

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

TITLE: STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S SERVICES

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	2 November 2022
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Children's Services
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

The report aims to support political and organisational leaders' understanding of how well Barnsley Council's Children's Services are performing in response to statutory duties and to establish how we successfully strengthen our services to impact our children, young people and families positively.

Council Plan priority

This report primarily supports the Council Priorities of a **Healthy Barnsley** by ensuring children and young people are safeguarded from harm and can maintain their health and wellbeing, together with a **Learning Barnsley** through ensuring children and young people obtain a good start in life, maintain a good level of development in the range of outcomes and thereby achieve their aspirations and potential.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1. Acknowledges and notes the outcomes of the review of children's services in Barnsley.**
- 2. Supports the proposal outlined in section 4 of this report and the actions within the development plan. This will include submitting quarterly children's services performance and financial reports for Cabinet's consideration.**
- 3. Agree to the required investment to support the development and improvement of the service, noted particularly in section 5 of the report.**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barnsley is a place that is ambitious for its children and young people. There is both political and organisational commitment to providing the best services to children and their families and a will to make Barnsley a Place of Possibilities for them.
- 1.2. Delivering safe and effective children's services is a key challenge for councils across the country. This challenge is exacerbated by a significant workforce crisis, a slow recovery from a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis that will see many more people parenting and caring in adverse circumstances.
- 1.3 Barnsley had a full inspection in 2018. Since then, there have been significant changes in the national context, not least the recent Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which recommends a fundamental shift in how the social care system operates. Our Children's Services have a new Director of Children's Services and a new leadership team for social care.
- 1.4 Barnsley has historically been a low spender on Childrens services. According to the 20/21 s251 return to CIPFA Barnsley spends £735 per capita on its services to children and young people. In contrast the average spend for statistical neighbours is £1197, for Yorkshire and Humber it is £875 and for England it is £834.
- 1.5 Irrespective of these challenges, we're committed to continuing to deliver against our statutory and legal duties so that children are provided with a proportionate help and protection service. We anticipate that Ofsted will be returning imminently to inspect how successful we have been in upholding these responsibilities.
- 1.5 For the above reasons, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services have asked for a review of our current operation.
- 1.6 This report will seek to identify strengths to build on and areas for development, all of which will be captured in a development plan.

2. Scope of Review

- 2.1 To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the current operation, we gathered evidence from a range of sources.
 - Feedback from our workforce.
 - A review of data not currently included within the Children's social care performance framework.
 - External case sampling has been completed using the Ofsted methodology by a former Ofsted HMI Inspector.
 - Findings from Spring Lane children's home inspection
 - Findings from the recent Joint targeted area inspection
-

3. Findings

The following sections are an overview of the key findings from each strand of the review.

3.1 Feedback from our Workforce

Our employees are committed and loyal to Barnsley. They work hard to make sure that children, young people and families receive the support and help they need.

We're having real challenges with recruiting and retaining a children's service workforce. This is a national issue and one from which Barnsley is not immune.

These current workforce challenges are making it difficult to meet demand across services.

This means some employees have higher caseloads and workloads than we would want, and there are fewer opportunities to build relationships with families and undertake direct work with children and young people.

These issues, combined with the absence of an embedded practice model and a comprehensive learning and development offer, are leading to inconsistencies in practice.

The pressure that this creates is, at times, affecting employees' well-being.

3.2 Caseloads and Workloads

There have been enduring concerns regarding caseloads, which are restated within this review through a review of current data. Despite the organisations best efforts caseloads are still being impacted as a result of vacancies within the system and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, alongside high sickness levels.

3.3 A review of data not currently included within the Children's social care performance framework

Our current performance against the indicators within the existing framework is strong. Several gaps within it mean we don't have complete oversight of all the necessary measures. When we review the framework further and look at data we do not currently report, we find that compliance and quality need strengthening. We must develop a more comprehensive framework to improve our internal assurance arrangements and make sure senior officers and the cabinet spokesperson have an effective line of sight to practice.

3.4 External case sampling has been completed using the Ofsted methodology by a former Ofsted HMI Inspector

We commissioned an independent consultant with significant experience as an HMI for Ofsted to test out the quality of our practice through the lens of the inspections of local authority children's services framework.

