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9
Public

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICE

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1.0 Summary

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

The past year has been a challenging one, with the trend for an increased demand for children social care services continuing. Referrals to children's social care have continued to increase, however the number of children in care has remained stable over much of the period with approximately 307 children in care at any one point in time.

The education landscape continues to evolve as more schools become academies and the introduction of the Regional Schools Commissioner, who has oversight of Academies, has required the building of new relationships.

Shropshire now has 22 academy schools i.e. 12 Secondary schools, 9 primary schools, 1 Special school and 1 free school.

School Funding for Shropshire has remained a keen issue, and Schools Forum together with Council Members and officers have sought to raise the profile of sustainability across the sector.

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee has played an active role in influencing the direction of Children's services, with demonstrable impact. Child Sexual Exploitation has rightly been prominent in Scrutiny's work over the last year, with amendments being made to the licensing of taxi drivers and the development programme for elected Members. I am most appreciative of those Members who have played such a valuable contribution to the work of Children and Young People's Services.

Transformation activities have continued through this year, notably Inspire to Learn provision has begun to transfer into ip&e and Havenbrook has changed its

status to a Short Break provision in order to increase the number of children who are able to remain with their family rather than come into care.

REPORT

2.0 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING

2.1 Ofsted Inspections

2.1.1 Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

Shropshire Council's Children's Social Care was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2012 under the then unannounced inspections of local authority arrangements for the protection of children (safeguarding).

Ofsted would normally expect to inspect Local Authorities every three years, so an inspection can be expected at any time.

In preparation for an impending inspection the opportunity was taken to undertake an LGA Children's Safeguarding Peer Review in June 2015. The Peer Review is not an inspection, but does identify areas of good practise whilst offering support and guidance on areas for improvement. It focuses on five key themes:

- Effective practice, service delivery and the voice of the child
- Outcomes, impact and performance management
- Working together (including Health and Wellbeing Board)
- Capacity and managing resources
- Vision, strategy and leadership

It was pleasing to note that a number of Members of Council were involved in the review process.

The Peer Review process involved:-

- Looking at case records
- Document and data challenge
- Interview and visits
- Contact referral assessment audit.

In summary, 55 meetings were held and 60 cases reviewed.

The Peer Review noted the improvement journey that Shropshire Council and its partners have been on, and made particular mention of the passion and loyalty of staff and partners and of the commitment of agencies to work together to safeguard children.

Areas for further development included ensuring effective performance management and quality assurance processes are in place at all levels and routinely used to drive performance outcomes, as well as ensuring the quality of practice, making sure that interventions are timely and consistently outcome focussed, and that contacts and referrals and associated workflow from First Point of Contact (FPOC) through to the social care teams are easily navigated and operate to the standards that the Council sets.

As an outcome of the Peer Review an action plan is being developed in order to ensure that improvements identified are put into place, and an Internal Improvement Board has been established to oversee its implementation. I am grateful to those Members who have agreed to sit on the Board and look forward to its first meeting.

2.1.2 Children's Centres

Three Children's Centres have been inspected under the latest Ofsted inspection framework for Children's Centres. Two of these were judged as Good and one as Requires Improvement. Shropshire Children's Centres are now inspected in Groups as reflects the delivery model. The overall effectiveness of Children's Centres remains higher than the national average for Children's Centres inspected as Groups. (83% of CC Groups in Shropshire are judged as Good at the last inspection compared with a national average of 52%).

Outcomes identified during inspection include:

- Children are well prepared for school and achieving good levels of development,
- Health outcomes are positive and in recognition of effective partnership working,
- Users are very positive about the availability and range of services and
- Parents are more confident in parenting skills enabled by support such as Understanding Your Child courses.
- Plans to improve include:
- Improving the tracking of children's progress and development, particularly where children are in a target group
- Working more with adult learning and skills partners to track the progress of adult learners, workless and low income families to understanding achievement and sustained change to assist planning for the future.
- Improving the integration of data to evidence known, accessing and sustained engagement particularly from target groups.
- Refine action planning to target improvement in priority areas.

Shropshire Council Children's Centres have been assessed for Stage 2 and Stage 3 Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative (E7). This is a worldwide programme designed to implement practice standards that result in successful breastfeeding. Achievement of these standards include parent infant relationship building and very early child development, plus enhanced requirements in communication skills for staff. Shropshire Children's Centres met most of the standards. Staff including leaders were commended for their efforts, responsiveness and

effectiveness. Mothers reported being very positive about all the services they accessed. Partnership working was seen to be clearly evident with excellent communication. “Despite a significant reduction in staff there has been a drive to work smarter to provide consistent support and messages for parents irrespective of the provider”. This is evidence of strengthening the community in line with our Early Help vision.

