

## **Manchester City Council Report for Information**

**Report to:** Audit Committee - 14 July 2016

**Subject:** Children's Services: Assurance Update

**Report of:** Director of Children's Services

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### **Summary**

At its meeting on 9 June 2016, Audit Committee requested a report which explains the reasons for limited assurance on children and families social care internal audit inspections and the actions the Council was taking to address the recommendations from those audits. This report provides the details of the actions being taken in response to audits, but also the findings of the Ofsted inspection, Improvement Board and management's own reviews of governance, risk management and control arrangements across the service

### **Recommendations**

Members are requested to note the update from the Director of Children's Services on progress made in response to the findings of audit reports and the 2014 Ofsted Inspection

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**Wards Affected:** All

### **Contact Officers:**

Paul Marshall  
Director of Children's Services  
234 3804  
E-mail [p.marshall1@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:p.marshall1@manchester.gov.uk)

### **Background documents (available for public inspection):**










- Reports to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
- Internal Audit Annual Assurance Statement (Audit Committee June 2016)

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Council is subject to an Improvement Notice, issued in March 2015, following the publication of the Ofsted Inspection report in September 2014 and must therefore show significant and sustainable improvement by the time of the next Ofsted inspection. Since the Inspection the Council has demonstrated its commitment and focus to delivering the changes and improvements required. Significant investment has been committed to the wider Children's Services, specifically related to improvements in the Looked After Children's Service (LAC) and also to address the short fall in the Early Help Services.
- 1.2. The Council's Audit Committee has received reports from Internal Audit, External Audit and the former Directors of Children's Services that highlighted areas for improvement across Children's Services both pre and post Ofsted.
- 1.3. This report reflects the most recent findings of Internal Audit and External Reports and summarises the progress to date and further challenges being addressed by the Service

## 2. Issues Arising from Audits, Inspections and Reviews

- 2.1. The Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management reflected opinions from a number of audits in the 2015/16 annual audit report and annual opinion. As shown below these opinions indicate that whilst the governance of improvement and establishment of the quality assurance framework have been positive and led to high levels of independent assurance, these changes are not yet translating into consistently positive levels of compliance with basic casework policies and procedures.

Ofsted Social Care Improvement Plan Delivery	Substantial 	Medium 
Children's Quality Assurance Framework	Substantial 	Not Assessed
Children's Services Live Case Audit	Limited 	Medium 
Social Care Casework – Looked After Children	Limited 	Medium 
Children Missing from Home/Care	Limited 	Medium 

- 2.2. External Audit commented on delivery of the Improvement Plan in their 2014/15 Audit Findings Report. Their report focused on the progress made but noted that there was further work required in respect of leadership and management, the workforce and quality of social work practice. Updated

reports and progress has been reported periodically; subsequently these issues are well understood by management and the Improvement Board, as are the steps being taken to deliver the required improvements.

- 2.3. This position reported by both Internal and External Audit is consistent with management reviews and audits. It is also consistent with reports being made to the Improvement Board which receives regular progress reports and along with the Children's Board, Corporate Parenting Panel and Manchester Safeguarding Children's Board robust support and challenge continues to be made to the Service.
- 2.4. In addition there are regular reports presented to the Council's Chief Executive and Strategic Management Team, Executive Members and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.5. This support and challenge includes multi agency engagement on the Improvement Board, which is independently chaired by Edwina Grant, OBE, who reports directly to the Children's Minister. Her sixth report was provided at the end of June 2016 and noted the current areas for focus to be as follows:
  - A continued focus on the outcomes of audit on safe casework practice.
  - Continued focus on measuring and acting on performance data trends, particularly in risk areas such as missing children and unaccompanied asylum seekers.
  - Social worker recruitment based on the securing of financial investment.
  - Further improving operational practice and greater consistency in social work, built on the Signs of Safety approach.
  - Further evidence of uptake of the Early Help assessments and evident improvements to that strategy in terms of measuring impact and outcomes.
  - Evidence of an outcomes based approach to changes in commissioning of services linked to the revised Children's plan.
  - Further progress on the work of the LSCB and progress on the review of governance.

