

The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 3BT

Contact: Jo Miller
Tel: 01302 862230
E-Mail: jo.miller@doncaster.gov.uk

Date: 29 January 2016

Annual Report of the Doncaster Children's Services Trust (1 October 2014 – 30 September 2015)

Dear Secretary of State,

The establishment of the Doncaster Children's Services Trust, the first of its kind in the country, has created much interest within the children's social care sector itself and local authorities nationally. There has been no blueprint to follow and, as such, the past year has been a period of learning for all – the Council, the Trust, and our partners. It has been characterised by an increased focus on improving services for children and young people, innovative practice, and the strengthening of partnership working, not only between the Council and the Trust, but also across the wider partnership of Team Doncaster.

Over the past twelve months, there have been thirteen inspections by regulatory bodies across the range of service areas delivered by the Trust, where inspectors have reported evidence of the progress made, such that we can confidently state that:

“Services for children and young people in Doncaster are improving”

However, the Council and the Trust recognise the areas where progress has been slower and practice needs to strengthen, and are resolute in their determination that further improvements are realised in order that children's services meets the performance directions according to the timeframe set out within the Service Delivery Contract. Our assessment of performance indicates that we are on track to reach the Ofsted judgement of 'Requires Improvement' milestone by April 2016, and that a number of areas are already making clear progress towards 'Good' and 'Outstanding' judgements.

The success that has been realised to date has been achieved through the experience, determination and leadership provided by the management teams and supporting staff in the Council and the Trust, together with members of the Trust Board who have provided the Trust with valuable expertise, assistance and

challenge. We also recognise the support provided by the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board, partners in both the private and voluntary sector, and external agencies – from directly supporting service delivery through to providing independent challenge and peer review – that has enabled these improvements to take shape.

Over the past year, the Council and the Trust have welcomed a series of external observations and reviews in regard to the functioning of the Trust. These have included a joint visit by Alan Wood and Professor Julian Legrand, a visit by Safelives to examine work on Domestic Abuse and some ‘deep dive’ activity by the improvement partner appointed by the Department for Education, Achieving for Children, which has focused primarily around Early Help.

The key priority for the forthcoming year is to build upon these firm foundations so that we can develop, together with the Trust as our strategic partner, the necessary systems leadership and further innovative practice to continue to improve outcomes for our children, young people, and their families within the borough of Doncaster, whilst recognising the challenges that may arise from devolution and other changes to local government.

Yours sincerely

Jo Miller

Counter-signatories:

Ros Jones, Elected Mayor, DMBC

Cllr Nuala Fennelly, Lead Member for Children’s Services, DMBC

Damian Allen, Director of Children’s Services, DMBC

Colin Hilton, Chair, DCST

Paul Moffat, Chief Executive, DCST

Abridged Report

Summary of the Trust's performance against Performance Indicators in the preceding Contract Year

The Council can report that performance across almost all key indicators is showing improvement or stability, and that trends are largely positive. Of particular note:

14 - 16
Appendix A

- A review and strengthening of the Response and Referral service, including Front Door arrangements has led to a reduction in the re-referral rate from 38% at the point of transfer of children's services from the local authority, to 23% after 12 months operation by the Trust - This figure is now better than national and regional performance; 17
- similarly, a reduction in the number of children and young people becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan for second or subsequent time from 16% to 13% - placing Trust performance close to top quartile, based on latest available national data; and 17
- a reduction in the number of children experiencing three or more moves in a year from 11% to 7% in quarter. 17

In regard to early help performance, upon transfer to the Trust, referral rates were almost twice as high as the national average. Changes to management of the response and referral service, coupled with improved recording procedures brought this rate closer to national average for the reporting period April 14 to March 15 (latest available data).

20-21

The improvement in performance has been underpinned by improved staff stability, with the reliance on frontline agency staff reducing from 18% to 10%, and turnover rates falling from 29% to 18%.

17

Over the past twelve months, there have been a total of thirteen regulatory inspections of children's services provided by the Trust, that have reported clear improvements to services provided to children, young people and their families.

- The Trust has been judged as Good both as an Independent Fostering Agency and also as a Voluntary Adoption Agency. 3, 32
- All four children's homes have been inspected during the first year of operation by the Trust - Three are now judged to be Good and one as Outstanding. 3, 31
- The recent multi-agency inspection of Youth Offending Work in Doncaster identified four unsatisfactory areas of performance, one poor and one satisfactory. The Youth Justice Board is satisfied with the progress being made by the Trust Youth Offending Service against its improvement targets and it is expected that all changes will be embedded and evidenced within practice by April 2016. 3, 33

At the recent Ofsted inspection of 'services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers', whilst the overall judgement was Inadequate, significant improvements were reported to areas that, under a different framework, had all previously been judged as inadequate:

3, 28

- Children who need help and protection: Inadequate
- Children looked after and achieving permanence: Requires Improvement
- Adoption performance: Good
- Experience and progress of care leavers: Requires Improvement
- Leadership, management and governance: Requires Improvement

A shared action plan was developed by the Trust immediately post-inspection aligned to the 20 recommendations within the Inspection Report, with robust arrangements in place to ensure pace in relation to progress in preparation for further external review or inspection, that is ultimately overseen by a Joint Council and Trust Strategic Inspection Group.