2.1.3 Children’s Residential Homes

This year saw the full implementation of the redesign of our children’s homes.

Havenbrook was re-designated as a short breaks service for children on the edge of care. At its most recent interim inspection in February 2015 Ofsted judged the home to be making “improved effectiveness” with all eight requirements and four recommendations being addressed. They found that improvements have been made to young people’s short break plans to ensure their needs and circumstances are fully reflected in a way that shapes how they are looked after. Young people are positive about their short break experiences and say they feel very safe in the home and with the staff who look after them.

Our edge of care support services have shown successful outcomes in keeping children at home supported in family care where it is safe to do so. Havenbrook short breaks has increased its capacity to offer more children planned and emergency short breaks, and three full time outreach posts have been created to work in the community with young people and families preventing family breakdown. Of the 43 young people who were accommodated in the pilot phase, 13 (30%) were accommodated and 30 (70%) remained out of the looked after system. A new Support and Prevention Panel was established in March 2015 and this has evidence of high engagement with young people and their parents/carers in preventing family breakdown.

Chelmaren remains a high quality provision, having secured sustained effectiveness in its interim Ofsted inspection in March 2015 following its previous outstanding inspection.

2.2 TRANSFORMATION ACTIVITIES IN CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE

After a successful implementation the 2014/15 Early Help strategy is progressing now to evolve alongside the Troubled Families Phase 2 programme, which will be revised in September 2015 as “Strengthening Families through Early Help”. A review of all early help services is underway, with an analysis of data regarding needs and demands as well as performance to inform our future commissioning strategy. The combination of these will take us forward in our delivery of whole family focused early help delivered at a local level.

Compass (the front door to children social care services) has located to Mount McKinley co locating staff managing all concerns and referrals for children and families needing Targeted Early Help to those in need of protection. Compass brings together social workers, Targeted Youth Support workers and CAMHS workers. Work is underway to co-locate Police, Probation and Health

Visitor/School nurse representatives in order to build on our effective and timely information sharing.

To ensure we are meeting our placement sufficiency duties to have choice, quality and local care placements for children, a procurement process has been undertaken and we are in the final stages of agreeing two smaller block contracts with residential care providers. Our fostering training and support strategy has been revised and a new foster carer “payments for skill” introduced, which recognises foster carer exceptional skills and is focused on children’s outcomes.

In line with the Government’s clear agenda to regionalise adoption services, we are looking to the West Midlands region to see how we can achieve a regional approach that meets the needs of Shropshire children – maintaining our good quality and timely services but also challenging ourselves to achieve permanency for more children through Adoption or Special Guardianship where they cannot return to birth parent care.

There has been a higher than usual turnover of the social care workforce with a high number of staff on maternity leave, staff successful in career progression moves and some leavers from the organisation. This has led to the need for higher than usual agency staff in posts and a large number of newly qualified social workers. Key managerial posts have been appointed to and we have a stable managerial leadership team which now needs to embed itself. Maintaining workforce stability and staff retention is key in providing good quality services to children and it remains a priority to reduce high caseloads and ensure regular good quality support and supervision for our social workers and social care staff.

3.0 EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY

3.1 Ofsted Inspections

A significant number of schools in Shropshire were inspected by Ofsted during 2014-2015 and outcomes have improved the profile of Shropshire schools across primary and secondary schools. In August 2013 Shropshire had 70% of primary schools judged good or outstanding (compared with 78% nationally) and 75% children attended good or outstanding primary schools (compared with 77 % nationally). 71% of secondary schools were judged good or outstanding (compared with 72% nationally) and 74% children attended good or outstanding secondary schools (compared with 75% nationally).

The Education Improvement Service’s sharp focus on primary and secondary schools judged to be satisfactory or to require improvement has been sustained, and by August 2015 Shropshire had 82% of primary schools judged good or outstanding (compared to a latest national figure of 80%, in March 2015) and 83% pupils in good and outstanding schools (compared to a latest national figure of 82%). Ofsted ratings for individual secondary schools have changed (including two mainstream schools and one special LA maintained school moving from requiring improvement to good) but the overall figures have not changed significantly, with 71% secondary schools judged to be good or outstanding

(compared to a latest national figure of 73%) and approximately 73% pupils in good and outstanding schools (compared to a latest national figure of 76%).

The number of schools in Shropshire now judged to be inadequate continues to reduce: there are two LA maintained primary schools and one secondary academy in this category.

A revised framework for the inspection of Local Authority arrangements for supporting school improvement to ensure high quality education provision and outcomes for children was introduced in November 2014. Shropshire's Education Improvement Service has not yet been inspected, but the judgements made by Ofsted inspectors in their individual school inspection reports continue to confirm the effectiveness of the challenge and support provided by the service.

