CSIB now has a clearer understanding of the weaknesses in the service and there is greater focus on improving the quality and impact of social work practice. Recruitment and retention of social workers remains a challenge particularly in relation to permanent social work managers. The CSIB has a clear focus on this issue as the absence of permanent managers presents significant challenges in securing improvements in practice that require consistent management oversight and supervision.
- 5.3 Practice and Systems - the Domestic Violence Audit undertaken by external reviewers in response to one of the Ofsted recommendations has provided CSIB with valuable insight into social work practice in Reading. The review of over 700 cases identified some examples of good work and also highlighted gaps in social work practice together with implications for partner agencies. The CSIB has provided a clear steer to senior leaders and partners that the findings of this extensive review should be used to support improvements in practice across the children's workforce. The CSIB recognises the importance of ensuring that it maintains a focus on quality of work being undertaken with children and families and this needs to be supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms. The CSIB will continue to emphasise the importance of being able to provide evidence of impact and improvement rather than simply reporting on activity.
- 5.4 Governance and Accountability - this priority relates to ensuring effective lines of accountability and governance to embed a culture of appropriate challenge and scrutiny at all levels and across the partnership. The CSIB is committed to providing robust challenge and scrutiny on the implementation of the Learning and Improvement Plan. This role is taken seriously by partner representatives who are keen to support a culture of improvement. The CSIB has identified that a partnership priority is to address the Ofsted recommendation relating to the consistent application of thresholds across the children's workforce. It has been agreed that this recommendation requires a more solution focussed approach with partnership engagement facilitated by the LSCB. The CSIB will continue to monitor progress on this important recommendation and provide appropriate levels of challenge to partners where necessary.
- 5.5 In summary, the CSIB recognises the enormous amount of work that has been undertaken to develop and begin implementation of the Learning and Improvement Plan. Officers have provided detailed and timely reports to the Board with clear RAG rating on the plan and a comprehensive data set which has become increasingly reliable. Management actions relating to areas of slower progress are becoming more clearly focused on resolution rather than commentary and there is evidence of a more rigorous approach to improvement. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to secure the scale of improvement required and this is recognised by the senior leadership team and the Board.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 Whilst an EIA has not been completed in compiling this report, CSIB members do focus on making sure that the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and young people are met in a timely and appropriate way.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no known legal implications.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The CSIB has no budgetary responsibility.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Minutes of CSIB meetings
- The Children's Services Learning and Improvement Plan highlight reports and data set and reports by other officers to the CSIB have been used to complete this report.

Appendix 1

Reading Borough Council Children's Services Improvement Board

Objectives for the CSIB

The main objectives for the Board are to ensure that:

- System wide leadership is in place and creates the conditions for effective partnership working and practice which will make a difference to children and young people who fall under responsibility of Reading Borough Council;
- There is a golden thread of oversight from 'top to bottom 'with a clear line of sight between leaders, practitioners and children;
- The voice of the child informs everything that the children's services in Reading Borough Council does;
- There are robust and effective quality assurance framework in place to support the Improvement Plan;
- Impactful support and challenge from the board with a clear oversight of the improvement plan and subsequent outcomes for children, young people and families is welcomed and embedded; and
- It supports Reading Borough Council to be a confident learning organisation.