

**Councillor Nick Bardsley**  
**Portfolio Holder for Children's Services**

## **1.0 SUMMARY**

This report provides information on the key achievements and developments of the past year, and strategic priorities for the forthcoming year.

September 2017 saw the long-awaited Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care and the resulting report, which was made public on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Subsequently a Joint Targeted Area Inspection was undertaken in November 2018.

Demand has increased significantly in all areas of Children's Social care over the period, with the number of children in the care of the local authority increasing sharply.

Outcomes for schools has continued to improve, and the number of schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted remains 4% above the national average.

## **REPORT**

### **2.0 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING**

- 2.1 Shropshire Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in September 2017 and received a Good judgement overall. The inspection recognised the progress that has been made in improving services to vulnerable children and families and found that safeguarding arrangements were robust. The inspection recognised the work done to strengthen services for looked after children and care leavers but also highlighted that further work was needed in these areas. An Ofsted Action Plan is in place that sets out how we will address all the key findings and recommendations from Ofsted and this Action Plan is subject to scrutiny by the People Overview Committee. The action plan is well on track, and positive progress can be reported in all areas.

- 2.2 A visit from Mark Riddell, DfE National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers, in February 2018 identified the progress made since the Ofsted inspection in respect of care leavers but also identified on-going areas of priority in improving services so that we can offer an outstanding service to our Care Leavers. Mark made a follow up visit in November and was impressed with the progress that had been made in a short period of time, including increased capacity within the Leaving Care team, an improved local offer for care leavers, apprenticeships for care leavers within the Council and participation of young people.
- 2.3 The Local Authority and its partner agencies have just been subject to a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI). This a multi-agency inspection that takes place over a 3-week period. The inspection focused on multi agency arrangements and our responses to all forms of child exploitation and abuse, the quality and impact of assessment, planning and decision making in relation to notifications and referrals and how children are protected from specific forms of abuse. A deep dive investigation was undertaken in relation to child sexual abuse in the family environment. The inspection involved inspectors from Ofsted and also inspectors from the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Inspectorate of Probation, 16 inspectors in total.
- 2.3.1 The inspectors identified key children whom they tracked. This involved speaking with allocated workers, observing meetings and speaking with the child and their family as well as auditing case files. We were also required, along with our partner agencies in health, police, probation and youth offending, to audit the case files of the tracked cases to evaluate the quality of work and understand what the experience of the child has been, identifying strengths and areas for development.
- 2.3.2 The inspectors also held meetings with senior leaders, managers and front-line workers from all partners.
- 2.3.3 The outcome of the inspection will be published in January 2019.
- 2.4 Over the past 12 months work has been on-going to strengthen the Corporate Parenting Panel and to engage more council members in meeting their corporate parenting responsibilities. More detail is included in the Council Corporate Parenting Pledge report to Council 13 December 2018.
- 2.4.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel has responded to the views of our looked after children and we are now in a position to offer free bus passes and leisure passes to our looked after children, 5 young people are currently in an apprenticeship role in the council. We have also been able to ensure that our care leavers who are setting up home independently for the first time have access to a training flat to help them prepare for their move to independence and when they do make that move that they are exempt from council tax. We now have a care leaver ambassador in place, and together with the care leavers forum organised a very successful celebration event in October where care leavers achievements were recognised. The Local Offer for Care Leavers has been much improved, based on the views of young people, and it will be published shortly.

2.4.2 I am pleased to report that we now have a number of member "corporate parent champions". These members sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel and have been appointed to drive improvements in the areas of:

- Participation
- Education, Training and Employment
- Housing
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing

A group of young people from the Leaving Care Forum have revised Shropshire Council's pledge to them, further details are contained in the Council Corporate Parenting Pledge report to Council 13 December 2018.

2.4.3 The Virtual School organised a very successful awards event in September held at the University of Chester Shrewsbury.

2.5 The number of looked after children increased during 2017/2018. At the time of writing the number stands at 369, an increase of 37 on the same point last year. This is as a result of more children being accommodated and less being discharged. We have seen an increase in children aged 0-5 come into local authority care due to safeguarding issues which have required court proceedings to be instigated. This has meant that we have seen a significant increase in care proceedings and as the demand for placements has increased we have seen more children placed in external fostering and residential provision, which has been at a significant cost to the local authority.

2.5.1 To address this a Business Case has been approved to improve our foster care sufficiency which means that not only are we seeking to increase the numbers of foster carers that we have available but to also look to recruit or develop existing carers to care for more complex young people, preventing the need for high cost residential placements. As part of the approved Business Case we have also developed a support team specifically for foster carers which will ensure that we also see less foster placement disruption and children moving into residential care. Work on improving foster care sufficiency is on-going.

