

**To the Chair and Members of the
SCHOOLS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL**

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Nuala Fennelly	ALL	K1155

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update on improvements to children services since the last report to Cabinet in March 2013. Changes include the appointment of a new DCS, the appointment of an Improvement partner, the publication of the Le Grand / Wood report, the response to that by the Secretary of State for Education including a draft direction, the response from the Mayor to the Secretary of State, and the final Direction that was issued in August 2013.
2. The Improvement Plan that was agreed in March 2013 is being refreshed in the light of the events described in the previous paragraph.

EXEMPT REPORT

3. This is not an exempt report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Scrutiny is asked to note the current position and to agree how frequently the committee wishes updates on the delivery of the refreshed Improvement Plan.

BACKGROUND

5. The report to Cabinet in March 2013 followed on from the Ofsted inspection in October 2012 and the publication of the Carlisle report to the Secretary of State. During March the Chief Executive commissioned the LGA to undertake a review of social work practice and the findings of that review also informed the plan.
6. The Improvement Plan in March 2013 focussed on the quality of practice, the need to strengthen social work staffing and management, leadership and governance of CYPS, outcomes for children in care,

improving education standards and dealing with the financial position. The Plan was very focussed on CYPS and did not address broader strategic leadership, the role of children's services in the context of the wider system, and the multi-agency dimension, so the impact of the Plan would inevitably be more limited than if it were wider ranging. The Plan produced in March 2013 was summarised in what was termed Appendix A, with a detailed plan covering all the Ofsted and Carlisle recommendations sitting behind the summary.

7. The report also outlined proposed performance monitoring arrangements with a commitment to deliver monthly reports to the Council, commissioners and the DfE. There was also an intention for 4 monthly mini reviews to be undertaken by other LAs.
8. There was also an update on progress achieved since the previous inspection in October 2012 and a reference to the Council's intention to recruit an improvement partner once the direction of the Secretary of State became known.
9. Annex b attached to the report to Cabinet in March 2013 clarified how additional funding to support the improvement of services would be used. This amounted to £405k in 2012/13, and £1577k in 2013/14.
10. Following the LGA review and report, the plan was amended to focus more specifically on social care, under 6 themes:

Theme One: Providing confident leadership and management across children's services - leaders will articulate a clear vision for the service and provide a sense of direction. They will lay out a clear set of priorities and pace the actions so that change is manageable, achievable and sustainable. Members will be well engaged with the service, support the improvement and be active Corporate Parents

Theme Two: Putting in place effective front-line practice - aiming to develop high quality, rigorous and consistent front-line practice which will safeguard children and young people, including those who are looked after. We will build a range of services which support families and their children as early as possible.

Theme Three: Creating an organisation fit for purpose - putting in place an effective and sustainable structure and ensuring that front-line teams receive the infrastructure support they need.

Theme Four: Strengthening partnerships to make a difference – developing a shared vision with all our partners and work together to improve services to safeguard and look after children and young people through the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB)

Theme Five: Becoming the employer of choice in the region - marketing Doncaster as the employer of choice within the region for social workers alongside developing a compelling offer based on the opportunities, experience and support that Doncaster offers as an employer.

Theme Six: Robustly managing performance - Practice and management across the council and partners will be supported by an effective performance and accountability framework to ensure business intelligence and information is shared and exploited in order to achieve better outcomes for children, young people and their families in Doncaster.

Update since March 2013

- 11 Following the retirement of Chris Pratt at the end of June 2013, the Council appointed Eleanor Brazil as interim Director of CYPS. She came into post on 1st July 2013.
- 12 The Council also progressed a tendering process to appoint an Improvement partner to provide capacity and expertise to drive forward improvement in children's services. Impower was the successful organisation presenting a bid which focused on delivering against the six themes outlined above. Their contract is for 2 years, also starting on 1st July. The contract includes a requirement for a Director of Children's Services, and Impower confirmed the appointment of Eleanor Brazil in this role.
- 13 In July 2013 the Le Grand / Wood report to the Secretary of State for Education was published. The Secretary of State accepted 2 of the recommendations of the report and these were put into a formal draft direction to the Council:
 - 1) To appoint a Commissioner for children's social care to oversee the establishment of an independent trust to deliver social care services
 - 2) That an independent Trust be set up by April 2014 to deliver children's social care services
- 14 The Council was given 4 weeks in which to respond and submitted a detailed alternative proposal on the 13th August. This is attached as Appendix 1. The Council's proposal addressed the legal, financial and H.R. issues that had not been clarified in the Le Grand / Wood report. The Council put forward an option which responded to the Secretary of State's intention that an independent Trust should be established to deliver children's social care, but retains appropriate Council involvement and accountability.
- 15 On 19th August the Secretary of State responded with a letter to the Mayor, and a Direction to the Council. This confirms his intention to appoint Alan Wood, as commissioner for children's social care, accountable to the Secretary of State, with responsibility to establish an independent trust to deliver children's social care services. The letter and Direction agree to discussions between the Secretary of State and the Mayor on the arrangements for and nature of the Trust, in the light of the proposal from the Council. It is anticipated that these discussions will take place during September or October 2013. The letter and the Direction are attached as Appendix 2.

