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**UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENTS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Cyndi Hughes,  
Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
Suzanne Joyner, Director of Children and Adults Services**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the improvements to date within Children's Services further to the Single Inspection undertaken in June 2015. The report also provides Members with an inspection update and changes to Ofsted inspection regime

**Summary**

2. Cabinet on 8 December 2015 agreed to receive regular reports on progress in implementing the Children's Services Improvement Plan. This report summarises progress on improvements since the last update report in May 2016.
3. Notable activities have included:
  - (a) A mid-term Improvement Plan progress review by Department for Education (DfE) and improvement partners Red Quadrant – 17 May 2016. See letter of 15 June 2015 at **Appendix 1**. The next DfE review is scheduled toward the end of 2016.
  - (b) Ofsted monitoring visit of 10/11 July 2016. See letter of 5 August 2016 at **Appendix 2**. This is the first of a series of quarterly Ofsted visits, each focusing on different areas of Children's Services.
  - (c) Improvement Board approval of the update of the Children's Services Improvement Plan focusing on remaining priorities for the remainder of the intervention period - see **Appendices 3 & 4**.
4. These progress reports demonstrate that improvement is being made and that the pace of change has increased, whilst recognising that there is further work to do. Putting this in context, Leeds who have been providing some support on our improvements to performance management, took 4 years to go from inadequate to outstanding. Several other councils following the same improvement process have

not evidenced the improvements that have been demonstrated within the DfE and Ofsted letters.

5. Key Highlights of the improvement journey so far are:

- The leadership team has been strengthened and has clear management oversight;
- Significant improvements have been made in performance management with a clear scorecard and reporting hierarchy;
- Weekly performance data is provided at an operational level to allow service and team managers to understand their workload and drive cases forward;
- Caseloads of social workers have reduced and are consistently within the target range;
- Timeliness of reviews and visits has improved through active management and weekly reporting ensuring that no cases are missed;
- Children's placements are more stable with fewer experiencing 3 or more moves and increased numbers staying in the same placement for 2 or more years; and
- A focus on the education of Looked After Children ensures that each child has a PEP that has clear outcomes and is regularly monitored leading to better prospects for improved educational attainment and continuing the low numbers of LAC NEET.

6. Due to the scale of improvements made in four areas, further progress on these is now being made through normal business as usual improvement activity rather than under the auspices of the improvement plan and the Improvement Board. These areas are:

- Elected members understanding of children's services performance and ability to challenge;
- Monitoring educational progress of looked after children to narrow the gap;
- Improved consistency and quality of personal education plans; and
- Completion of reports on fostering and adoption services.

### **Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that Members consider and scrutinise the information contained in the report and agree whether further information or explanation is required regarding any of the specific areas raised in the report.

### **Reasons**

8. That Cabinet should receive regular updates on improvement progress.

**Suzanne Joyner**  
**Director of Children and Adults Services**

## Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Children's Services updated Improvement Plan 2015-17
- (ii) Ofsted – Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and
- (iii) Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
- (iv) Monitoring and re-inspection of local authority children's services judged inadequate – Inspector's Handbook (August 2016)

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S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has the implications for the health and wellbeing of vulnerable groups of children
Carbon Impact	This report has no implications for Carbon Impact.
Diversity	This report has no implications for Diversity.
Wards Affected	All wards within the Borough of Darlington are affected.
Groups Affected	Looked After Children and Care Leavers and Children in Need of Help and Protection
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend any changes to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report has no implications for One Darlington: Perfectly Placed
Efficiency	This report has no implications for Carbon Impact.

## MAIN REPORT

9. This is the third update report to Cabinet, and as well providing Members with a commentary on progress there are a number of key events to report on:
  - (a) Inspection update and changes to Ofsted inspection regime.
  - (b) A mid-term Improvement Plan progress review by Department for Education (DfE) and improvement partners Red Quadrant – 17 May 2016. See letter of 15 June 2015 at **Appendix 1**. The next and potentially last DfE review is scheduled toward the end of 2016.
  - (c) Ofsted monitoring visit of 10/11 July 2016. See letter of 5 August 2016 at **Appendix 2**. This is the first of a series of quarterly Ofsted visits, each focusing on different areas of Children's Services.
  - (d) Improvement Board approval of the re-write of the Children's Services Improvement Plan focusing on remaining priorities for the remainder of the intervention period - **Appendices 3 & 4**.

## INSPECTION UPDATE

10. From 1 June 2016, Ofsted introduced a series of monitoring visits in inadequate local authorities to help Ofsted determine the timing and arrangements for re-inspection. As Darlington was already judged inadequate before the new regime, it falls under the transitional arrangements, and it is a requirement of the new arrangements that Ofsted will undertake at least four monitoring visits before a re-inspection takes place.

### DfE Review - May 2016

11. A mid-term Improvement Plan progress review was undertaken on 17 May 2016 by Department for Education (DfE) and the Council's improvement partners Red Quadrant (See letter of 15 June 2015 at **Appendix 1**). The next DfE review is scheduled toward the end of 2016. The DfE review acknowledged the significant improvement made in some areas and also the need to maintain the pace and momentum of change. In his letter of 15 June 2016, the Minister referred to specific improvements in leadership & governance, practice and performance management. He also noted that priority for improvement included workforce stability, quality of practice, continued strengthening of management oversight & leadership of practice, and the forthcoming new ICT system – Liquid Logic.

