



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 7 September 2023

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	N

SUBJECT: Children's Service Improvement Journey

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The previous report to Executive Board in June 2022 updated Members on the outcomes of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) conducted by HMI Ofsted Inspectorate. The report included the action plan which had been developed in response to Ofsted's findings and recommendations.

This report provides an update on progress over the last 12 months, including the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the statutory partners' – the Council's Children's Services, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB and Lancashire Constabulary – on the identification of need and risk in Blackburn with Darwen.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Executive Board:

1. Notes the progress and improvements made over the last 12 months
2. Notes the findings of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the statutory safeguarding partners in Blackburn with Darwen.

3. BACKGROUND

Since the report to Executive Board in June 2022, there have been significant changes in senior leadership within the Children's Services and Education directorate, with:

- A new Strategic Director of Children's Services & Education (the statutory DCS), appointed April 2023, who had been interim since November 2022;
- The Deputy Director for Children's Social Care returned from maternity leave in February 2023;
- Two new Heads of Service in Social Work and Specialist Services and Corporate Parenting and Permanence;
- Three new Service Leads in Assessment and Social Work, Permanence and Fostering, Adoption and Kinship care;
- A new Team leader for our Independent Reviewing team;

- A Deputy Director for Schools and Education has recently been appointed to take up post in September 2023.

These changes resulted from a review in November 2022 by the interim DCS (now permanent Strategic Director Children's Services & Education), the Chief Executive and Executive Member of the improvement journey to date and a stocktake of the position against the ILACS framework with a focus on: *The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.*

Together with senior leaders in the directorate, we have developed our improvement journey to ensure we are delivering services that are compliant, inclusive, value for money and of the highest quality providing positive outcomes for our children, young people and families.

The Strategic Director meets with both the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted every six weeks since December 2022. Following the most recent meeting with the DfE, and given progress to date, it has now been agreed to meet on a quarterly basis.

Further to the leadership changes there has been a renewed focus on improvement, particularly in Children's Social Care. The initial focus was on leadership and management, ensuring our corporate leadership team are clear about the task in hand, ensuring we offer services that are not only good value for money but also improve outcomes for our children, young people and families.

The improvement board which had been established met monthly to ensure change at pace with the support and challenge of our Local Government Association (LGA) advisor Linda Clegg as independent chair. There is a focus on priority areas of practice, impact and the inspection framework, with the support and challenge from wider corporate directors including Finance and HR. This gives the Council's political leadership and Chief Executive a clearer overview of the directorate as a whole and the support needed to improve. With this approach, we are confident we are building the strong foundations to move the directorate to an outcome our children, young people and families deserve.

We have developed an improvement programme and are consolidating our work across the Directorate under the 'Proud to be BwD' vision, and underpinned by our clear focus on:

- We are Systemic;
- Transitions for all ages;
- Best start in life;
- Providing the right support at the right time;
- Transforming our services building upon national best practice 'Stable homes built on love';
- Supporting children to reach their full potential.

Improvements made over the last nine months include:

- Staff engagement which has included two directorate engagements days – focusing on our priorities and improvement required. A weekly Director email and fortnightly Teams meeting keeps staff updated.
- With HR colleagues, a focus on the workforce including recruitment and retention which continues to be a challenge to all local authorities, with a monthly data set for the improvement board. All leadership posts are filled giving greater stability to staff and our social work agency rate has significantly reduced from over 30% to 14%.

- Clear plans to consolidate and strengthen our Practice Model and Social Work Practice Standards across the Children's Services workforce have been developed. We have been successful in our bid to work with Warrington Council as part of the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP).
- Our restructure of social care has supported improvements to practice by supporting better workflows to provide purposeful interventions at the right time
- Revised engagement with our finance department has enabled leaders in the directorate to have a greater understanding of whole directorate budgets. It has also ensured our finance team have a greater understanding of demand to the service.
- By strengthening the relationship with our data team to one of research, analysis and insight, a monthly children's social care scorecard has been established, giving a directorate snapshot. There is a strong focus on what we need to do to improve and we are continuously developing our critical analysis of data.
- More children are receiving the right support at the earliest opportunity.
- Knowing ourselves is part of the improvement journey. Our new QA (quality assurance) framework fully commenced in June 2023, with staff engagement session taking place in May to ensure this is understood, owned and utilised by all our workforce - working with practitioners. By November 2023 we expect to have a QA framework embedded into practice, at which point we have a formal review of the impact of the framework planned, utilising our SLIP partner, North Tyneside (judged by Ofsted as Outstanding).
- Reviewed practice within Emergency Duty Team (EDT) with our SLIP partner, North Tyneside, has led to updated practice guidance being implemented. Focus is now on safety planning in EDT to allow partnership strategy meetings to take place in day time services with partners who know the child best.
- The Directorate self-evaluation is kept up to date by the wider leadership team, with progress made, and areas requiring improvement.
- Our Family Hubs model has been successfully launched with all four hubs now open.
- Purposeful partnership plans are in place via the renewed Children's Partnership Board and place based BwD Safeguarding Partnership.
- Along with the improvement to Children's Social care there has continued to be a drive on all areas for improvement across the Children's Services and Education agenda including the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) agenda, the Youth Offending Service and our School Improvement Programme. We have learnt from what works well and applied these approaches to the monitoring of improvements across the system.