2.5.2 In addition to improving foster care sufficiency we are also looking to develop our residential sufficiency. Following on from a report which went to the People Overview Scrutiny Committee which highlighted some of the challenges in looking after our most complex children, a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was established and considered proposals about how we could most efficiently and effectively look after our most vulnerable and complex young people. Proposals to increase internal residential placements were fully supported and work is on-going to secure council funding to develop two additional 2 bedded residential home and one three bedded residential home.

2.6 As well as listening to the views of children in care and care leavers we have developed a Service Impact Group which looks at how we can seek the views of as many service users as possible and use this information to develop services and practice.

- 2.7 Children’s Safeguarding has continued to focus on the quality of social work practice, in particular around permanency planning for looked after children. Arrangements to secure children in permanent care arrangements have been strengthened and a new Permanency Forum is in place to ensure that our permanency planning is timely and in the best interest of the child.
- 2.8 During the course of this year key challenges for the services have related to recruitment and retention of social workers and to increasing caseloads as demand for services and complexity of work has increased.

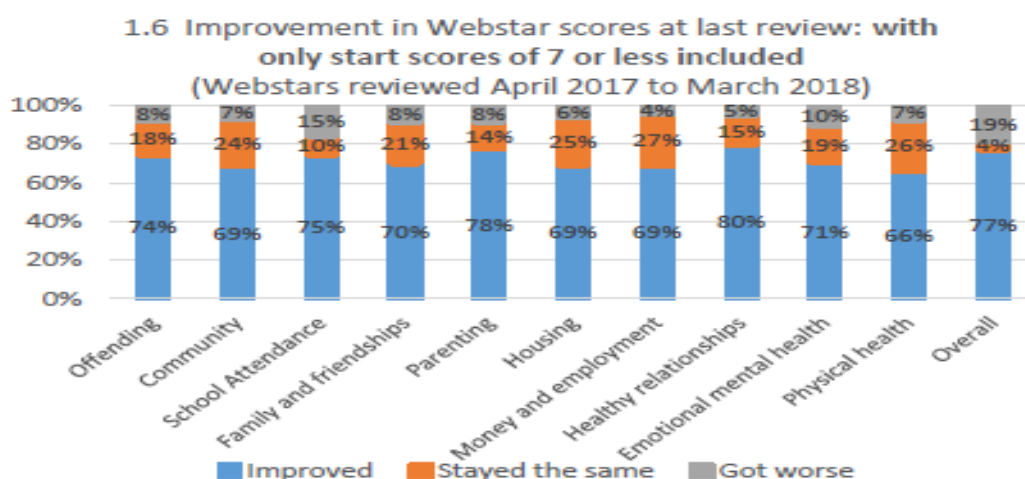
### 3. EARLY HELP

- 3.1 Between April 2016 and March 2018, 2718 children and young people have been supported, to improve their life chances and outcomes through Early Help.

#### 3.2 How have outcomes improved for children and young people?

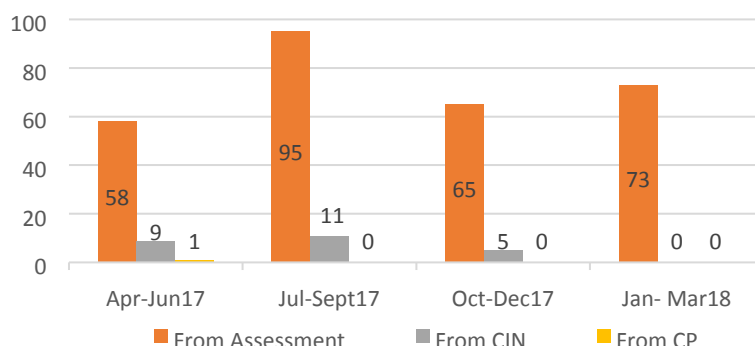
- 3.2.1 The Early Help webstar is systematically used to measure impact on children and young people.

2017/2018 webstar scores – full year



- 3.2.2 There were 261 webstars reviewed from April 2017 to March 2018 – 77% of families (202 families) had seen improvements in their overall score at the last review. The areas with most improvement were parenting and emotional mental health.

### 3.3 Early Help supporting Children’s Social Care



3.3.1 There have been a total of 317 step downs from April 2017 to March 2018. Early Help escalated 23 families into children’s social care.