Revised Improvement Plan

- 16 Since April 2013, performance monitoring of children's social care has been significantly strengthened with weekly reports and meetings outlining the position with regard to initial and core assessments, staffing and recruitment, caseloads, and statutory requirements such as visiting children subject to child protection plans and looked after. In many of these areas the position has gradually improved although there remain significant issues with respect to inconsistent quality of practice.
- 17 It is also of concern that the number of referrals to children's social care, the numbers subject to child protection plans and in care continue to remain very high. The lack of effective early help and early intervention services to support families needs to be addressed otherwise it is unlikely this will change.
- 18 Working with Impower, the Improvement Plan is being revised, building on the work done earlier this year but taking account of the new circumstances and improvements that have been made to date. The revised plan is intended to deliver on 4 clear objectives:
- 1. Strategic Direction**
To establish an agreed multi-agency vision for children, young people and families and an aspirational plan to improve outcomes for all children and young people, particularly vulnerable young people, driven forward by an effective strategic partnership.
 - 2. Improving the child and family journey**
To ensure that children and their families receive the right support at the right time in the right place, and effective monitoring identifies shortfalls in practice and ensures they are addressed.
 - 3. Stable and high performing workforce**
To put in place a stable, well-supported workforce, which understands and delivers good practice and improved outcomes for children and young people.
 - 4. Fit for purpose organisation**
To ensure operational services provide Value for money, take account of the need to reduce costs and are effectively supported to maximise efficient service delivery.
- 19 Work is continuing to improve services and is not waiting for the revised plan to be agreed. A Children Services Programme Board chaired by the Chief Executive, with senior representation from partner agencies will meet monthly to over-see improvements.
- 20 The final plan will be considered for approval by Cabinet on the 2nd October 2013.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 21 The Council's response to Le Grand / Wood report addressed the gaps

in that report and proposed a more robust way forward.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

- 22 The appointment of an improvement partner was believed necessary in the light of on-going concerns and need to increase pace of improvement. Not doing this would potentially delay improvements further.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

23

	Priority Outcome	Implications of this initiative
1.	Doncaster's economy develops and thrives, underpinned by effective education and skills	The refreshed Improvement Plan priorities are aimed particularly on social care in strengthening services to ensure maximum protection for children and young people and improving children's lives to reach quality of life outcomes. There are four clear objectives shown at 18 above.
2.	Children are safe	
3.	Stronger families and stronger communities	
4.	Modernised and sustainable Adult Social Care Services with increased choice and control	
5.	Effective arrangements are in place to deliver a clean, safe and attractive local environment	
6.	The Council is operating effectively, with change embedded and sustained with robust plans in place to operate within future resource allocations	

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

- 24 Not continuing to improve services is a significant risk and will impact on outcomes for children and young people.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 25 Children's services operate within an extensive statutory framework, particularly the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004, and various Education Acts. Services are highly regulated and systematically subject to inspections by Ofsted and other regulatory bodies.
- 26 Further specific and bespoke legal advice will be required as the situation within Children's Services develops, particularly in relation to the Direction issued by the Secretary of State and the establishment of an Independent Trust to deliver Children's Services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 27 As set out above, the original Improvement Plan approved by Cabinet on 27th March 2013 included the financial plan and this set out additional funding of £405k in 2012/13 and £1,577k for 2013/14. At this time the full financial implications of working with the Improvement partner were not known.
- 28 The contract was tendered in May/June and the cost was higher than previously established in the March report. Additional funding to support the new DCS and Improvement Partner of £2.7m was subsequently approved in the Finance and Performance Improvement 2012/13 Quarter 4 report to Cabinet on 19th June 2013. The contract with the Improvement Partner and DCS is for £1.8m for the first 2 years.
- 29 The report to be presented to Cabinet on 2nd October 2013 will include the updated financial plan details.

CONSULTATION

- 30 This report has significant implications in terms of the following:

Procurement	x	Crime & Disorder	
Human Resources	x	Human Rights & Equalities	
Buildings, Land and Occupiers		Environment & Sustainability	
ICT		Capital Programme	

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- i) Children and Young People's Plan (U409) – report to Cabinet on 27 March 2013
- ii) Proposals for a Doncaster Children's Trust – Appendix 1
- iii) Letter from Secretary of State dated 19 August 2013 and Doncaster Direction – Appendix 2

The following documents can also be found at the Department for Education (DfE) website link -

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/safeguardingchildren/a00223342/improving-childrens-care-doncaster>

- iv) Le Grand / Wood Report to Secretary of State – May 2013
- v) Letter from Secretary of State dated 15 July 2013 to Mayor
- vi) Proposals for a Doncaster Children's Trust – Appendix 1 to this report.
- vii) Letter from Secretary of State dated 19 August 2013 and Doncaster Direction – Appendix 2 to this report

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Eleanor Brazil

Tel: 01302 737800 eleanor.brazil@doncaster.gov.uk

Eleanor Brazil
Director, Children and Young People's Service