

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO AUDIT COMMITTEE

1.	Meeting:	Audit Committee
2.	Date:	22 July 2015
3.	Title:	Corporate and Children and Young People's Service Improvement Plans Governance Arrangements
4.	Directorate:	Corporate Services and Children and Young People's Service

5. Summary

5.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Audit Committee details of the arrangements that are in place in respect of the governance of the improvement plans for both council-wide (the corporate Improvement Plan) and Children and Young People's Services (CYPS).

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Committee receives this report and notes the governance arrangements that are currently in place for each of the Councils formal improvement plans.

Proposals and Details

7. Children and Young People's Services Improvement Action Plan

7.1 The Children and Young People's Improvement Action Plan was developed in response to the following;

- Independent inquiry into CSE in Rotherham, by Professor Alexis Jay (26th August 2014)
- OFSTED Inspection of Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers *and* the Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board (19th November 2014)
- Corporate Governance Inspection report by Louise Casey CB (4th February 2015)
- Secretary of State for Education Direction under section 497A (4B) of the Education Act 1996.
- Secretary of State Directions to Rotherham MBC, (26th February 2015).

7.2 It aims to address the systemic improvement needed internally within RMBC Children and Young People Services and across our partnership structures to safeguard our children and young people.

7.3 The plan takes into account the following themes for improvement which align to the key judgments in the Ofsted Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. Each them is overseen by a CYPS Director.

- 1. Leadership**
- 2. High Quality Practice**
- 3. Effective Partnerships**
- 4. Capacity and Skills**
- 5. The Experience of the Child and Family**

The approach to CYPS Improvement

7.4 RMBC Commissioners, Elected Members, officers and partner agencies are determined to deliver rapid, visible and sustainable improvement to our children's services. There is a strong emphasis to ensure that the changes are embedded and sustained so that we build system capacity across the Partnership.

7.5 Working with our Children's commissioner we have identified the following seven immediate priorities, these contribute to the priority and immediate action recommendations in the Ofsted Report published 19th November 2014.

- 1.** Strengthen the arrangements for screening through the introduction of a Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub
- 2.** Put in place sufficient social workers to ensure caseloads are manageable across the service.

3. Clear up the backlog of out of date assessments and ensure that assessments are completed in a timely fashion
4. Recruit to a permanent senior and middle management structure.
5. Strengthen the specialist team for investigating Child Sexual Exploitation and put in place strong strategic and operational leadership of CSE
6. Ensure all children in need, children on a child protection plan and looked after children have an up to date plan focused on outcomes and that children on caseload are visited at the required frequency by social workers
7. Address the severe deficits in the ICS system as a matter of urgency and procure a replacement system

Governance

7.6 Internally the governance of the CYPS plan is through the Children's Improvement Board, Chaired by the Children's Commissioner and attended by the Directors of Children's Services and key partners, including health and the police. Ongoing monthly meetings are scheduled.

7.7 A key responsibility of the Children's Improvement Board is to oversee progress through monitoring, challenging and supporting the actions of the Children and Young People's Improvement Plan. The Board confronts the areas of greatest risk first, and lays the foundations for effective and sustained improvement. This includes monitoring the targets set out in the Improvement Plan and assuring that improvements are embedded through continuous quality assurance and scrutiny.

7.8 Through the Children's Commissioner the Improvement Board brings focus to the Improvement Programme through;

- A clear articulation of priorities
- Systematically reducing risks in the system
- Restoring confidence in Members, partners, staff, the public and National Government.

7.9 Evidencing improvements on a weekly and monthly basis is used to determine impact and improved outcomes. The evidence presented to the Board is quantitative as well as qualitative and is critically assessed and challenged to ensure that it is robustly implemented. In addition, an evidence bank is in place for the Improvement Plan to capture outcomes which demonstrate impact on each area identified.

“A Fresh Start” – Rotherham MBC corporate Improvemnet Plan

7.10 The RMBC Council meeting on 22nd May approved a corporate, council-wide Rotherham Improvement Plan, with full cross-Party support, prior to the Plan's formal submission to the Secretaries of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Education (DfE) on 26th May. The version of the Plan as submitted to Government is publicly available via the Council [website](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2313/rotherham_improvement_plan) and has also been circulated to partners¹. While the Plan is not intended as a public-facing document, a

¹ See www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2313/rotherham_improvement_plan

short, executive summary version is also being finalised to support wider knowledge and understanding on the Plan's main aims amongst councils staff, elected members, partners and the public, particularly those over the next 12 months.

7.11 The Plan is Rotherham Council's strategic, organisation-wide response to the same list of reports and publications outlined at paragraph 7.1 above, but covering all aspects of the organisation, complementing the CYPS Improvement Plan as its "sister document". A section of the "Fresh Start" Plan (section 5) covers the interrelationship between it and the CYPS Action Plan.

7.12 As the Plan sets out, the specific actions and milestones contained within it – set out in a series of tables in sections 6.7 and 6.8 of the Plan document – were informed by the Government appointed Commissioners' assessment of the Council's key improvement requirements in order to achieve a "fresh start" (a key phrase used at the time of Louise Casey's CGI report). It took into account discussions with leading elected members, senior managers and a staff corporate working group. It also drew upon elements of initial work carried out by a corporate improvement board that the Council had established with the Local Government Association (LGA) following the publication of the Professor Jay report.