This is a summary of the general findings and is what Ofsted would currently find if they were to notify us of an inspection:

- There is some variability of practice.
- Some children are not consistently receiving timely support.
- High caseloads are leading to less time for direct work with families.
- Spans of control for managers are too broad, resulting in insufficient management oversight.
- The child's voice needs strengthening.
- Thresholds are not fully understood by some partners and are not consistently applied.
- Due to a lack of sufficient placements for children in care, we have some children in placements that aren't fully meeting their needs.

3.5 Findings from Spring Lane Children's Home Inspection

The Spring Lane children's home reinspection in July 2022 was judged inadequate. The inspectors identified weaknesses in each of the three judgement areas as follows:

- **The overall experiences and progress of children** – This included the quality of care not sufficiently consistent with the Homes Statement of Purpose, young people's education not consistent with their needs and greater scrutiny over the matching of young people in the home.
- **How well children are helped and protected** – This included young people are to be better supported with their emotions and de-escalation and the need to ensure regular supervision for employees.
- **The effectiveness of leaders and managers** – This included the Interim Residential Manager being too dismissive of risk and understanding the level of concern, insufficient evidence of management oversight following serious incidents and the lack of a permanent registered Residential Manager.

While this inspection was specifically related to a children's home, it also identified areas for development in care planning, including oversight from the Independent Reviewing Officers.

3.6 Findings from our Joint Targeted Area Inspection

A number of key strengths were identified in the Joint Targeted Area Inspection, which has been covered in other reports. These are the development areas which we are addressing:

- The quality and consistency of all agencies' gathering, recording and responding to the expressed wishes and feelings of children with whom they work.
- The consistent application of thresholds for children stepping down to early help services.
- The availability of and the quality of the emergency duty team's (EDT) response to children and partner agencies. The out-of-hours service (EDT) is not sufficient to meet demand. There are too many gaps in EDT's case recordings, so the audit trail of decisions is unavailable for daytime social work staff to provide continuity.

4 PROPOSAL

It is clear from the findings that we need to take corrective action to strengthen services under considerable pressure. We propose the creation of a development plan to be overseen by robust governance.

Development Plan

We will have a focused and structured approach to improvement for the whole of children's services. The development plan will contain a range of actions with clear timescales and measures. The plan will address the following key areas:

a. Capacity

We have confirmed that our funded establishment for social care services is sufficient. This includes the following services: Screening and Assessment, children and young people's teams, Disabled Children's Teams, and Children in Care teams. However, caseloads across these services are too high and unmanageable. This is due to vacancies, difficulties with recruitment and retention and sickness levels. To address this, we propose to:

- Continue to support employees absent from work due to sickness back into the workplace
 - Use agency staff to fill the gaps in our capacity short term while delivering a longer-term plan to fill all vacant posts permanently, including the use of project teams
 - Recruit a cohort of Team Managers so that line management and practice overview improve.
-

b. Leadership

Children's services have been subject to a complete change of leadership team, including a new Executive Director, Director of Social Care and several members of the extended leadership team.

Findings from all reviews show that practice compliance and quality of practice need strengthening. The senior management and Cabinet Members' line of sight on our performance needs to be improved.

Investment in the current Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service means we will have sufficient capacity to develop and embed robust quality and performance frameworks. We better support our employees with effective inductions, training and development. We can accurately and regularly audit and monitor practice quality, compliance and outcomes for children. To address this, we propose to:

- Establish a Development Board with an Independent Chair
- Develop a Practice Hub in children's services
- Invest in and recruit to specific Quality Assurance roles that will make sure our practice is quality assured and performance improves
- Develop a workforce, recruitment, retention and development strategy and plan
- Invest in a system-wide practice model to make sure our practice and risk management are consistent
- Redesign our performance framework and monitoring arrangements.

c. Early Help

As a result of increasing demand, targeted early help services are also under significant pressure. Given the cost-of-living crisis and the adverse circumstances in which many people are now parenting and caring, we expect this demand to continue to increase.

Currently caseloads in this service consist of families and not children and as stated earlier our family support workers are often working with over 50 children.