29

The Trust has performed well across its suite of innovation projects, achieving particular national acclaim for its work on the 'Growing Futures' and 'Pause' Department for Education (DfE) funded innovation projects. The Growing Futures work has been particularly effective in driving strategic engagement of partners in tackling domestic abuse, including the development of new interventions and ways of working, workforce reforms and new accredited learning programmes each of which show potential for being scaled up for use at national level.

25

Recent external scrutiny through Ofsted inspection of the Trust's activities clearly recognises the progress that has been made, whilst also confirming what is needed to secure the continuous improvement required to achieve the Trust's and Councils' ambition for services to be Outstanding by October 2019.

22, 34

The Council's assessment of performance indicates that the Trust is on track to reach the Ofsted judgement of 'Requires Improvement' milestone by April 2016, as determined in the Service Delivery Contract.

Summary of the Trust's performance against budget in the preceding Contract Year

Since establishment, the Trust have been developing their financial management role, gaining a better understanding of the Council's requirements, improving reporting and the general the provision of information. The Council is satisfied with the financial information provided from the Trust, but have recognised that financial performance measures set out in the contract require amendment to ensure they are more relevant and fit for purpose.

38

The Trust's Annual Report and Accounts, for the period 6th December 2014 to 31st March 2015, was submitted to the Council for noting, as per the contract requirement. The final outturn was, after the risk share mechanism adjustment, a surplus of £49k.

36 - 37

The Trust's quarter 2 financial monitoring report for 2015/16 presented a forecast outturn overspend of £348k, including funding from DfE, with the key pressure continuing to be costs of children placed in care. The Trust is addressing the pressure on placement costs in conjunction with the Council and a contract variation will be raised reflecting the increased activity in line with the contract. As such, the Trust is working towards ensuring that a balanced budget exists at year end.

40

Confirmation in principle of the budget (subject to Council approval) that will be made available to the Trust by the Council for the next Contract Year

The Council and the Trust have worked together to agree the indicative budget of £42.2m, a net reduction of £111k. The discussions have addressed the items listed under the Contract in Schedule 3 'Annual Review' including uplifts for pay and price inflation, any changes in law, demand for services and a contribution towards the Council's savings targets.

41-45

The budget is considered by the Council to be sufficient to enable the Trust to deliver the level of services required, but recognises the challenge facing public services generally and the Council specifically in meeting its reduced funding base.

Agreed strategic priorities and outcomes relevant to the Services in the next Contract Year

The Trust's first business plan set out a range of strategic and operational priorities, many of which were linked to establishing the new organisation. They have been kept under review as the year progressed, in consultation with staff and young people. The Trust Board has held a series of discussions and workshops to review priorities and set the future ambitions of the Trust.

Strategic priorities have been agreed that focus on:

46-47

- Improving quality of practice;
- reforming the Early Help system;
- development of a locality based delivery model;
- delivery phase of innovation projects;
- leading the sub-regional adoption agency project;
- further developing strengthened strategic relationships; and
- establishing continuum of collaboration with local partners up to and including joint provision

Years 2 & 3
– 48-49

The Trust will also explore new opportunities relating to joint commissioning, joint budgets, and shared opportunities to learn from innovations to support re-design.

Proposed changes to the Agreement as a result of the Annual Review

At the Annual Contract Review, three proposed changes to the Service Delivery Contract were agreed in principle:

1. To transfer the Children with Disability (CWD) service to the Trust

However, both the Council and the Trust recognise that closer alignment between the CWD team, the Referral and Response team, and the locality social work teams are required to improve recognition and responses to children with disabilities. This was supported by the recent Ofsted 'Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' (November 2015) that indicated that children with disabilities are under-represented in child protection work and that there are too few skilled practitioners with a knowledge of safeguarding children with a disability issues at the point of referral.

55-59

By transferring the CWD service to the Trust:

62-63

- Safeguarding provision for children with disabilities will be strengthened.
- Continuous professional development for CWD social workers will be strengthened by becoming part of the Trust. This is especially relevant in terms of the requirements of the registering body and the anticipated changes arising from the full roll out of assessment and accreditation of social workers.