### **3. Key Actions to Address Issues Arising**

#### **Challenges Faced**

- 3.1. The key challenge faced by the Department is to increase the pace and effectiveness of the improvements already made whilst embedding the new ways of working and undertaking recruitment at front line manager and practitioner levels. The new senior leadership team is now in place and focused on maintaining a high degree of pace and urgency to the improvement work. This has been acknowledged by the Improvement Board, which has indicated the recent pace and focus given by the senior leadership team is starting to deliver the improvements.
- 3.2. Since the Ofsted inspection Children's services have been working to an improvement programme against which there has been significant progress and is summarised below:

- New senior leadership team recruited and now in place, including a permanent DCS. This puts the Council back on a sure footing and able to provide sustainable service improvement.
- Strengthened the 'Front Door' contact centre and MASH – assurance given from the Ofsted mini-inspection in January 2016.
- Average caseloads for workers have reduced initially from 30 to from 27 in 2014/15 and then to the current level of 23 per social worker.
- LAC numbers have been reduced from 1,400 in 2014/15 to 1,380 in Aug 2014 and continues to reduce to 1,226 at the end of June 2016.
- Launch of new Early Help service – new strategy, revised thresholds, three new hubs launched October 2015. A review has indicated that the long-term strategy and plan is the right one but will take up to 18 months to see significant impact.
- Child's Voice being strengthened to put children at centre of social work practice, including a new Child's Voice framework due to launch April 2016.
- Adoption performance improved for the numbers of children adopted and timeliness of adoptions; Foster carer recruitment is also increasing.
- City's work on domestic violence is being reviewed and overhauled with key partners.
- Signs of Safety practice model is being rolled out bringing a new 'strengths based' approach.
- Flexible working arrangements (laptops & smart phones) have been rolled out to the locality social work teams.
- Fit for purpose policies, procedures and standards developed and implemented.
- Workforce strategy developed.

3.3. This progress has laid a foundation for improvement and a sense of confidence. However now we have a permanent leadership team and anticipated increased capacity within children's social care, the service can start to ensure that these developments are built upon, progress continues and is sustained in the coming months.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- 3.4. Despite recent improvements, there remain a number of challenges before the Council can be confident the service is safe, effective and efficient. A number of reoccurring themes have been identified by the new leadership team as part of the self-assessment process that have identified the four main challenges are related to high caseloads, not enough evidence of management grip, inconsistent social work practice and recurring data inaccuracy. All of these issues are being tackled and improvements are underway but the evidence is not yet available to demonstrate that the improvements have been embedded and are sustainable in the long term; this supports the findings of the internal audit reports. The Intention is to secure this evidence within the next three months.
- 3.5. The approach to deliver and sustain further improvement will be encapsulated within a Single Service Plan that will articulate the service priorities and timeline for improvement. This will set out the specific actions to be taken over

the coming year; with key milestones so that progress and impact can be measured. The plan will include a set of immediate actions required to take the service out of an inadequate judgement and relate to the following areas:

1. Address high caseloads by implementing manageable workloads through increased productivity and extra frontline social work posts.
2. Build a body of evidence to demonstrate good management grip through the embedding of the comprehensive performance and practice management system.
3. Improve the quality of social work practice through further training, improved supervision as evidenced through better compliance with the Quality Assurance Framework.
4. Improve the quality and accuracy of data and management reports through the business process reviews in MiCARE, delivery of the national statutory children in need/LAC returns and use of the extra capacity from the data analyst posts.

### **Addressing High Caseloads**

3.6. Manageable caseloads of 18 will be central to this offer and will bring about a more stable workforce with higher moral. This will be phased in by reducing cases to 20 and then by the end of the financial year to 18 using a bespoke recruitment approach. Initially this will mean a dependency on agency staff but this will tail off by the end of year one as the City's reputation improves and the evidence of a well managed service with manageable caseloads leads to more permanent recruitment. This will be achieved by building capacity whilst the service recruits permanent, highly motivated and competent staff through an enhanced 'Manchester Offer' which will include:

- Manageable caseloads
- Regular and supportive professional supervision and developmental opportunities
- A remuneration package which is in the top quartile
- Promotion of Manchester as a place to live and the City Council as an employer of choice

3.7. Recruitment activity is well underway with the first round of team managers and social workers being recruited to teams across the service. The recruitment activity will continue throughout the summer and autumn months.