We must create conditions where effective early help services can prevent families from entering the social care system, which is much more intrusive for families and costly for the organisation. To address this, we propose to:

- invest in the number of family support workers to reduce current caseloads, enabling workers to provide impactful interventions with children and young people
 - invest in additional managers to make sure we have robust and effective oversight of children.
-

Governance

To make sure that the development plan is delivered and positively impacts our services, we propose introducing a multi-agency Development Board with an independent chair for additional assurance.

The board will include key partners and provide strategic leadership and governance to the development programme. The board will provide regular progress reports to the Senior Management Team, Cabinet and the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Financial investment

To implement these proposals, we request additional financial investment, detailed in the development plan and associated business cases.

Conclusion

When considering the entirety of this information, we have to conclude that we need to strengthen the quality of our practice. When children, young people and families need services to support them, our response is sometimes not as timely or effective as it should be.

However, we know that the remaining workforce and management team are working hard and fully committed to Barnsley's children and young people and are working to do their best in this challenging environment. The most important thing we need to do is create an environment where their practice can flourish.

If we implement the proposals recommended above, we are confident we will begin to see improvements quickly. We intend to develop a comprehensive performance and quality framework to measure the impact of our plans, but in broad terms, we would expect the following result:

- A skilled workforce that is stable with Barnsley Council as an employer of choice
- Improved outcomes for children, young people and families
- Improved performance and quality of service
- Children and young people's voices central to our practice
- More children and young people placed in Barnsley and supported in our communities.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

Financial and Risk

The Service Director – Finance (S151 officer) or his representative has been consulted in drafting this report. The costs of implementing the Children's Social Care Development Plan are outlined in the table below. The investment requirement has been split between:

- Proposals previously considered by our Senior Management Team
-

- Proposals where our Senior Management Team has requested additional information for further consideration. Please note supporting business cases have been provided to inform the review of these proposals.

	22/23 £'000	23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000
<u>Previously considered:</u>				
Capacity (agency staff)	1,860	104	-	-
Leadership	89	133	-	-
Service development	511	875	864	864
	2,460	1,112	864	864
<u>Proposals with additional information:</u>				
Practice Model	162	163	-	-
Early Help	609	1,461	1,461	1,461
LAC commissioning	26	105	105	105
Learning and Development	25	50	50	50
Retention Payment	148	-	-	-
Others*	71	93	41	41
	1,041	1,872	1,657	1,657
	3,501	2,984	2,521	2,521

The 2022-23 estimated investment (£3.5m) represents additional employee costs for the year only and excludes other cost pressures in children's social care, such as Looked After Children placements. The 22/23 overall financial position for children's social care would be presented as part of our quarter two finance report and include the above forecast.

The table below shows the breakdown of the non-recurrent and ongoing requirements. Currently, there is no funding for both the one-off and ongoing costs attached to these proposals as set out in the development plan. However, it is proposed that consideration be given to funding the non-recurrent costs (£6.5m) from reserves and for the ongoing costs (£2.5m) to be financed by the through the MTFS (from 2024/25).

	22/23 £'000	23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 TOTAL £'000
Funding Requirement				
Reserves (non-recurrent)	3,501	2,984	0	6,485
MTFS (recurrent)	-	-	2,521	2,521
	3,501	2,984	2,521	

Along with considering the impact of this additional investment through the MTFS, there must be a commitment to undertaking the service reviews to identify savings as set out in the MTFS update report.

Proposals previously considered

Although previously considered by our Senior Management Team, formal approval is now sought for the following investment proposals:

- Agency staff capacity - represents non-recurrent spending on agency roles (including project teams) in 22/23 and 23/24 to cover social worker vacancies and absences.
- Leadership capacity – covers a fixed-term development board (independent chair, programme manager and project support) with investment profiled over 22/23 and 23/24.
- Service Development – covers a variety of additional permanent roles across the service, for example, family support workers, team and service managers and advanced practitioners.

Proposals (with additional information) for consideration

In addition, formal approval is also sought for the following proposals (see the attached business case for further details and rationale for the respective proposals):

- **Practice Model** (£0.3m non-recurrent) - to procure and implement a practice model to develop and embed practice standards across the service. Continuation of the model beyond two years would be subject to evaluation and demonstrable outcomes.
 - **Early Help *Early Help*** (£1.5m recurrent) – proposal is to increase capacity across Targeted Early Help Services to ensure caseloads and spans of control are at a manageable level. It is proposed that team managers span of control be limited to 7 ftes, with caseloads for each family support worker no more than 12 families. This would require the recruitment of additional 27 fte FSWs / team managers. It is envisaged that this recurrent investment would have a positive impact in future activity levels in children social care and should result in demonstrable cash savings on spend on supporting children in need, children with protection plans and those looked after by the authority. These would be evidenced / captured as part of the agreed Transformation / Service Reviews.
 - **Looked After Children commissioning capacity** (£0.1m - recurrent) - To develop Barnsley's care market so more young people can be placed and supported in our communities, we propose creating one Senior Commissioning Manager post and an additional Placement Team Contract Officer.
-

- **Learning and Development** (£50k – recurrent) - We acknowledge that the learning and development offered to social workers is poor and does not support practitioners with the skills they need to deliver good practice consistently. The complexity of casework has significantly impacted the need to provide more advanced specialist training that meets the increasing challenges in practice. We propose creating a training budget so the practice development team can create a learning and development offer.
- **Retention payment** (£148k – non-recurrent) – To support recruitment and retention, we propose implementing a one-off payment of £2,000 for front-line social workers in some practice areas. This discreet payment would be for people most likely to be considering leaving the council. This will complement other retention activity that is currently being undertaken. Retaining employees provides much-needed stability for young people, supports a reduction in children’s social work caseloads, and provides the capacity to respond effectively to rising demand from children and young people in need of help, protection, and care.
- **Others** (£41k – recurrent) – covers a number of additional temporary and permanent roles in SENDIASS and Spring Lane Children’s Home (to cover additional shift rota).

5.2 Legal

There are no legal implications directly emerging through the consideration of this report. The terms of reference of the proposed Children’s Services Development Board and Development Plan will support measures to close any gaps in compliance with statutory children’s services responsibilities.

5.3 Equality

There are no implications for promoting equality and eliminating unlawful discrimination emerging through this report. All services and partner organisations are subject to the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty provisions. This ensures services are planned and commissioned to meet specific or additional needs, particularly for children and young people with protected characteristics.

5.4 Sustainability

There are no implications for sustainability in the borough arising through consideration of this report.

5.5 Employee

The Children’s Services Development Board and Development Plan will actively seek to address and resolve the workforce issues impacting children’s services, detailed earlier in this report. The actions to be considered will be the subject of full consultation with the Service Director for Human Resources, Business Improvement and Communications and the Service Director for Finance.

5.6 Communications

- 5.6.1 The Children's Services Development Plan will be supported by a communications strategy aimed at making sure all stakeholders are informed and are supported to own and buy into the objectives of the overall plan as part of strengthening our capacity.

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Senior Management Team, Trade Unions and staff have been consulted as part of the review.

7.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the proposal to strengthen the capacity of Children's Services to meet the challenges we're facing. This is part of our ambition to commission and provides high-quality services for children, young people and families as we continue to recover and renew following the pandemic.

8.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Please see Paragraph 7.1

9.0 GLOSSARY

- 9.1 N/A

9.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

- 9.1 Main Appendix: Children's Services Development Plan: Immediate Actions (September 2022 – March 2023).
Appendix 1: CSC Development Plan - Learning and Development
Appendix 2: CSC Development Plan – Children's Social Care Practice Model
Appendix 3: CSC Development Plan - Early Help
Appendix 4: Transformation Scoping Paper (One-Off Retention Payments Business Case)
Appendix 5: CSC Development Plan – LAC Commissioning Capacity
Appendix 6: Transformation Scoping Paper (Feedback Business Case)

10.0. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made.
-

11. REPORT SIGN OFF

11.1

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date <i>Joshua Amahwe (19/10/2022)</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date <i>Jason Field, 20/10/22</i>

Report Author: Debbie Joyner
Post: Programme Manager (Children's Services)