Both the Council and the Trust consider this to be a Notifiable Change because the proposal is inconsistent with the Statutory Direction that was issued to support the establishment of the Trust.

The issue of a further Statutory Direction will ensure that the proposed transfer of the CWD service complies with Council procurement regulations, and will mitigate against Trust VAT liabilities.

2. To transfer the management oversight of the Early Help Hub to the Trust

The responsibility for the Early Help Strategy and how partnership services are delivered remain a priority for the Council. There is a need to inject pace and urgency in the delivery of the strategy and plans for 2016/17 that will transform not only the Council Early Help services but also provide the necessary infrastructure support to deliver the strategy across the partnership.

64-66

The Early Help Hub (the Hub) was established in Oct 2015 following extensive development work with the Trust. The Hub is a key element of the Early Help Strategy as it provides individual practitioners with the infrastructure to support:

- The practical aspects of identifying needs of children, young people and their families;
- gathering and sharing information;
- completing an early help assessment;
- supporting the provision of a multi-agency response to identified 'additional' needs; and
- a review process to measure the outcomes for families and contribution of services to these.

In October 2015, Ofsted inspectors recognised the Hub development, along with new threshold guidance and the early help strategy but noted they were yet to show impact. They also stated that 'the early help offer is fragmented and too many children and young people are referred for statutory services whose needs could be met at a lower level'.

67-70

It recognised that the Hub arrangements would benefit from co-location and management with the Trust's Referral and Response and MASH arrangements. This would provide consistent practice in relation to assessment, decision-making and appropriate pathways to services based on presenting needs.

The Council in discussion with the Trust also believes this would provide opportunities for greater economies of scale through a shared service response across the two 'front door' arrangements.

3. To introduced a revised Performance Indicator basket

The partnership Quarterly Performance Monitoring Group was directed by senior officers to review the performance framework as part of the Annual Contract Review process.

12, 51-54

It was felt that, whilst the existing suite of Performance Indicators had served a useful purpose for the first year of establishment of the Trust, some of these measures were no longer relevant or of reduced importance when reporting the progress being made in the delivery of children's services. The performance indicator set also required further development to ensure that the measures capture the totality of services delivered by the Trust and be comprehensive enough to avoid being skewed by small numbers.

Proposed changes to the performance indicators and an explanation for the reasons are detailed within the Notifiable Change Request (Appendix C), together with the Target Performance levels and tolerances that have been agreed in consultation with the Trust following a review of the Contract Baseline and updated Statistical Neighbour data.

Areas of Joint Focus

Both parties have agreed to three areas of joint focus over the coming year:

1. To introduce a joint commissioning approach to placements in partnership between the Council, the Trust and Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

73-75

It is recognised that the current decision-making arrangements regarding the commissioning of packages of care for children and young people with complex needs can be improved through closer alignment of commissioning arrangements.

There is consensus between partner agencies (including the Council, the Trust and Doncaster CCG) to streamline systems and processes, and recognition of the need to clarify supporting budgets. This work will be overseen by the Joint Commissioning Executive group.

2. The transfer of operational lead responsibility for the Corporate Parenting Board to the Trust.

81 -83

The recent Ofsted inspection acknowledged that the Council has revised the terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Board and has appointed a new Chair, and noted that whilst these changes are positive, they are too recent to evidence any impact

Both the Council and the Trust recognise the further work that needs to be undertaken to develop a robust Corporate Parenting Board and have already started joint work to improve functioning of and reporting to the Board.

3. Recognising the better educational outcomes that are needed for Looked After Children (LAC), the Virtual School is an area for closer joint working between the Council and the Trust as strategic partners.

The recent inspection of services for 'children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' in October 2015 recognised some areas of strength within the virtual school, including the attendance of looked after children, the absence of any permanent exclusions, arrangements for tackling children missing education and the quality assurance of providers. However, it also raised concerns including:

76-78

- The proportion of children looked after who attend a school that is good or better is too low at 63%.
- The quality of Personal Education Plans is too variable, and too

many lack the detail and clarity necessary to help drive the progress of children and young people.

- Educational attainment for children in care is too variable and the gap between these children and their peers is not consistently reducing year on year.

Although a joint working protocol is in place between the Council and the Trust in regard to educational standards and effectiveness for looked after children, outcomes for children and young people could be further improved by closer and more visible joint working. Specific areas for further collaboration include:

79-80

- Improved information sharing and decision making at strategic and operational levels
 - Pupil Premium Plus
 - Personal Education Plans
 - Tracking of progression
- Joint training including social care, school and education staff and carers.
- Engagement with head teacher groups and individual schools