



Committee and Date
Council
21 March 2024

Item

Public



Children’s Improvement Board

Responsible Officer:	Tanya Miles		
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Kirstie Hurst-Knight		

1. Synopsis

To regularise and insert into Part 3 of the Constitution the recently formed Children’s Improvement Board.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. As all Members will appreciate decisive action was required to address the concerns raised during the Ofsted Focused Visit in November 2023. Though their formal letter was not published until 12 January 2024, immediate steps were taken to establish a provisional Children’s Improvement Board to develop the Improvement Plan required by Ofsted.
- 2.2. Given the embargoed nature of the Ofsted letter it was not possible to establish a fully formed Board until January and we are now seeking formal Council approval to include the Board within Part 3 of the Constitution (Statutory and Advisory Bodies). The Board includes the Chief Executive (chair), Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, Opposition Members who sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Executive Director of People, Assistant Director Childrens Social Care & Safeguarding as well as a representative from the LGA. The full Terms of Reference are included as Appendix 1
- 2.3. A Children’s Improvement Board is a common feature where Council’s have experienced critical Ofsted visits/inspections. Sometimes they are directed to introduce them by the Department for Education but in Shropshire’s case, it was a proactive decision to set the Board up voluntarily.

3. Recommendations

That Council approve the formal establishment of a Children's Improvement Board with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 The Report is concerned with formal establishment of the Board rather than the risks that it seeks to address. It is important to ensure that the Board is appropriately referenced within the Constitution so that all members and the public are aware of what it does.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no financial implications of formally including the Board within Part 3 of the Constitution.

6. Background

- 6.1. Members will be aware that during the Ofsted Focused Visit in November 2023, certain weaknesses in child protection practice were identified including the quality of management oversight and decision-making, staff supervision, and appropriate challenge by child protection chairs.
- 6.2. As an immediate action, the informal establishment of the Children's Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive was agreed with both Ofsted and the Department for Education ("DfE").
- 6.3. Careful consideration was given to the set-up of this Board and its membership. It is correct to say that a number of other such Improvement Boards set up over the past few years by various local authorities across the country have external agency members (such as from the NHS and Police). However, that approach was not considered necessary in Shropshire because we are largely already aware of the issues of concern (having identified them within our pre-visit self-assessment) which are mainly inward looking rather than involving external partners. This point was raised at a recent Safeguarding Partnership meeting and it was accepted that the issues need to be predominantly addressed by the Council itself.
- 6.4. A number of the other Improvement Boards have engaged independent chairs for the meetings. Often that has been because their establishment has been directed by the DfE and there is a requirement for a level of independent oversight. That is not currently considered to be a necessity in Shropshire's situation as the priority was to prepare and recommend to Cabinet the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan. The key role of the Board moving forward is to ensure that the Council delivers on the Improvement Plan actions.

- 6.5. Given that the Board includes both Members and Officers it cannot be a formal Council committee and so it can only be advisory in nature. Formal decisions will be taken on the recommendations of the Board by either the Executive Director of People and/or the Chief Executive or in the case of significant policy proposals by Cabinet. Oversight of the Board's operation is undertaken by the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.
- 6.6. As set out in its Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) the role of the Improvement Board is to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan.

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

Local Member: All

Consultation with Local Member – Please consider the Local Member Protocol (see page E60 onwards of part 5 of the Constitution) and determine whether it is necessary to consult with the local member over the proposal set out in this report. This may not always be applicable (eg where the proposal affects all of Shropshire) but it should always be a consideration and in some cases a necessity so as to comply with the spirit of the Protocol.

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1 – Children's Improvement Board Terms of Reference