Since the ILACS Jan 2022, we have engaged with further external scrutiny, this includes :

- A Peer review and challenge session led by DCS's from Warrington, Wigan and Wirral,
- the Annual Conversation with Ofsted,
- Youth Justice Inspection which resulted in the service being judged good with outstanding features,
- Peer review of the Leaving Care Service

JTAI – Joint Targeted Area Inspection

In May 2023 a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) was conducted of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Blackburn with Darwen. This was a multi-agency partnership inspection by Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The inspection found improvements since the ILACS (2022) in relation to practice and leadership.

“Recent changes in the BwD senior leadership team have been a catalyst to this transformation, intended to enhance the quality of practice with vulnerable children. These changes have supported the framing of shared objectives and a culture of high expectation, where understanding the child’s experiences is driving improvements. Partnership working is strong.”

Please see Appendix 1 to view the Joint area outcome letter.

Strengths were identified as follows:

- Children who are at immediate risk of significant harm receive a prompt, proportionate and effective partnership response through CADS (front door).
- Children and their families benefit from responsive, well-coordinated universal and multi-agency targeted early help services, including out of hours, which are helping to reduce harm.
- Children who go missing from home or are at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation receive effective help and protection from the police-based co-located multidisciplinary engage team.
- Schools provide a range of excellent proactive support for children and families.
- The highly effective multidisciplinary weekly ‘transforming lives panel’ ensures that individual children are provided with the right level of help from the most relevant professionals.
- Resolute practitioners and accomplished leaders across agencies work well together to understand the experiences of individual children in their families. Working relationships across the partnership are extremely positive, and staff at all levels know each other well.
- Senior leaders are working together well to accelerate the development of a cogent ‘place-based’ children’s safeguarding board, specifically designed to provide high-quality, locally and swiftly delivered child-centred services

Improvements were identified for action across the partnership, many of which had been identified within existing plans and actions were being delivered:

- Shared and consistent multi-agency processes and records of referrals when professionals identify children in need or at risk of harm.
- The quality and consistency with which the voices of children and their lived experiences are recorded in referrals, assessments, plans and multi-agency reviews.
- Formal multi-agency triage processes, or meetings to consider referrals that do not meet child protection thresholds in the children’s advice and duty service (CADS).
- Communication with and involvement of health professionals, police, schools and children’s social care in meetings and in decisions about next steps to help and protect children.
- Contingency planning and effective challenge by health professionals, police, schools and social care for children who are the subject of repeated referrals or child in need or child protection plans.
- The effectiveness of management oversight and supervision in health, police and children’s services.
- Accurate partnership performance management systems, routine multi-agency audits and rigorous evaluation and analysis of the impact on children’s experiences across services.
- The involvement of children and their families in co-creating services locally.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

As a directorate we continue to drive improvement across our service areas following our improvement plan.

Our three strategic areas for scrutiny include:

Corporate parenting

Children’s safeguarding partnership

School improvement.

Priorities for the next 4 months include:

Sept 2023

- Develop a plan to consolidate the QA framework and practice model.
- Develop a coherent vision for children, families and the workforce.
- Complete a place based Safeguarding partnership business plan

Oct 2023

- Embed the revised working plan
- Governance and forward work plan for key Boards
- Complete updated Children and Young people plan
- Review Improvement plan and Self Evaluation
- Develop a communication plan for Children's Services & Education

November 2023

- SEF completed in preparation for Peer Review
- Development of a social care forecasting model
- Review and develop the workforce recruitment strategy

December 2023

- Develop and coproduce the Corporate Parenting strategy with our children in care and Care Experienced young people
- Develop a policy map
- Update key policies

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implication arising directly from this report. The Council's policies are reviewed to ensure they align with statutory, government and best practice guidance.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report. The Council has invested in Children's Services further to the ILACS reports as previously agreed and through the budget process to ensure appropriate care and quality standards for our vulnerable children and young people against a backdrop of rising demand and increasing costs, particularly post-Covid

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional resource implications identified

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

Staff, partners, children, young people and their families and social care regulators are consulted on service delivery and improvement.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Jo Siddle, Strategic Director, Children & Education (DCS)
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DATE:	7 September 2023
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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