

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE	21/09/2023
REPORT OF	Janice Spencer, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Children's Services Improvement Journey
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Improving services for children is a core strategic aim within the Council Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work is ongoing as part of the Council's children's social care transformation journey. An Improvement Plan for the service was agreed by the Department for Education (DfE) chaired Continuous Improvement Board in April 2023 and work has been ongoing to deliver this plan and stand up a wider transformation programme.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

This report seeks to update scrutiny panel members on the Council's children's social care improvement journey and ensure that scrutiny members are briefed on the performance of children's services and implementation of the transformation programme that will deliver the Improvement Plan.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1. North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) children's social care services were judged to be Inadequate by Ofsted in October 2021.
- 1.2. Work has been ongoing since then to make improvement in the Service. Since October 2022, NELC has benefited from a high intensity Sector Lead Improvement Support (SLIP) support from LCC.
- 1.3. An Improvement Plan has been agreed via the DfE chaired Continuous Improvement Board and has been mobilised by the Council's Transformation Team, with support from SLIP.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1. If children's social care services do not improve at pace, the children could be unsafe and will not achieve their best outcomes in life.
- 2.2. Ongoing financial and reputational risks to NELC if there is not control of children's services and the provision of high-quality services that effectively manage demand.
- 2.3. The risk that if NELC does not show sustained improvement, the DfE may undertake further intervention – i.e., creation of an operationally independent children's trust.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1. There remains an external reputational risk of NELC not achieving its improvement aspirations.
- 3.2. That would particularly impact on staff, both current and those potential recruits for the service.
- 3.3. There is an ongoing programme of internal and external communication in place, with a dedicated communications officer aligned to CSC.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. There is significant financial pressure that is impacting on wider NELC finances.
- 4.2. Excessive demand and numbers of children in the system, the cost of agency social workers and the cost of external placements is the result of overspend within the Service.
- 4.3. Service improvement, as currently underway, is about improving Service quality and reducing demand, and therefore cost to the authority.
- 4.4. Whilst some support has been provided by the DfE, and to NELC via DfE investment in LCC SLIP support. This has not met the total investment case put forward to deliver children's services transformation.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Children's social care improvement journey

- 5.1.1. The North East Lincolnshire Children's Social Care Improvement Plan was approved by the Continuous Improvement Board in April 2023. It sets out the forward plan to achieve a different outcome at the next Ofsted ILACS inspection, likely Autumn 2024.
- 5.1.2. Since then, work has been ongoing to deliver the Improvement Plan, with the support of LCC as SLIP partners. This work has seen improvements in services, reduced demand in the system, and a more stable workforce. However, there is a long way to go in the improvement journey.
- 5.1.3. This early progress has been recognised by Ofsted during its most recent Monitoring Visit. With the next Monitoring Visit imminent.
- 5.1.4. Alongside this, work has been ongoing to stand up a transformation programme. With the aims being to:
 - 5.1.4.1. Develop the strategic Improvement Plan into service-by-service transformation plans. These plans can be owned and delivered by services and frontline staff, with corporate support. Critical to the work is ensuring these plans come together into workstreams and are adequately supported by corporate workstreams. Critical to this work has been ensuring total alignment between the Improvement Plan/transformation plans and SLIP's activity.
 - 5.1.4.2. Develop robust transformation and service governance. With service governance, such as Operational Leadership Team created, and transformation governance with a Council Transformation Board that feeds into the oversight governance of Tactical Improvement Board (chaired by Lincolnshire Chief Executive, Debbie Barnes) and Continuous Improvement Board (chaired by the DfE appointed Commissioner, Anthony Douglas

CBE).

- 5.1.4.3. Hold ongoing discussions with the DfE regarding levels of potential investment in the transformation programme. Thus far investment from the DfE has been limited but welcome. Conversations remain ongoing about future opportunities to support the Council's transformation activity.
- 5.1.4.4. Over the coming months, work will continue to develop, implement, and then report on all transformation activity.

5.2. **Children's Social Care performance update**

- 5.2.1. The Service, along with the Tactical Improvement Board and Continuous Improvement Board continue to track NELC's performance data. Significant improvements have been made, with focus on delivering further progress. The significant updates are:
 - Current number of Child In Need (CIN) is 813, equivalent to a rate of 246 per 10,000. This has increased slightly over recent months due to an increase in referrals but remains in line with Statistical Neighbours (SN) rate;
 - CIN visits are 90% in time which remains in line with target set of 90%
 - Current Child Protection (CP) is 312, equivalent to a rate of 94 per 10,000. CP numbers have been increasing slightly over the last 2 months due to a large increase in S47s in June, however CP strats have dropped once more which should help reduce numbers.
 - CP visits are at 89% in time which is close to the target set of 90%.
 - Early Help currently has 621 open cases and has maintained a similar level of reduced number of cases over the last 6 months due to increased partner activity.
 - Current open cases have reduced since last month with 1943 open cases, equivalent to a rate of 588 per 10,000. This is still above SN average.
 - Current number of Children Looked After (CLA) is 543, equivalent of 164 per 10,000. Numbers have continued to steadily decrease and are now below the current improvement plan target of 550. We continue to see much lower numbers of children entering care each month.
 - Current average caseloads for frontline Social Workers are 19. This has increased since last month from an average of 18. There is a renewed focus on throughput within the CASS service to help keep caseloads down.
 - Supervisions:
 - CASS 78%
 - CDS 86%
 - CiC 93%
 - New Futures 75%
 - Supervisions are tracked weekly however annual leave has had an impact on timeliness of supervision during August.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. No impact

7. MONITORING COMMENTS

7.1. In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS

8.1. All wards impacted

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. [reports for links\Childrens Services Improvement Plan March 2023.pdf](#)

9.2. [reports for links\Childrens Services Improvement Plan one pager.pdf](#)

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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