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Public

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Councillor David Minnery

1.0 Summary

This report provides information on the key achievements and developments of the past year, and strategic priorities for the forthcoming year. I was appointed to the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services in January 2016. I am grateful to my predecessor for her contribution to this role up to that date.

As ever, the past year has been a challenging one, with the trend for an increased demand for children social care services continuing. Initial contacts to children's social care have continued to increase, however the number of children in care has remained stable at its reduced level over the period with approximately 280 children in care at any one point in time. Early help provision has remained an important part in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable children and families.

The education landscape continues to evolve as the Government's drive to academise all schools accelerates.

Shropshire now has 27 academy schools: 12 secondary schools, 1 all-through school, 12 primary schools, 1 special school and 1 free school.

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).

The current programme of Ofsted inspections is expected to run until December 2017, so an inspection can be expected at any time and up to that point. Preparation therefore continues.

The Joint Adoption Service was inspected as part of Telford Single Inspection Framework (SIF) and was found to be good. The service will of course be re-inspected as part of the Shropshire SIF.

Ofsted have introduced a new multi agency Targeted Area Inspection which focuses on how key agencies including health, police and probation work together to identify children at risk and safeguard children. Preparation for this inspection regime has been undertaken.

2.1.2 Children’s Centres

Shropshire has eleven gradings for Childrens Centres, nine out of the eleven (81%) being graded as good. Childrens Centres make up a significant part of the Early Help Offer and during 2016 a real focus has ensured that the delivery of services and support is aligned to the Strengthening Families through the Early Help Strategy and the principles of the Strengthening Families programme. This has created the opportunity during 2016 to redesign and redevelop this area of work to provide more focussed targeted case work and targeted group work for families alongside work to increase collaboration and integration of targeted support with key stakeholders.

2.1.3 Children’s Residential Homes

Both Chelmaren and Havenbrook have been inspected twice by Ofsted in the last twelve months, for interim and full inspections. The outcomes were:

Chelmaren

24/11/15 – Full inspection	Outcome – Outstanding
12/02/16 – Interim Inspection	Outcome – Improved Effectiveness

Havenbrook

December 2015 - Full inspection	Outcome – Requires Improvement
10/02/16 – Interim Inspection	Outcome – Improved Effectiveness

2.2 Development in 2016

The Childrens Social Care teams have been restructured in April 2016 in response to emerging issues regarding the throughput of work in previously larger Case Management Teams. Ensuring effective performance management and quality assurance processes are in place as well as ensuring the quality of practice, making sure that interventions are timely and consistent, remain key priorities.

There has been a continued need for higher than usual agency staff in posts and a large number of newly qualified social workers. The additional Head of Service post for Quality Assurance and Performance has taken up post. All other 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.

We have received the first three Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) whom we have successfully transferred from Kent as part of their dispersal scheme. I am pleased to report that the children are suitably settled in Supported Lodgings. It is important that we increase our capacity to accommodate more UASC as the national dispersal scheme commences.

In line with the Government’s clear agenda to regionalise adoption services, we are continuing to work with five West Midlands Local Authorities 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.

Our role as Corporate Parent remains vital in ensuring that those children who are in the Care of Shropshire Council have the best life that they can. The Corporate Parenting Panel has been reviewed both in terms of membership and the way that it operates. The Children In Care Council has been reinvented and for the first time in many years, members have been able to actively engage directly with children in care. Feedback from members was positive, and we aim to repeat this valuable process. The Corporate Parenting Pledge is currently being reviewed by our young people, and will be brought forward for members to endorse.

