

<b>Committee:</b> Safeguarding Sub-Committee – For Information	<b>Dated:</b> 07/02/2022
<b>Subject:</b> Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service Development Plan Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children’s Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Rachel Talmage, Head of Service, People Department, Department of Community and Children's Services	

### Summary

This report provides an update on the work of the Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service, with a current position on staffing, activity and – most importantly – impact on children and their families. Work is tracked through the appended updated Service Development Plan (Appendix 2). Key achievements include running the first Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme and appointing four permanent social workers as part of the Target Operating Model (TOM). All but three targets are green/blue; and three targets have turned from green to orange and require attention from our Practice Assessment and Impact Review (audit).

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service provides support to children and their families within tiers 2 to 4 levels of need: early help, children with complex or multiple needs, and children in acute need. The service comprises two teams: the Early Help team (tier 2) and the Social Care team (tiers 3 and 4).
2. The Service Development Plan is created annually and is a ‘live’ document tracked and updated as work unfolds. The service is accountable to its service users – children and families – and aims to offer an excellent service that

enables positive change. The service tests itself via monthly performance reviews, frequent audits, and through our own cross-examination at our Achieving Excellence Board (AEB). The latest audit cycle took place in October/November 2021, and recommendations are responded to in the paragraphs below. A report on the audit cycle is before the committee along with this paper.

## **Current Position**

### **Early Help**

#### ***Staffing***

3. There are two staff members permanently established in the Early Help service: the Early Help Manager and the Early Help Worker. A locum Early Help Social Worker has been appointed to support children and families in need as part of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Programme in the City, and a Social Work Assistant had their short-term contract extended to January 2022 due to this additional area of work. The assistant works part time with Early Help and part time supporting care leavers in the City, with their role amended in September 2021.
4. The TOM is complete and jobs in this area under evaluation. The Early Help Service is well staffed, and able to meet the increase in individual casework, group work, and support for the children and families in the bridging hotels.
5. The Early Help Worker has undertaken Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Facilitator training. The Early Help Manager has been part of Leadership in Colour in 2020/21 and is undertaking the Black and Asian Leadership Initiative. The Early Help Manager regularly shares resources from the Leadership in Colour programme, which enrich the team. Resources include those for supporting the mental health of black women and girls, as well as other research, for example, on improving social capital for black staff. The Early Help Manager also supported the delivery of an anti-racism session with Social Care and Education staff at the Department for Education, the second such session there.

#### ***Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities***

6. The Early Help Service has led the pilot of the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities programme, reaching a key target in the Service Development Plan. A full report is with the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. The Early Help Manager came to the City already trained and experienced in this programme, and they supported the Early Help worker to undertake training to co-facilitate this pilot together with a family worker from the Adult Education Service. The programme began in September and concluded in December 2021.

7. The Race Equality Foundation designed and set up the programme. They explain:

*Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC) is an inclusive evidence-based parenting programme, designed to promote protective factors which are associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children.*

*SFSC has enjoyed success with parents from a number of backgrounds, including Black and minority ethnic parents, teenaged parents, parents with learning disabilities and parents from marginalised communities, including those with experience of drugs, alcohol or violence.<sup>1</sup>*

8. The Early Help Manager has secured a venue and creche provision for a second programme to run from January 2022.

## **Children & Families from Afghanistan**

9. The Early Help Service has continued to offer one-to-one support to guests at the two bridging hotels, providing practical and emotional support. The Early Help Manager and the Social Care Team Manager have delivered reflective sessions on the threshold of need with hotel staff and professionals, including Afghan Association Paiwand and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). A Team Around the School model has begun to meet community needs and one-to-one work with families.

## **Children's Social Care**

### **Staffing**

10. The last three months have been a period of transition in terms of staffing in the team. The permanent Team Manager returned from maternity leave and, after a handover period, the maternity cover manager left. This role is central to the running of the service. This transition occurred during the arrival of new guests in the bridging hotels, and with a change in systemic clinician supporting the team (the previous clinician having been promoted in her substantive role to Service Manager). Note: we have a contract with the London Borough of Hackney to provide systemic support one Wednesday per week. Sickness has affected service delivery.
11. The returning Team Manager has successfully gained a promotion near to home, and another interim solution is being pursued while we recruit on a permanent basis. The Team Manager leaves in mid-March 2022. There will be a further transition period, supported by the existing Assistant Director, Head of Service, Deputy Team Manager and Early Help Lead.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/children-families/sfsc> Accessed 26 November 2021

12. Three new areas have been highlighted for improvement around management recording. Each part of the management system is recording as much as possible to ensure that it is keeping track, and our focus is to re-establish the progress we had made.
13. We had five permanent social workers established in September 2021: one began maternity leave in October; one acted up as Deputy Team Manager; one gained a permanent role as a therapist outside of the City and left in December. Note: this social worker had combined studies as a therapist alongside her full-time social work position, supported via compressed hour and study leave and was attached to our weekly family therapy clinic, jointly run with King's College London. This can be seen as a success for the worker and for our service.

