

Cabinet

5 April 2022

Self-Evaluation of Children's Services For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides a summary of the comprehensive Self-Evaluation of Children's Services to support preparation for the Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

Recommendation:

Cabinet are asked to review and consider the contents of the Annual Self-Evaluation of Children's Services, noting the strengths, areas for development and next steps.

Reason for Recommendation:

The requirement to produce an Annual Self Evaluation is part of the Ofsted Inspection Framework of Children's Services. This report is intended to enable Cabinet to understand progress over the past 12-months and highlight areas of strength and areas for development over the next 12-months.

1. Executive Summary

The Annual Self Evaluation report provides an overview of areas of strength and areas for development in Children's Services focusing on leadership and governance; the quality and impact of social work practice; education and inclusion; our approach to performance management and quality assurance and our future plans for continuing to strengthen services.

2. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

3. **Well-being and Health Implications**
Good quality children's services lay the essential foundations for the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families.
4. **Climate implications**
There are no climate implications arising from this report.
5. **Other Implications**
N/A
6. **Risk Assessment**
Having considered the risks associated with this decision, I have identified the risk level as follows:
Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low
7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**
N/A
8. **Appendices**
Appendix 1: Self-Evaluation for Inspection for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers
9. **Background Papers**
[Cabinet Report 7 December 2021: Feedback from Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services \(27th September to 8th October 2021\)](#)
[Ofsted Report on the Inspection of Dorset local authority children's services 2021](#)
[Ofsted framework for inspecting local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#)
10. **Introduction and Background**
 - 10.1 Local authority children's services are asked to produce an Annual Self-Evaluation for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers as part of the Ofsted framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS), first published in November 2017 and updated in March 2021.
 - 10.2 Self-evaluation is a critical part of our quality assurance and enables leaders to identify areas of strength and development. The Self-Evaluation also provides the foundation for our participation in the annual south west region peer challenge programme, part of a regional sector led improvement programme. This peer challenge event takes place in

December each year and provides an opportunity to share good practice and identify regional priorities and programmes of support for the coming year.

10.3 The Self-Evaluation also forms the basis of our Annual Engagement meeting with Ofsted that takes place as part of Ofsted's framework for inspection of local authority children's services.

10.4 This report provides an overview of the headlines from our most recent Self-Evaluation (February 2022) with the full Self-Evaluation attached as an appendix.

11. **Key Strengths**

Our Self-Evaluation highlights the following areas of strength:

11.1 **Dorset Children Thrive model**

Our "Thrive" locality model ensures children receive the help they need at the right time. Families benefit from a broad range of Early Help services, tailored to their needs and in the places where they live. Partnership working is well-developed, offering a range of options that build on families' strengths and can be provided without delay.

11.2 **Children's Advice and Duty Service (ChAD)**

Our ChAD model helps families to receive the right support at the right time by clarifying concerns with referrers and activating local solutions whenever possible. ChAD acts as our 'front door', providing a calm, well-organised service, where timely and appropriate decisions are made about how to protect and support children most effectively. Parental consent is obtained if appropriate, and families are not subjected to statutory intervention unnecessarily. However, when children are, or may be, at risk of significant harm, social workers investigate quickly, with the support of key partners, including the police, when needed.

11.3 **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

Our SEND services deliver in an integrated way and put children and young people at the centre. The locality teams bring together colleagues from across early help (including our SEND early help offer), children's and adult's social care, educational psychology, inclusion and the education improvement service. This has enabled our services to hold our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children at the heart of our work and deliver ambitious outcomes through a whole system approach in partnership with education settings.

11.4 **Workforce**

Our workforce is largely stable and workloads are manageable. The vacancy rate in social work remains low at 5%. We have a funded 'grow

our own' and apprenticeship programme that will run over the next three years. Multi-agency toolkits and workforce training are in place, learning and development are promoted and undertaken to ensure staff and managers understand and meet children's and families' needs, focusing on impact and outcomes.

12. **Areas for development**

12.1 In their Inspection Report of October 2021, Ofsted required us to improve our oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation. Ofsted noted that young people in more complex situations, including when they are in custody, dependent on drugs and alcohol or vulnerable to exploitation, are prioritised, but their written plans are not routinely updated when risks or situations change.

12.2 The ILACS inspection also raised the quality and consistency of pre-proceedings letters as an area for focus.

13. **Progress over the last 12-months**

13.1 **Care Leavers**

We have addressed Ofsted's requirement to improve oversight of care leavers who are in emergency accommodation, or who face other complex situations, through an action plan that has created new practice standards and governance in respect of visits to young people, regular updating of their pathway plans, case supervision, business intelligence and reporting. The Care Leaver Delivery Group has oversight of the further, ongoing improvements in this area.

13.2 **Partnership working**

Partnership working across our Strategic Alliance to deliver the Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2020-23 has progressed. Senior representatives from across the partnership have reviewed and monitored the progress and impact of the Plan and will further develop the evolution of a longer-term, generational plan in 2022 to continue improving outcomes for people in our communities.

13.3 **Rights of children and young people**

We have collaborated with Realising Rights, York City Council and our West Dorset Local Alliance Group to develop and deliver 8 x 1.5-hour Workshops developing and building on Bridport's Rights-Based Approach. These workshops have run from January 2022 and will be completed in April 2022. York University will evaluate the impact of the workshops in Dorset and York to inform further development and wider adoption of the programme.

13.4 **Public Law Outline (PLO)**

We have updated our pre proceedings policy and flowchart to give clearer guidance on timeliness and senior management oversight. All Pre-Proceedings are then tracked using our Pre-Proceedings tracker to ensure robust and timely planning. Our Pre-Proceedings template letter has been updated.

13.5 **Performance - Distance travelled**

Our data dashboards inform service improvements as part of our Performance Management Framework. Distance Travelled from April 2019 to December 2021 can be seen on page 7 of the Self-Assessment. It highlights successful de-escalation at source, with more Early Help interventions and (despite an increase in S47 enquiries) we are continuing to see a planned, small decrease in CIN, Child Protection Plans and numbers of children in our care and more indicators are in line with 'good' and 'outstanding' authorities.

14. **Next steps**

Our plans for 2022/23 are to continue to focus on:

- Improving the quality and availability of local placements through opening internal residential provision, recruitment and retention of foster carers and a new model of foster carer peer support through an evidence-based model of support through the Mockingbird programme.
- Improving the experience and outcomes for our care leavers, overseen by the Care Leaver Delivery Board and Corporate Parenting Board.
- Continuing to improve services across the partnership through the delivery of comprehensive multi-agency Strengthening Services Plan,
- Further developing our Children, Young People and Families Plan to respond to emerging local and national policies and implementing our 5- year Transformation Plan.
- Increasing the number of children and young people that benefit from outstanding support through our Dorset Centre of Excellence and other school build programmes as part of our approach to offer outstanding provision for children and young people with SEND.

15. **Recommendation:**

Cabinet are asked to review and consider the contents of the Annual Self-Evaluation of Children's Services, noting the strengths, areas for development and next steps.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.