

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE	16/11/2023
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

Good progress continues to be made as part of the Council's children's social care transformation journey. The Improvement Plan, as agreed with the Department for Education (DfE), continues to be implemented, with support from Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) as Sector Led Improvement Partners. A recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit maintained the trend of good progress in the transformation. However, there is significant transformation still required to deliver the desired outcomes.

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 improvements 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.
- 1.4. The next full ILACS Ofsted Monitoring Visit is expected in Autumn/Winter next year.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1. If children's social care services do not improve at pace, the children we are responsible for could be unsafe and will not achieve their best outcomes in life.
- 2.2. There are ongoing financial and reputational risks to NELC if there is not sustained improvement of children's services and the provision of high-quality services that effectively manages demand.
- 2.3. The risk that if NELC does not show sustained improvement, the DfE may undertake further intervention – i.e., creation of a 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 potential recruits to the service.
- 3.3. There is an ongoing programme of internal and external communication in place, with a dedicated communications officer aligned to children's social care.

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 are all contributing to overspend within the Service.
- 4.3. Service improvement, as currently underway, is about improving Service quality, reducing demand, meeting need at the lowest level and, therefore, reducing the overall cost to the authority.
- 4.4. The DfE continue to provide additional support, both direct to NELC and through LCC as SLIP partners. This is not to the level originally hoped, but the service has been able to maintain a pace of change despite this.

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/Winter 2024.
- 5.1.2. Work is ongoing to deliver the transformation required, in partnership with LCC as SLIP partners.
- 5.1.3. Significant improvements have been made in parts of the service, with recent Ofsted Monitoring Visits recognising the direction of travel and progress. However, there remains elements of the service that require significant transformation to improve quality and reduce other challenges, such as the workforce or financial challenges.
- 5.1.4. There are some success stories to highlight, such as the new Team Around the Family (TAF) model. Working with partners, the launch of this has been a success and will make a meaningful and lasting impact.
- 5.1.5. The pace of the transformation journey, and NELC's ability to drive and own that transformation, has increased in recent months. Areas of focus include:
 - 5.1.5.1. Work to make significant improvements into Children in Care and Care Leavers, with the aim of stepping down children urgently and reducing the financial pressure on the Council.

- 5.1.5.2. Improvements to the service's governance have been made, with robust structures around an Operational Leadership Team and Children's Leadership Team reporting into the Transformation Meeting and the DfE's Improvement structures.
- 5.1.5.3. Service improvement plans have been developed with most of the service, with the aim of making improvement more systematic and owned by each service.
- 5.1.5.4. Our new vision for children's services, "Our Children, Our Future" will be launched with partners in late November. The development of which has been done with extensive staff engagement and inputs from children and young people.
- 5.1.5.5. Phase one of the reconfiguration of the service has started, with consultation ongoing.
- 5.1.6. This work is in anticipation of the new Director of Children's Services, Ann Marie Matson, when she starts in December. This is alongside new permanent Assistant Directors. Janice Spencer, as DCS, is already working to ensure the conditions for success are in place for the new leadership team.

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 773, equivalent to a rate of 234 per 10,000. CIN numbers have seen a 5% decrease since last month after a period of slightly increasing numbers. CIN numbers are now below Statistical Neighbours (SN) rate;
 - CIN visits are 86% in time which has fallen below the target set of 90% but should increase once school holidays have finished
 - Current Child Protection (CP) is 291, equivalent to a rate of 88 per 10,000. This is a 7% reduction from last month
 - CP visits are at 84% in time which is a decrease on recent weeks
 - Early Help currently has 536 which is a 14% decrease on last month. Currently to date 167 external TAFs have been started
 - Current open cases have reduced since last month with 1863 open cases, equivalent to a rate of 563 per 10,000. This is a 4% decrease on last month but still above SN average.
 - Current number of Children Looked After (CLA) is 527, equivalent of 159 per 10,000. We continue to see much lower numbers of children entering care each month.
 - Current average caseloads for frontline Social Workers are 19 which is in line with last month
 - Supervisions:

- CASS 78%
- CDS 76%
- CiC 34%
- New Futures 71%

5.2.2 Review of performance against Improvement plan targets set for 30th September 2023

Achieved target

- % CIN visits in timescales
- % CLA visits in timescales
- % CP review within timescales
- % assessment timeliness
- Number/Rate of CLA
- Number/Rate of CiC starts
- Number/Rate of CiC ends
- ASYE ave caseload
- % CASS supervision in timescales
- % New Futures supervision in timescales

Target not achieved but within target tolerances

- Number/Rate of CIN
- Number/Rate of CP
- % CP visits in timescales
- All open cases
- SW ave caseload
- % of workforce which are permanent
- All services supervisions in timescales

Did not meet target and outside of tolerances set

- Number/Rate of referrals
- ICPC held in timescale
- % of re-referrals
- % CDS supervision in timescales
- % CiC supervision in timescales

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. None

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

10.1 Janice Spencer, Director of Children's Services

JANICE SPENCER
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES