

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 14 March 2018

Electoral Division affected: All

Children's Services Inspection and Review

(Appendices 'A' and 'E' refer)

Contact for further information:

Amanda Hatton, Director of Children's Services,

amanda.hatton@lancashire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

This report highlights the key findings of a range of inspections that have taken place in Children's Services in the last year. It gives an overview of strengths and areas of development. It also delineates governance structures and plans in place to support effective improvement going forward.

Recommendation

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- i. Note and comment on the report and information presented.
- ii. Consider a quarterly update to the Committee on improvement activity and impact in order to effectively scrutinise the progress of County Council Children's Services and core partners in leading the improvement plan.

Background and Advice

Since February 2017 there have been 13 different external inspections or reviews of Children's Services (this does not include the routine inspections of Children's Homes or Schools). There have been four monitoring visits by Ofsted, two looking at services for children looked after, one at Children in Need and one looking at the multi-agency safeguarding hub arrangements. Each monitoring visit has a published letter and they can be found at Appendices 'A' to 'C'. A verbal update on the forth visit will be provided at the meeting.

The other inspections or reviews do not produce published reports. Department for Education (DfE) reviews result in a letter which goes to the relevant minister, the Statutory Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive. Feedback is given to all partners and Lead Members at the independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board. The two Peer Reviews the Authority has commissioned have also followed this pattern of letter and presentation to the relevant Board. Finally the regional Peer Challenges and Ofsted Annual conversations inform a self-

assessment of all the services including schools and the action plan that goes with this.

Key Messages

There is a consistency of message across the various reviews.

Strengths

- We know ourselves well – in the Peer Review and last 2 monitoring visits we told the reviewers/inspectors what they would find and this is exactly what they found.
- We have a strong and robust audit framework which is beginning to make a difference to practice.
- Practice is improving – in the Children in Need monitoring visit Ofsted stated, "Most children now receive services at the correct level to meet their needs.....Stronger assessments are through and detailed.....Plans include appropriate tasks and actions.....There is some effective direct work taking place with children and this has resulted in improved outcomes."
- Staff morale is good and retention improving – DfE reported that staff feel consulted and listened to which has led to, "Staff morale is excellent in challenging circumstances."
- Performance indicators are improving in the majority of areas with some excellent performance, for example Care Leavers and Adoption.
- The quality and use of performance data is much improved.

Challenges

- Capacity – there is a lot to do and expectations are high but this has been a long journey and people have been working very hard to make the changes required.
- Consistency – we have some examples of good practice now but this is not consistent – we still have some inadequate, but not unsafe, practice.
- Management – we have some very new managers and need to support them to own and drive the improvement journey more.
- High demand – we still have a high level of requests for a service.
- The voice of children is now very visible but we are not yet strong in our understanding of the lived experience of children and using this to drive planning for them.

The Department for Education in their latest review gave a very fair summary of where the services are at:

"In summary plans are in place to embed and sustain improvement. Morale is good, staff are certainly clear what is expected of them and plans implemented to date are

having a positive impact. Inconsistency in practice remains and both leaders and front-line staff are aware of this and the issues needed to address this area. In very practical terms the whole partnership in Lancashire needs to relentlessly implement successfully the agreed action plans".