Regional HMI (including the Senior HMI) have continued to lead professional development sessions for Shropshire schools, throughout the last year.

3.2 Sustainability and efficiency of provision

Schools Forum has continued to work closely with officers and members on the funding and sustainability of schools in Shropshire. Overall the number of pupils in Shropshire schools is declining, in contrast to the national trend in many other local authority areas. The reduction is not evenly spread and varies across the county. In the short-term, the current updated projections indicate an overall reduction in pupil numbers of 3.2% (1,122 pupils) between 2014 and 2018 (3.7% in primary and 2.6% in secondary). This equates to a potential loss in funding to schools through the Dedicated Schools Grant of around £5 million.

This reduction in pupil numbers will have an impact on the post-16 phase over time, and post-16 providers know that they need to plan for this potential reduction in student numbers and in funding for post-16 places.

While there is an overall demographic decline, pupil projections confirm that in some areas of the county there will be pressure on school places, mainly linked to proposed large scale housing developments. In the majority of cases this increased demand is neither significant nor imminent and can be absorbed within the existing provision, particularly where there are places available within neighbouring schools.

School leaders and governors are becoming increasingly aware of the demographic challenges facing their individual schools, or group of schools, and the need to secure sustainable models of leadership to ensure their schools are financially and educationally viable in the future. Data, together with a modelling tool, has been made available to all schools to facilitate their planning.

Five federations involving eleven primary schools have been established and governors of a further six primary schools are exploring opportunities to establish new federations or join existing ones. A further twenty-eight primary and secondary schools are working under collaborative arrangements either as Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or learning trusts.

The number of young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) remains below the national average. But we are not complacent, and continually look for new and innovative ways to engage with young people and remove barriers to learning and employment. The Stride Out Project which began in June is a partnership between Shropshire Council's Shropshire Youth, the Emerging Leaders charity and The Shrewsbury Club, and has provided 12 local teenagers who are NEET with the chance to learn leadership skills and improve employability skills and confidence.

3.4 Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

The Children and Families Act came into force in September 2014, there is an ongoing focus on implementation particularly with reference to the Local Offer and the introduction of Personal Budgets.

Shropshire strengthened multi-agency links at both strategic and operational levels. The recent Health appointment of a Designated Medical Officer (DMO) will further support this work. Shropshire also continue to work with parent representatives and young people to ensure a person-centred approach to implementation of SEND reforms. Strengthening existing links and creating new opportunities to work with voluntary sector organisations remain a priority.

The 16 to 25 Pathway has been and is continuing to be developed to ensure improved outcomes for young people with SEND. In March 2015 a very successful and well attended post-16 conference was held, which centred on preparing for adulthood. This event provided the opportunity to disseminate information across a range of stakeholders and collect essential feedback to inform future strategic developments in this area.

A priority area for 2015/16 will be measuring the extent that Shropshire Council has achieved the key priorities of:

- establishing a family centred approach to the assessment process
- closer working across education, health and social care
- developing an effective and accessible local offer
- supporting children and young people with SEND to prepare for adulthood.
- closing the gaps in achievement.

There continues to be an emphasis for the Local Authority to develop appropriate specialist, local and cost effective provision for children/ young people with SEND with the aim of enabling them to remain within their communities as much as possible. These developments are being undertaken whilst continuing to expand the capacity of mainstream provisions to provide an inclusive education for children and young people with SEND.

The first specialist hub provision for children with difficulties associated with an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) officially opened in June this year, although it has been fully operational since April. It currently has places for 16 pupils aged 11 to 16. This will rise to a maximum of 24. It is anticipated that a second specialist hub will open in early 2017, this will be at a location in the south of the

county.

A primary provision for children with needs associated with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) has been developed at Holy Trinity Primary School, Oswestry in partnership with Woodlands Special School. The Tuition Medical and Behaviour Support Service (TMBSS) has also increased local provision in the north with a hub provision at The Meadows Primary School, Oswestry.

3.5 Early Years

The local authority provides information, support and guidance to Early Years providers in line with the statutory duties set out in the current code of practice. The quality of Shropshire early years provision is better than the national average as evidenced by the following table showing the achievement of Shropshire early years providers at their most recent Ofsted inspection.

This is based on data released by Ofsted in March 2015:

Area	% of providers rated Outstanding	% of providers rated Good	% of providers rated Requiring improvement	% of providers rated Inadequate
National	13%	72%	14%	1%
Shropshire	17%	72%	10%	1%

We intend to continue to focus efforts on those providers currently judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate. Working with Ofsted we will support the completion of action plans to focus on the area identified by Ofsted as needing improvement and offer support and guidance to the settings in those area.

Improved partnership working across the health, education and social care has increased the take up of early education places for disadvantaged 2 year olds in the last year from 55% to 71%. This is higher than the national average take up rate of 65%.