7.13 In practical terms, the Fresh Start plan is divided into two phases. The initial "transition" phase, to May 2017, focuses on ensuring the Council has the basic building blocks in place of an effective council, namely:

- Inspirational political leadership
- Robust governance, decision-making and performance management
- A culture of excellence and outstanding implementation
- Strong, high impact partnerships

7.14 The specific actions set out within the document are presented in line with these four themes.

7.15 The second phase of the Plan is that beyond May 2016, following the appointment of key, permanent senior staff and the all-out elections, which is focused on role of embedded strong leadership and a new culture. Inevitably, at this early stage, this second phase is yet to be defined in detail, with most actions necessarily front loaded and focused on the key building blocks. Greater clarity over phase two will therefore emerge as phase one is implemented.

Implementation

7.16 Some early consideration was given by Commissioners to the practical implementation of the Fresh Start Plan as it was developed – including initial discussions at an "M3" (middle) managers session on 20th May as well as with the Senior Leadership Team.

7.17 The Plan itself (section 9, page 42) also set out its headline governance arrangements, chiefly through a "Joint Board" of Commissioners and leading Elected Members, supported by an officer corporate improvement plan group, linked to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT).

7.18 The chief focus until the end of May had to be on ensuring a comprehensive improvement plan that would be accepted by two Government Departments, hence most work on an implementation strategy for the Plan's actions has taken place since its submission to Government, during June.

7.19 This has confirmed the role of the Joint Board referred to in the Plan, which meets for the first time on 28th July and will consist of Commissioners Myers, Manzie, Ney and Kenny, alongside the Leader, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Opposition.

7.20 To further support the focus on effective and robust delivery of all elements of the Plan, a total of nine implementation programmes have been established, bringing the actions together in sensible, operational groupings, with clear project leads for each element and appointed programme coordinators. The programmes are as follows:

1. Workforce training and development
2. Communication
3. Financial planning
4. Corporate governance
5. Supporting Elected Members
6. New Vision and Performance Framework
7. Restructure and appointments
8. Effective Partnerships
9. Service-level improvements

7.21 The nine programme coordinators will constitute the supporting officer group referred to in the Plan's governance section, building on the officer task-group that was established to inform the Plan's content as it was being developed. This is chaired by the Interim Strategic Director for Resources & Transformation, Stuart Booth, meets formally for the first time on 15 July and will aim to meet monthly thereafter.

7.22 Specific programme and project management documentation has also been developed alongside the implementation programmes to track progress of each element (including via RAG-ratings), which will also be supported by a more user-friendly SharePoint system. The first report on overall progress will be presented to the first meeting of the Joint Board on 28th July. Following this, the first formal review of progress to Government is due by 26th August as part of a 6-month report from the Commissioners to DCLG and DfE on the progress being made.

7.23 Commissioners and the Joint Board may also wish to give further consideration to how members of the previous LGA Improvement Board could be engaged in reviewing progress at some future stage, helping to provide an external, independent perspective on the Council's improvement journey.

8. Finance

8.1 **In relation to the CYPS Improvement Plan**, the governance arrangements in respect of finance are met within existing budgets, however it is recognised that additional financial resources have been needed to implement and sustain the identified improvements within the service.

8.2 The 22nd May report to Council on the **corporate, “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan** noted that any investments required to support the delivery of the Improvement Plan would need to be picked up in the process to establish a new Medium Term Financial Strategy. In the immediate term, the Council paper also noted the “transformation reserve” allocated in the current 2015/16 Budget (totalling £8.4m) that is available to draw upon should this be required.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 There is a risk that actions are reported as completed without substance, however further evidence is collected as part of the respective quality assurance regimes and monitored through performance management, evidencing not just completion of actions, but the associated outcomes.

9.2 In the case of CYPS, recruitment to the most senior posts is now complete to ensure the positive direction of travel continues. Recruitment in relation to managers and social work posts to deliver the required improvements continues.

9.3 The processes for the “Fresh Start” plan, by comparison, are inevitably some months behind that in CYPS, with the process commencing at the end of June to set out project plans and mapping the risks associated with each of the actions within the plan. Key, immediate term risks to highlight, however, are the need to ensure appropriate resources to support the Joint Board and performance/programme management regime; as well as the relatively tight timescale and impacts of summer leave/other commitments on the first formal report to Government, due by 26 August. In part these are being mitigated by some dedicated, cost free programme management support being provided to the Council by the LGA; and the officer group of Programme Managers will also bring greater focus to where gaps in delivery capacity might need to be addressed.

10. Policy & Performance Agenda Implications

10.1 The need for the improvements in Children’s Services was a direct result of statutory intervention from the DfE following the inspections and subsequent reports in 2014. It is essential that improvements are made and sustained.

10.2 Rotherham is still subject to OFSTED inspections in addition to the regular reports to, and visits from the DfE. OFSTED’s new integrated inspection framework is due to commence in September with six local areas being inspected, CYPS are currently making preparations in the event they are selected as one of the six.

10.3 In addition the implementation of both Improvement Plans and the responsibilities for delivery will need to be reflected in the review of the Council’s overall performance and service planning frameworks in due course, including the establishment of a new Corporate Plan, informed by the new Community Strategy that will be informed following the Summer 2015 programme of “visioning” workshops with partners and being led by the Leader of the Council and Lead Commissioner.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- 11.1 Independent inquiry into CSE in Rotherham, by Professor Alexis Jay (26th August 2014)
- 11.2 OFSTED Inspection of Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board (19th November 2014)
- 11.3 Corporate Governance Inspection report by Louise Casey CB (4th February 2015)
- 11.4 Secretary of State for Education Direction under section 497A (4B) of the Education Act 1996.
- 11.5 Secretary of State Directions to Rotherham MBC, (26th February 2015).
- 11.6 CYPS Improvement Plan (25th February 2015)
- 11.7 “A Fresh Start” Rotherham Improvement Plan (26th May 2015)

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