Next Steps

Monitoring and Governance

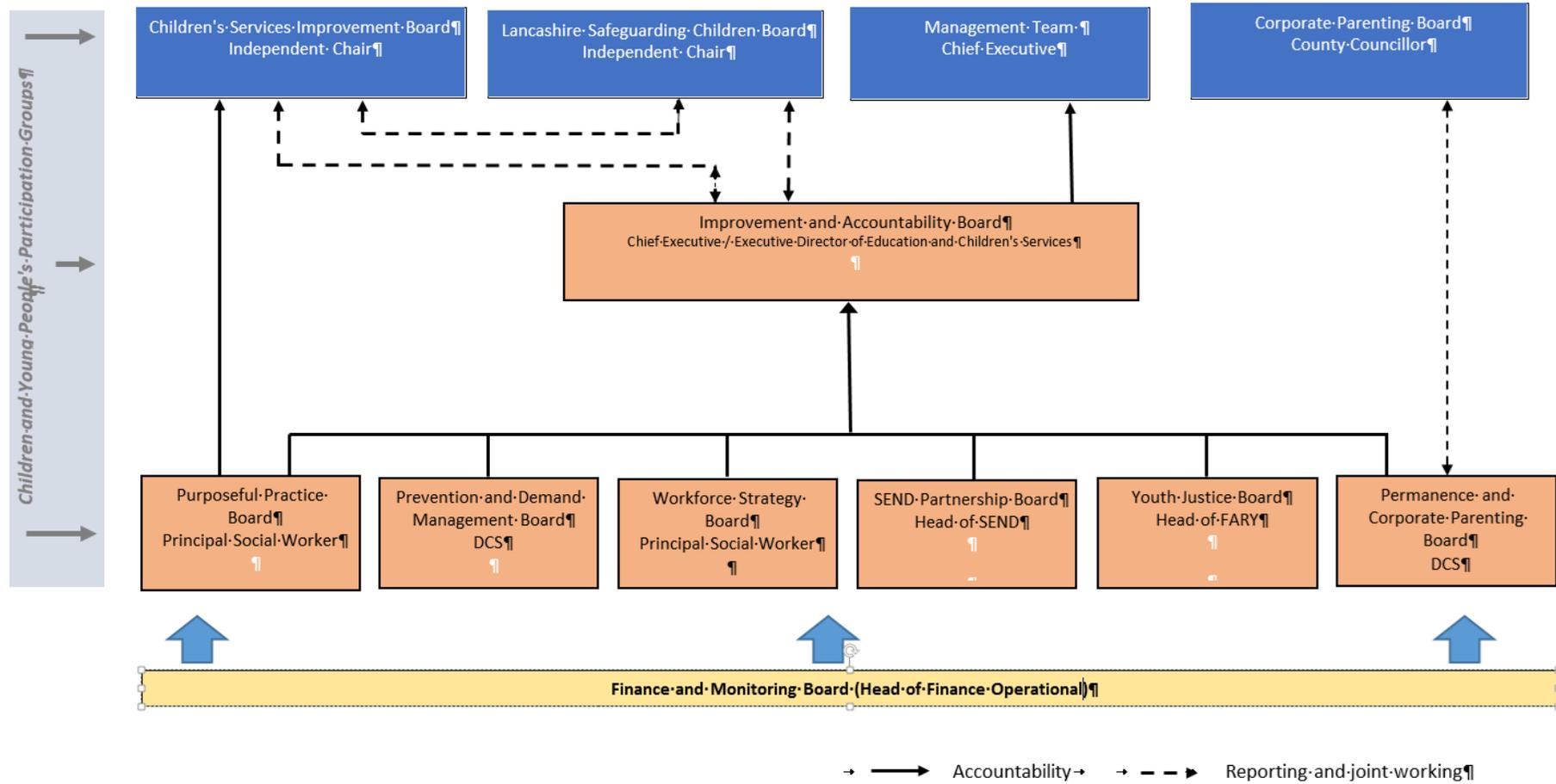
The service has a very detailed improvement plan which is clustered around three key themes:

- Effective wellbeing and preventative strategies will be in place for vulnerable children young people and families- thereby ensuring they get the right service at the right time – **effective prevention**
- Ensure social work and care intervention is effective and efficient, engaging children and families and building on their strengths – making the right plans with children and young people through **purposeful practice**
- Long lasting and sustainable outcomes for children – **permanence**.

We have a rolling 12 week plan which ensures we focus on the key tasks to be delivered (derived from the longer term plan) in the next three month period (attached as Appendix 'D').

This plan also has a set of key performance indicators which are used to measure progress (attached as Appendix 'E'). We have revised the governance structure to ensure that our internal systems are sufficiently robust to drive change and mitigate risks of non-delivery (as outlined below).

Children's Service Governance Structure 2018



The Children's Services Improvement Board (depicted top left) is the key external monitoring board. It is independently chaired, has representation from all key partners and elected members and reports progress to the Department for Education.

We have now had our last monitoring inspection and therefore can expect a full re inspection any time from Easter. This will be a four week inspection carried out under the single inspection framework. This will look at:

- those children and young people at risk of harm (but who have not yet reached the 'significant harm' threshold) and for whom a preventative service would provide the help that they and their family need to reduce the likelihood of that risk of harm escalating and reduce the need for statutory intervention
- those children and young people referred to the local authority, including those for whom urgent action has to be taken to protect them; those subject to further assessment; and those subject to child protection enquiries
- those who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan setting out the help that will be provided for them and their families to keep them safe and to promote their welfare
- those children and young people who have been assessed as no longer needing a child protection plan, but who may have continuing needs for help and support
- those children and young people who are receiving (or whose families are receiving) social work services where there are significant levels of concern about children's safety and welfare, but these have not reached the significant harm threshold or the threshold to become looked after
- those children and young people who are missing from education or being offered alternative provision
- those children and young people looked after either by being accommodated under section 20 or those 'in care' during or as a result of proceedings under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and those accommodated through the police powers of protection and emergency protection orders
- those children aged 16 or 17 who are preparing to leave care and those young people aged 18 to 25 who qualify as 'former relevant children pursuing further education or training' including those children living in homes of multiple occupation and
- those children and young people who have left care to return home, or are living with families under a special guardianship order, child arrangements¹ order or adoption order.

It will also consider the performance of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the leadership and governance of the whole system.

We have a fortnightly Ofsted Preparation group in place chaired by the Deputy Director. This group will also ensure the self-assessment and the key data required by Ofsted is updated and ready for inspection.

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is requested to note and comment on the report and information presented and to consider the need for a quarterly update report on improvement activity and impact in order to scrutinise the progress of County Council Children's Services and our core partners in leading the improvement plan.

Consultations

NA

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

This report has no significant risk implications.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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NA

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

NA