### Ofsted monitoring Visit - July 2016

12. A monitoring visit by Ofsted in July 2016, also identified significant improvements in some key areas and re-affirmed work underway in refocussing attention in areas where improvements are not yet demonstrating the required impact (See letter of 5 August 2016 at **Appendix 2**.) The findings from the visit have been mapped alongside the existing recommendations and used to refine and focus the new actions in the improvement plan. Below is a summary of Ofsted findings:

- (a) The council has responded purposefully to the recommendations made following the single inspection in 2015.
- (b) A new senior leadership team is highly visible, accessible and demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the key priorities for improvement.
- (c) Performance management arrangements have improved significantly, and have been supported by an extensive auditing programme. Findings are widely reported across the senior leadership team and to elected members to ensure that strengths and areas for improvement are known and understood.
- (d) The workforce is not yet stable. There is a high turnover of social workers and an over reliance on agency staff. Children and young people are experiencing too many changes in social worker, which impacts on the continuity of casework and the timely progression of their care plans.
- (e) Structural changes, increased social work capacity, enhanced practical support and the co-location of social work teams is beginning to improve management oversight and staff morale. Social workers are receiving regular supervision and report feeling valued and well supported.
- (f) A reduction in social work caseloads is resulting in improved timeliness of single assessments and is enabling social workers to see children and young people during assessments.
- (g) While the timeliness of single assessments has improved, the quality of assessments remains poor. Risk analysis is weak and assessments lack evidence of multi-agency involvement. The impact of cumulative neglect is not well understood or recognised.
- (h) Child protection enquiries are not informed by multi-agency discussion and decisions made within a strategy meeting.
- (i) Arrangements to safeguard children and young people who are at risk of being sexually exploited are not consistently ensuring that children are protected.
- (j) While social workers and their managers receive regular supervision, it is not sufficiently focused on the quality of social work practice or professional development.

13. Ofsted will be making its next monitoring visit on 12/13 October. The third and fourth visits will take place in the first half of 2017 before the re-inspection. It is the re-inspection which will formally assess progress against the 2015 inspection and provide a new judgement.
14. The decision regarding when to undertake a post-monitoring single inspection lies with the Ofsted regional leadership team. The decision will be informed by:
  - (a) information gathered during the quarterly monitoring visits
  - (b) the local authority's evaluation of its improvement journey and performance, including whether they consider they are ready for re-inspection
  - (c) the view of the Department for Education
  - (d) performance data
  - (e) other regional intelligence, for example inspection outcomes of regulated settings run by the local authority.
15. It is expected that the Ofsted post-monitoring single inspection will take place towards summer 2017, as it has to be within 24 months of the inspection report.
16. With regard to DfE and Red Quadrant there will be a second review toward the end of 2016.

## **PROGRESS REPORT**

17. The Ofsted report of 1 September 2015 made 18 recommendations which shaped the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan was approved by DfE and endorsed by the Children's Services Improvement Board on 6 January 2016. The plan contained over 150 actions to meet the Ofsted recommendations.
18. Throughout 2016 the Improvement Board has received monthly updates on the Improvement Plan. Progress on these has been monitored, assessments taken on the degree of completion and relevance to the overall improvement journey and consideration given to how the ongoing improvement will be managed in a sustainable way.
19. The original 18 recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection are reproduced at **Appendix 3**. The table shows those that are to continue in the Improvement Plan and, for those others continuing under Business As Usual improvement activity, the headline improvements to be made and the governance mechanism for overseeing the continuous improvement of services provided.
20. The Improvement Plan has now been re-written to acknowledge what has been achieved and to allow focus on the remaining actions. The revised plan (attached at **Appendix 4**) was approved by the Children's Services Improvement Board on 24 August 2016 and defines the next stage of the improvement journey.
21. The emphasis of the re-write is to focus on Ofsted outstanding priorities and to mainstream continuous improvement activity as part of day to day work, without the need for a formal Improvement Board and Improvement Partner. Evidence has

been gathered for each of the actions completed to demonstrate what has been achieved and inform future actions that are contained within this plan.

Development of the new Improvement Plan has also been informed by:

- (a) Audit and review programmes
- (b) Regular quality assurance activity
- (c) Monthly performance reports and challenging performance indicators
- (d) DfE Review – May 2016 letter and presentation / feedback on the day
- (e) Ofsted Monitoring Visit – July 2016 letter and feedback on the day

22. These pieces of work have come together to provide the mainstreaming of certain aspects of improvement activity, enabling enhanced focus on the remaining recommendations as the emphasis for the Improvement Plan. The re-write of the Improvement Plan sets out clear expectations and timescales for delivering the next stage of this journey and in doing so provides greater focus on these areas where step change improvement is still required, whilst mainstreaming the remainder of improvement work as business as usual improvement activity. This clarification and focus is essential in ensuring that the required changes are made and that change, improvement and innovation are seen as part of day to day activity within the Council. These will either be carried out as one of the workstreams in the Transformation Programme or through normal work programmes.

### **Managing Delivery of the Improvement Plan**

23. The recommendations continuing within the re-write of the Improvement Plan have been developed in a way to keep the plan simple and uncluttered, enabling focussed reporting on a monthly basis to the Improvement Board and then to Cabinet.
24. These reports will present a simple view of progress focussing on delivery of the key actions for each recommendation and the key performance indicators for the recommendation. This will enable demonstration of the impact of actions taken and the resulting improvements in the quality of work undertaken, supporting attainment of better outcomes for the children and families concerned.