3.0 EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY

3.1 Ofsted Inspections

28 of the 153 schools and academies in Shropshire were inspected by Ofsted during 2015-2016 and outcomes have continued to improve the profile of Shropshire primary and secondary schools. The Education Improvement Service’s sustained and sharp focus on primary and secondary schools judged to be satisfactory or to require improvement has been sustained, and by August 2016 87% of all Shropshire schools and academies were judged as good or outstanding compared to the latest national figure of 84%. 89% of LA maintained schools are good or outstanding and 68% of Academies and Free schools are good or outstanding. 88% of primary schools and academies are judged good or outstanding compared with the latest national figure of 84%. Ofsted ratings for secondary schools and academies have also improved with 81% now judged to be good or outstanding compare to the latest national figure of 75%. In August 2015 71% of secondary schools and academies were good or outstanding.

The number of schools in Shropshire now judged to be inadequate has continued to reduce: there is 1 LA maintained primary school in this category.

A revised framework and Handbook for the inspection of Local Authority arrangements for supporting school improvement to ensure high quality education provision and outcomes for children was published in September 2015. 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.

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, and have continued to support schools and governing bodies to consider their individual and collective position, with a growing number of federations or multi academy trust developing.

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. Finance workshops for vulnerable schools focusing on the use of the finance modelling tool have been held. The workshops have challenged and supported governors and Headteachers to take a proactive approach to securing a sustainable approach to ensuring a good or better education for children in their community.

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, and consultations have been undertaken in the five specific areas to explore potential solutions.

Development sessions with Headteachers and chairs of governors have been undertaken, focussing on the government plans outline in Education Excellence Everywhere, to increase at pace the academy programme. Sessions aimed to raise awareness and understanding, and to engage decision makers in debate about Shropshire’s response to the issue. Further sessions are planned for October 2016.

The number of young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) remains below the national average.

3.4 Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

Work has continued to implement the SEND reforms, and in particular the conversion of Statements of Special Educational needs to integrated Education Health and Care Plans, together with the development of the Local Offer.

The prevalence of SEN at a local level continues to increase, and so we have been working hard to in developing specialist provision within mainstream setting, including early years settings. Plans include a second primary hub in South Shropshire for pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour, this will provide similar opportunity to that which exists in the Oswestry area. Plans are also progressing for a second specialist secondary hub provision to be located in the south of the County.

In May this year the Government published its framework for the Local Area inspection of SEND. This will be a joint inspection of the LA and the CCG, undertaken by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to assess the effectiveness of local areas in fulfilling the new duties. Whilst an inspection has not yet taken place, preparation has been ongoing.

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 inspection achievements of Shropshire early years providers, along with national and regional comparisons.

The table is based on data released by Ofsted for the period 1 January 2016 – 31 March 2016.

Area	% of providers rated Outstanding	% of providers rated Good	% of providers rated Requiring Improvement	% of providers rated Inadequate
National	22%	64%	9%	4%
West Midlands	20%	60%	11%	9%
Shropshire	55%	36%	0%	9%

Continued partnership working across early education, health and social care has shown an increased take up of early education places for disadvantaged 2 year olds (scheme title: 24U). In the last year this has risen from 71% to 79%, which is higher than the national take up rate of 70%.

The Integrated Review for 2 year olds (programme title: All about me @ 2), will be launched at the Early Years Provider Network Meeting in November 2016, following a pilot period which ended in July 2016. The full roll out across the county will commence in January 2017.

3.6 University Centre Shrewsbury

In January the oversight of the University development moved into the Children and Young People Portfolio. In its second year of operation, the University is

developing its curriculum and I am pleased to see an increasing numbers of students starting in September 2016.

4.0 Summary

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 will be to ensure services achieve good outcomes for our children and young people in a more cost effective way.

Key priorities for 2016/17 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.
- Embed new social work structure and ensure processes and systems are promoting timely interventions and decision making for children and families
- Continue to embed quality assurance, and achieve consistency of good practice in social work.
- 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 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.
- To challenge and support governors and headteachers to be proactive in responding to national policy concerning academies including through the exploring the opportunity to establish a local authority Multi-Academy Trust
- Continued implementation of the SEND reforms including personalisation

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)

David Minnery

Local Member

All

Appendices

None.