### **Demonstrating Good Management Grip**

3.8. A rigorous performance challenge has been built into the day to day running of the service and is monitored through a set of performance meetings at different levels within the organisation. Chaired by the DCS all areas of activity are scrutinized and specific actions agreed to implement improvement and consistent practice.

3.9. The Children's Management Team performance clinics are being held on a monthly basis and actions are cascaded throughout the service by weekly

meetings chaired by the Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care. These meetings address standards of practice in a systematic way at a service and team level. This framework is now built into the day to day running of the service. This will ensure that managers at head of service, locality and team management levels implement consistent management oversight of the work within their span of control. The DCS has oversight and monitors the effectiveness of the additional investment in social work capacity on improving practice and managing demand more effectively. This has already resulted in improvements in the standard of management grip across the service.

### **Improving the quality of social work practice**

- 3.10. The performance clinic and practice improvement approach will also look in a more detailed level at data covering outcomes (e.g. adoption timeliness), quality of practice, quality of management oversight and workforce capacity. These sessions have already started to identify a number of practice improvements such as, tracking and monitoring of practice supervision, better and improvement support for children missing, starting to reduce repeat referrals and why some children are being subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second (or further) time.
- 3.11. All case work will be monitored routinely for accuracy, activity and timely outcomes. Performance clinics will be held at departmental, service and team level to ensure services continually improve and their appropriate accountability across the whole service. Where standards or performance fall below expectations this will be robustly challenged and individuals supported to make the required improvements.

### **Improve the quality and accuracy of data and management**

- 3.12. Work has been ongoing with colleagues from Performance & Intelligence unit to systematically improve the quality and reliability of the data held within the electronic social care record system, MiCARE. A new social care record system (MOSIAC) has also been purchased and is in the process of implementation across Children's and Adult Services. All business processes have therefore been reviewed and changed to match 'best practice' models as part of the future design of MOSIAC. Implementation is being overseen by the Council's ICT Board and MiCARE steering group. Over twenty workshops with managers from across Children's and Adults have taken place to complete the business process reviews.
- 3.13. The Performance Framework through the iterative approach to monitoring and reviewing of performance data will also focus on improving the accuracy and reliability of information within the MiCARE system which will in turn inform reliability in strategic planning.

### **Ofsted Preparation**

- 3.14. A dedicated senior management group has been formed and is chaired by the Interim Deputy Director on a monthly basis to focus on the logistical

preparation for a full Ofsted inspection. This includes a communication plan for key stakeholders within and outside of the Council and detailed arrangements to manage the Ofsted team in preparation for their arrival.

- 3.15. Evidence from the Ofsted Preparation group will be reviewed on a monthly basis and lead managers will be invited to review the priority actions for their section to assess if these are; a) delivering the required improvements or b) if they need to be reviewed or changed or c) if new actions need to be added. All actions will be SMART and contain the date of their delivery and the named lead who will be delivering this.
- 3.16. The preparation work is also being enhanced by the work being led by the Deputy Chief Executive (People) to ensure that there is full corporate support across all departments to deliver the effective improvement.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

- 4.1. The range and scale of activity to improve Children's Services remains substantial and is subject to regular scrutiny through the existent governance arrangements of the council and independently chaired Improvement Board.
- 4.2. The commitment of resources and sustained focus on improvement in all matters of governance, planning, practice and performance management continues and whilst positive progress has been made there is more work to do. In particular the positive governance, investment in resources and development of practice is being closely managed to ensure that this results in real, sustained and positive performance.
- 4.3. The Service will continue to engage with colleagues across the Council including Internal Audit as well as external audit in support of this improvement journey; colleagues from internal and external audit attendance at the Board continues to be welcomed.
- 4.4. Areas of Internal Audit focus agreed for 2016/17 continue to include areas that are referenced in this report and include: Children's Social Care Quality Assurance; Children's Social Care Casework; Children's Social Care Data Quality; and Signs of Safety. The Service welcomes this work in providing further independent assurance over the actual progress made in the achievement of improvement plans. Progress against any subsequent recommendations/findings are tracked and monitored via the Head of Service meetings which are chaired by the Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care.
- 4.5. Audit Committee are requested to note the report and to comment on the progress to date and further actions underway to improve Children's Services in Manchester.