

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/2020 REPORT NO. 129

MEETING TITLE AND DATE:

Cabinet: 13th November 2019

REPORT OF: Tony Theodoulou

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Agenda – Part:1

Item: 7

Subject: Children’s Social Care Increasing Demand and Pressures

Wards: All

Key Decision: KD: 5014

Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Rick Jewell

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Following the recent ILACS (inspection of local authority children’s services) standard 2-week inspection from 4th to 15th March 2019 Ofsted found services for early help and protection, looked after children, care leavers, fostering and adoption are good. Since March the Local Authority has delivered on the Ofsted improvement plan, maintained practice improvements and increased quality assurance processes.
- 1.2 Children’s Services continue to be a key priority for the Council. Cabinets investment into Children’s Social Care in July 2019 has yielded direct results with reduced caseloads and better practice evidenced through the 6 weekly audit and moderation process that is in place. Whilst there had been a significant increase in child protection investigations (over 90%) a recent review found that 94% of the strategy discussions were held in a timely manner, threshold application and decision making was appropriate and proportionate. There has been a marked and sustained improvement in timeliness of assessments, currently over 90% assessments are being completed within statutory timescales compared to 74% in March 2019.
- 1.3 However, Children’s Social Care have been unable to keep caseloads at a reasonable level as demand has continued to increase over the last 6 months. The rise in activity is due to continued complex needs, ending of the edge of care service and significant practice changes within the service.
- 1.4 The service has a planned annual conversation with Ofsted in November 2019 and a focused 2-day visit is likely to happen soon after. It was agreed at the July Cabinet that a further report would be brought in November following an analysis of demand and pressures. Cabinet are asked to note the good work of frontline staff and the rise in practice improvement against a backdrop of increasing caseloads.
- 1.5 To ensure caseloads are at a reasonable level and that practice improvements are sustained Cabinet are asked to invest in a new social work team in the child protection service and approve a further:
 - £125k investment this year funded through risk reserves while the permanent investment of £365k in 2020/21 will be managed through the medium-term financial plan process.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet are asked to note the good work of frontline staff and the rise in practice improvement against a backdrop of increasing caseloads. To ensure caseloads are at a reasonable level and that practice improvements are sustained Cabinet are asked to invest in a new social work team in the child protection service and approve a further:
- £125k investment this year will be funded through risk reserves while the permanent investment of £365 in 2020/21 will be managed through the medium-term financial plan process.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the recent ILACS (inspection of local authority children's services) standard 2-week inspection from 4th to 15th March 2019 Ofsted found that senior leaders, with cross party support, have worked effectively to strengthen and improve service provision since the recent focused visit in September 2018 and the previous inspection in 2015.
- 3.2 Ofsted recognised that senior leaders continue to work hard to embed and sustain the recent improvements and that Children's Services continue to be a key priority for the Council. They found that Children's Social Care are on an upward trajectory of continuous improvement with strong, stable leadership in place and that services for early help and protection, looked after children, care leavers, fostering and adoption are good.
- 3.3 They recognised the impact of the practice lead positions introduced in November 2018 and the improvement in skills and knowledge of frontline staff and managers. The significant investment in staffing in the MASH and the assessment teams had made a difference to caseloads and the quality of practice. However, practice improvements are still inconsistent, decision making in the MASH is variable and it is too early to see sustained changes particularly in the Children in Need services.
- 3.4 Following the ILACS inspection Cabinet agreed in July 2019 invest £375k funded by risk reserve in Children's Social Care to deliver on the Ofsted improvement plan, maintain practice improvements and increase quality assurance processes. This investment has resulted in significant practice improvement however, Children's Social Care have been unable to keep caseloads at a reasonable level as demand has continued to rise over the last 6 months. The increase in activity is due to continued complex needs, ending of the edge of care service and significant practice changes within the service.
- 3.5 Children's Social Care continue to see an increase in demand over the last 6 months as follows:

Area of activity	January 2019	June 2019	Reason
Referrals to Social Care (within last 3 months)	1882	2339	Practice change following Ofsted
Child protection investigations (within	490	832	Practice change

last 6 months)			following Ofsted
Completed Assessments (within last 6 months)	2195	2928	Practice change following Ofsted
Children subject to child protection plan	285	311	Recent reduction
Children looked after	377	396	Recent reduction
Care Leavers	250	274	Increase in former UASC

- 3.6 Over the last 5 years there has been an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) from 12% of LAC population (2014) to 20% of population in 2019. This is a direct result of the national transfer scheme being broken.
- 3.7 The number of children at risk of sexual exploitation has increased year on year with a 50% increase in the last 2 years this is due to increased awareness across the partnership.
- 3.8 Enfield Children's Services continue to be relatively low spending compared to most other local authorities. The investment requested would increase the number of social workers creating a new team which will stabilise reasonable workloads and encourage social workers to stay in Enfield thus maintain the positive trend in reducing vacancies, agency workers and staff turnover.
- 3.9 This paper requests a further permanent £365k investment in Children's Social Care which will create a new social work team to bring caseloads down to under the Pan London standards. The in-year investment of £125k will be funded through risk reserves while the permanent investment of £365k in 2020/21 will be managed through the medium-term financial plan process.
- 3.10 The investment will enable recruitment to a new social work team (7 posts) which will bring caseloads down to a reasonable level assuring consistency and assurance of good practice.
- 3.11 There is a rigorous process in place to scrutinise, track and monitor practice as follows:
- Fortnightly operational Continuous Improvement Board chaired by the Director of Children and Family Services
 - Monthly Practice and Performance Board chaired by the Executive Director: People
 - Quality Assurance Board chaired by the Chief Executive.

The Cabinet Member and Executive Director: People and the children's multi-agency partnership receive regular reports. The service will seek further independent benchmarking opportunities, for example through external review, peer reviews and mock inspections to benchmark performance and ensure continuous improvement.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

We have recently commissioned a social care agency to deliver some children in need services to meet statutory duties within set timescales however maintaining agency staff is not cost effective in the long term. The investment requested from Cabinet will increase permanent recruitment, strengthen further the stability of the workforce and reduce staff turnover.

5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

An annual conversation is planned with Ofsted for November 2019 to track progress following the full inspection (March 2019). This is likely to be followed in quick succession by a 2-day focused visit. Through additional investment, the service will be able to maintain reasonable caseloads, firm up the strong foundations in social care and further hone our trajectory of continuous improvement. Ensuring that Enfield Council delivers a high quality, safe service to children and families that meets regulatory expectations.

6. COMMENTS FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6.1 Financial Implications

In 2019/20, £125k investment outlined in this report to be funded from the risk reserve while the permanent investment of £365k in 2020/21 will be managed through the medium-term financial plan process.

6.2 Legal Implications

- 6.2.1 The recommendations set out within this report are within the Council's powers and duties. The report recommends investment in Children's Social Services to strengthen delivery of the service and ensure that it can continue to support the Council in meeting its statutory obligations.
- 6.2.2 Every local authority has a general duty under Schedule 2 paragraph 4(1) of the Children Act 1989 to take reasonable steps through the provision of services under Part III of the Children Act 1989 to prevent children in their area suffering ill-treatment or neglect. The recommendations set out in this report comply with this legislation.
- 6.2.3 Under the Local Government Act 1972 the Council can appoint such officers as it thinks fit for the proper discharge of its functions. Section 111(1) of the Local Government Act permits a local authority to do anything calculated to facilitate the discharge of their functions. The recommendation to invest in Children's Services is in accordance with these powers.

- 6.2.4 Any recruitment and selection process must be carried out in accordance with the Council's policies, procedures and employment law, and avoid unlawful discrimination in advertising and recruiting to the posts.
- 6.2.5 An equality impact assessment of the impact of any reorganisation proposals should be prepared to enable decision-makers to consider compliance with the Council's duties generally under the Equality Act 2010, to avoid discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and access, including monitoring any possible negative impact hereafter.

7. KEY RISKS

Without this investment the service cannot maintain reasonable caseloads, the strong foundation and positive trajectory within Children's Social Care may weaken. If caseloads do not stabilise the consistency in the quality of work will not be maintained. This would also affect staff morale, recruitment and retention, reversing the positive trend we have established in the last 9 months. There is a risk that the annual conversation with Ofsted planned for November 2019 will not assure inspectors of our commitment to sustained improvements and could trigger a full inspection of services as was the case in September 2018.

8. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES – CREATING A LIFETIME OF OPPORTUNITIES IN ENFIELD

The work of Children's Social Care meets all 3 of the council's key priority areas within the corporate plan and the objectives within the Children and Young People's Plan. With emphasis and more weighting upon improving services to those children, young people and families that require prevention and intervention from safeguarding services across a broad spectrum from early help to statutory interventions. Through early intervention and specialist statutory services children are supported to live wherever possible within their families and communities.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

Children's Social Care forms part of the Council's programme of retrospective equalities impact assessments (EQIA). The retrospective EQIA collates equalities monitoring of service users, and consider how the service impacts on disadvantaged, vulnerable and protected characteristic groups in the community.

10. PERFORMANCE AND DATA IMPLICATIONS

This proposal will enhance practice and performance which is monitored regularly through national statutory returns and at political, corporate, departmental, service and team levels.

11. HR IMPLICATIONS

- Upon approval, once it has been identified which frontline posts will be created and where they will sit in the structure, HR to be provided with an up

to date organisational chart to enable the department to create the posts and provide post numbers for recruitment to commence without delay.

- Consultation on recruitment to take place with trade unions in accordance with statutory regulations and Council guidelines.
- Generic Social Worker and Advanced Social Work Practitioner posts will not require formal job evaluation. Any changes to job role profiles affected by the proposals to be submitted to HR to update records, or possible evaluation where the change is material. The Council's recruitment policy will be applied.

12. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Safeguarding children is a public health issue: preventing abuse and supporting vulnerable children and their families increases wellbeing. Children's Social Care protects and promotes the welfare of children and young people in Enfield and works in partnership with all health partners to improve outcomes in early life and childhood that leads to healthier, successful adults and improve the health of the population. For example: protecting children and young people results in improved population health outcomes by reducing mental health issues, sexually transmitted diseases, injuries and long-term poor health.

Resourcing adequate support could contribute towards the life course approach to improving health through safe and effective children services.