### 3.4 Parenting support provision

There have been 3 areas of success:

- a) The introduction of Understanding Your Child clinics at 7 venues across Shropshire
- b) Increase in provision of targeted parenting groups
- c) Successful implementation of Solihull on-line courses

The Understanding Your Child group brings parents together and applies Social Learning Theory and is intended for parents and carers who want to know more about sensitive and effective parenting. It aims to develop a framework of thinking about parent/child relationships, which can be developed into a lifelong skill. This in turn promotes effective behaviour management, with parents supporting parents.

28% of parents attending groups reported having a child with a disability or additional need (67 families).

97% of parents reported an increase in confidence in understanding and managing their child’s behaviour, after completing an ‘Understanding Your Child’ group.

#### On-line Understanding Your Child Course

In April 2017, we purchased the multi-user license for the on-line Solihull courses which enabled us to offer these to our families free of charge. We offer the on-line courses as a universal offer to all Shropshire parents. The courses have been promoted through our Early Help practitioners, Family Information Service, Health Visitors, Midwives and our schools.

In the last financial year:

- 235 parents accessed the on-line course; 'Understanding Your Child'.
- 304 parents accessed the on-line course; 'Understanding Pregnancy, Labour, Birth and Your Baby'.
- 70 parents accessed the on-line course 'Understanding Your Baby'.

### **3.5 Parenting support actions 2018-19**

- Align the parenting offer, with the development of Early Help hubs
- Introduction of a rolling programme of 'Me, My Children and Domestic Abuse' groups.
- Trial 'Understanding Your Child' workshops for fathers.
- Trial 'Something for Me' group to compliment the Solihull group offer

### **3.6 Early Help Family Hubs**

- 3.6.1 The service area has consulted twice with the general public, children and young people on a new delivery model for Early Help. Phase 1 consultation focused on the development and implementation of a new Early Help Delivery model, which was approved by Cabinet in March 2017. Phase 2 consulted on the proposed location of 7 Early Help Family Hubs located in all the market towns, delivering building-based services alongside outreach provision into the communities and home visiting. Both phases of consultation have engaged the public in a range of workshops, in a wide range of venues across Shropshire including effected Children's Centres. A simple questionnaire available through a range of mediums including online, gathered people's views, ideas and opinions, about the changes.
- 3.6.2 Since approval by Cabinet on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018, implementing the plan is in full swing. Twelve of the 20 buildings no longer required will be transferred to other agencies, in the main schools, by the end of December 2018. Implementation of the new Early Help delivery model will commence from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, and will continue until March 2020, as the range of partners and agencies interest in delivering from the hub or being co located is finalised.

## **4.0 EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY**

- 4.1 There are 150 schools across the local authority (LA): 127 primary phase schools, 19 secondary schools, 1 All-through school, 2 special schools and 1 Pupil Referral Unit with 6 centres on 5 sites across the county.
- 4.2 Approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Shropshire primary schools are small or very small. This increases their financial vulnerability and the volatility of outcomes for pupils. As at November 2018, 35% of schools were academies and the remaining 65% were LA maintained.

- 4.3 The most recent national data confirms that 89% of schools in Shropshire are good or outstanding compared to the national average. The Education Improvement Service has sustained a sharp focus on primary and secondary schools judged to be satisfactory or to require improvement. The percentage of good or outstanding schools has increased by approximately 20% over the period 2013 – 2017. It remains 4% above the national average of 86% (Data View March 2018). School inspection reports continue to confirm the effectiveness of the challenge support and interventions provided by the Education Improvement Service.
- 4.4 Officers and members have continued to work closely with Schools Forum on the funding and sustainability of schools in Shropshire. The reduction and removal of the general duties Education Services Grant (ESG) from September 2017 has resulted in reduced funding for academies and the Council. This has increased the challenge of sustaining current provision to promote and secure effective provision and high outcomes for pupils, with top-slicing required from maintained mainstream school budgets to provide support services previously funded through the ESG. The annual finance briefing for school leaders was held in October and was well attended.
- 4.5 Some parts of Shropshire, in particular the larger market towns, are experiencing a growth in pupil numbers as a direct result of housing developments. Up to 14 new primary classrooms and some 8 primary class base refurbishments are being programmed - for delivery in the academic year 2019/20 - in Baschurch, Hadnall, Market Drayton, Shifnal, Shrewsbury and Whitchurch. This contrasts sharply with other parts of the county where there continues to be a forecast decline in the school population.
- 4.6 School leaders and governors are increasingly aware of the demographic challenges facing their individual schools, federations or multi-academy trusts, and the need to secure sustainable and collaborative models of leadership to ensure their schools are financially and educationally viable in the future. Governors are aware of the need to secure a sustainable approach to ensuring a good or better education for children in their communities.
- 4.7 After a 7-year period of decline the overall pupil population (reception to age 16) has returned to the 2010/11 level. There remain 5 areas across the local authority where there is need for more school places. Officers have ensured that governors and school leaders are aware of the need to secure a sustainable approach to providing a good or better education for children in the communities they serve. They are aware of the financial challenges facing their schools and where necessary are working to secure sustainable models of leadership.
- 4.8 The number of young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) remains below the national average and compares favourably with statistical neighbours. The percentage of school leavers (2017 year 11 leavers) meeting the duty to participate (in full-time education, training, apprenticeship and full-time employment with study) is 94.5%. This compares favourably with national and regional participation figures published in June 2017 (England 94.2% and West Midlands 94.4%).

- 4.9 Effective partnership working across early education, health and social care results in approximately 80% of all eligible families taking up some part of their entitlement for early education places for disadvantaged 2-year olds (24U). Over 95% of eligible three and four-year olds now take up at least some part of their universal free entitlement. In September 2017 the government launched extended free childcare for working families with the aim of reducing childcare costs and encouraging more parents into work. Take up of the extended entitlement in Shropshire is in excess of estimates and, again, is above national and regional averages.
- 4.10 The Integrated Review for 2-year olds (All about me @ 2) has been launched successfully and many children and families are now benefiting from a joined-up review of their child’s health and development with input from both Health Visitors and Early Years professionals. This has led to earlier identification of those children who may need some additional support.
- 4.11 Shropshire Council provides information support and guidance to Early Years providers in line with the statutory duties. The percentage of good and outstanding early year’s providers is above national and regional averages.

| Area              | % of providers rated Outstanding | % of providers rated Good | % of providers rated Requiring Improvement | % of providers rated Inadequate |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| National          | 16%                              | 77%                       | 6%   | 1%                              |
| West Midlands     | 19%                              | 76%                       | 4%   | 1%                              |
| <b>Shropshire</b> | <b>20%</b>                       | <b>77%</b>                | <b>2%</b>                                  | <b>1%</b>                       |

#### 4.12 **Special Educational Needs**

Work is currently underway to establish specialist hub provisions for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) on the sites of mainstream schools. School leaders are positive about this initiative and the Shropshire Parent and Carer Council (PACC) has been closely engaged in planning for this project. The proportion of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) completed within a 20-week period has increased from 33% in 2014, to 90% in 2018. The proportion of children with EHCPs has decreased and is now closer to the national average. Graduated Support Plans are used to fund short term provision for pupils the SEN in mainstream schools and this is increasing the confidence and capacity of school staff to meet pupils’ SEN before an EHCP is required.

#### 4.13 **Attendance and Exclusions**

Overall attendance across primary and secondary schools remains at 96 percent, 5 percent above the latest published national averages. Persistent absence has increased by 3 percent from 2016 – 2017 but remains just below the latest



published national average. The number of permanent exclusions of pupils has increased across primary and secondary schools nationally. In Shropshire the number of permanent exclusions has risen from 50 in 2016–2017 to 76 in 2017–2018.

#### **4.14 School Admissions**

In terms of school admissions, Shropshire Council continues to meet a high number of parental preferences in applications for school places. In the application round for September 2018, 91.7% of Shropshire parents were offered a place at their first preference secondary school, giving a ranking of second highest of West Midlands local authorities. 97.3% of Shropshire parents were offered a place at one of their three preferred schools. This compares with national figures of 82.1% first preferences and 93.8% at one of the three preferred secondary schools.

- 4.14.1 In terms of primary applications, Shropshire ranked highest of all West Midlands local authorities, offering 95.4% of Shropshire parents a place at their first preference primary school and 98.7% at one of the three preferred schools. This compares with 91.0% and 97.7% respectively in the national statistics.

#### **4.15 Key Priorities for the forthcoming year**

- a) Respond to any areas for development identified through the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)
- b) The development of our accommodation provision for Looked after Children
- c) Implementation of the Early Help Family Hubs
- d) Implement new referral process for Children's Social Care and Early Help (January 2019).
- e) Support and challenge to school leaders, including governors to:
  - i. Improve outcomes for all pupils
  - ii. Diminish the difference between the achievement of vulnerable pupils and their peers
  - iii. Reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusions by improving inclusion practice
- f) Establish SEN hub provision across the county.
- g) Minimise the impact of reduced funding and the consequent reduction in capacity for education improvement.
- h) Work closely with Schools Forum to maximise the impact of education funds and to continue to lobby for a fairer settlement for Shropshire.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Ofsted Report: “Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board”, 24 November 2017

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Cllr Nick Bardsley

**Local Member**

All

**Appendices**

None.