The implementation of the Integrated Review for 2 year olds will start in mid-September, involving Health Visiting, Early Education Providers and Children’s Centre’s working in partnership to identify and support development needs for young children.

3.6 Learning and Skills Restructure.

Learning and Skills have restructured so that it can meet the Council’s commissioning operating model in the future.

A small core team has been retained which will carry out quality assurance, strategy development and identification of schools requiring improvement, support and challenge.

Providers of services are now clearly identifiable, i.e. the traded and commissioned services.

Service provision has begun to transfer to ip&e as agreed by Cabinet on 20th May 2015.

Phases 1 and 2 of the transfer have now been completed with the following services transferring to ip&e via an enabling contract.

- Shropshire Music Service
- Schools Library Service
- Schools IT Service
- Schools Financial Services
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Education Access and Equality
- Governor Support Services

3.7 The Learning, Employment & Training Services (LETS)

County Training/ACL has continued to provide a wide range of successful services to young people, unemployed adults, hard to reach groups and employers over the last year. In March 2015 an OFSTED inspection graded the provision as good in all areas and outstanding for Leadership and Management, Health and Social Care and Safeguarding.

Cabinet has agreed to the externalisation of County Training/ACL. A process is in place to support the merger of the elements of provision which are funded by the Skills Funding Agency/Education funding Agency with a local FE College. Discussions are taking place to arrange the transfer the work which is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions to external providers

4.0 SHROPSHIRE TROUBLED FAMILIES – STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

4.1 Phase 1 of the Troubled Families Programme came to an end this year. The last claims for phase 1 were completed in May 2015, 100% of engaged families were claimed for (turned around). Data for this was collected for entry onto the national cost saving calculator at the end of July.

By January 2015 398 families had achieved outcomes against the programme criteria:

- a) 396 families achieved the improvements required in youth crime, ASB or education outcomes
- b) 50 families gained employment and stopped claiming out of work benefits
- c) 9 families achieved successful 'progress to work' measures
- d) Of the above families, 38 also achieved employment or achieved the progress to work outcome.

A further 57 families outcomes were audited between January and May resulting in a 100% 'turn around' rate for phase 1.

4.2 Early Starter for Phase 2

Shropshire was part of the second wave of authorities that were offered the opportunity to participate as early starters in January 2015. 79 families have been identified as meeting at least 2 of the 6 criteria and are engaged in assessment, planning or targeted work through a range of agencies. These families were also entered on the national cost savings calculator.

4.3 Phase 2 (Strengthening Families)

While Phase 2 of the Troubled Families programme will retain a focus on those families with multiple problems and that are high cost, it will reach out to families with a broader range of problems. Shropshire is required to engage with 1570 families over the five years of Phase 2. The Troubled Families programme will be used to further develop the ‘Think Family’ approach, key for effective Early Help.

5.0 NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE (NCS)

58 School Leavers from across Shropshire participated in Shropshire Council’s National Citizenship Service project which is a nationally funded scheme. This is a four week programme, designed to enable school leavers to take part in a range of team building challenges activities and to engage with their communities. Young people worked in small groups to plan and deliver a range of social action projects based on community needs. For example, young people organised a fun day in aid of Help the Heroes, two teams raised money for epilepsy charities, whilst another group focused on social action and leaving a legacy after visiting a voluntary run youth club. A graduation event was held so that the contribution of young people to their communities could be acknowledged.

6.0 TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The scale and pace of change in both Children's Social Care and Education continues. Add to this the financial imperatives of Shropshire Council, and the need for change is great and the ongoing priority during this period will be to ensure services achieve good outcomes for our children and young people in a more cost effective way.

Key priorities for 2015/16 are:-

- Whilst the Corporate Parenting Panel membership has been reviewed to include key stakeholders, in order to ensure understanding and engagement of the corporate parenting agenda the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Children in Care Council remain a key priority for further development.
- Being inspection ready. New inspection regimes have been introduced for both Children's Social Care (including Safeguarding, Looked After Children and the Adoption process) and Education. The areas for development identified by the Peer Review will be a key area for attention.

- The performance of our schools and the outcomes for children, especially those who are disadvantaged, will remain a focus of our work. We will continue to both support and challenge schools, including academies, in order to address underperformance and drive up outcomes.
- The transfer of some services to Inspire 2 Learn (I2L), within ip&e has already been undertaken and the transition of further education support service teams will continue through 2015/16.
- Continued implementation of the SEND reforms including personalisation
- Despite positive performance headlines, review our fostering and adoption processes to improve the timeliness of recruitment of carers and to improve our aspirations for long term permanency outside of local authority care for what might be deemed hard to place children.

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

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Ann Hartley

Local Member

All

Appendices

None.