### ***Staff development***

14. A student social worker joined the service in October 2021, and a second student joined in January 2022. One of the permanent social workers is undertaking level 2 practice education. The other permanent social worker is undertaking a year's intensive programme on the language programme Makaton to help them better communicate with one of her looked-after children. This social worker has joined the Family Therapy Clinic weekly for the next two terms, which is a good development opportunity and strengthens our collective systemic practice.
15. The TOM process has finished, and revised jobs in this service area are under evaluation. The additional social work posts have been approved and four permanent social workers have been recruited. It is hoped that they will begin in March/April 2022.
16. In the meantime, we have four locums to ensure that the work progresses (one has successfully gained a permanent role).
17. This is a time of transition. It will have an impact on the quality of work, as new staff join and learn, and as we support staff. There is good and consistent support by the rest of the service, and through the commitment to systemic practice underpinning the health of our system, as well as support for the managers via the Practice assessment Impact and Review process. We are reviewing how we support managers in our system, recognising our differing strengths and areas of development, as well as thinking of how to reduce managers' isolation and identify more support.
18. Staff were recommended for awards in October 2021, including Innovator of the Year (team), Rising Star, and recognition of work on inclusion.
19. We focus heavily on the health of our relationships and on staff development, because we know it is essential for the strength of the relationship-based practice with families. It is the working relationship that makes change for children.

## ***Children in need an in acute need***

20. This work has developed alongside the Family Therapy Clinic, which has been an innovative offer throughout the last year and a half. This is now a completed action on the Development Plan.
21. Some children have been in acute need, and this level of need has increased in the last six months and has involved legal proceedings in some cases.
22. The Practice Assurance and Impact Review process has been completed, with individual case work reviewed. The Team Manager and social workers (as with the Early Help Manager and Support worker) have had sessions with the consultant to go through findings and action. The actions were followed up in January 2022.
23. The new Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) for children in need/subject to a child protection plan has been invited to all Child Protection conferences. They joined our team in person in September 2021, after an initial focus on setting up and running the learning centre for guests at the bridging hotels. We will ensure that the VSH is invited to Child in Need reviews and asked for comment on the child's plan from an educational perspective. We are looking forward to strengthening our offer.
24. Our children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) have had their educational needs reviewed by the consultant SEND Teacher, and work has progressed with transition to adulthood jointly with Education and Early Years and Adult Social Care. There is a separate workstream reporting on outcomes.

## **Children Looked After & Care Leavers**

### ***Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)***

25. A major project outlined in the Service Development Plan has had a life-changing impact on 15 young people: the Immigration Interview project, led by the Deputy Team Manager, has led to 15 (out of 20) positive decisions for young people. These 15 now have 5 years limited leave to remain, which is a big step towards permanent citizenship. This is life changing and the best form of emotional support for these young people. The Deputy Team Manager keeps a good pace of work on this project and is connected to the London Asylum Seekers Consortium.
26. The next main challenge for care leavers with immigration status is finding a permanent home. There is a waiting time of three to five years for permanent housing. The principle of our work in this area is 'would this be good enough for my own child'? This means we keep young people in the home they are in, in the area they know, while waiting for their permanent home. This is expensive, and our budget is under review. The alternative would be unacceptable: to move young people into affordable accommodation outside

London, meaning another move with a change of college/employment. This would not be right in the context of trauma and travel to the UK.

27. The sufficiency strategy that has been approved has good options for housing for our young people while waiting for permanent flats, and means we have reached our goals around housing in the development plan.

### **Health**

28. Some of the team attended the Healthy Smiles webinar on 10 November 2021. The team learnt that, if there is a looked-after child who is struggling to access a local dentist in London, there is now a specialist dental pathway that we can access. This is helpful as there was a challenge in London and nationwide in accessing dental care. This is a particular challenge for some of our young people, given the lack of access to dental care en route to the UK.

### **Employment/Education/Training**

29. Work has continued with the Not in Education or Training (NEET) tracker. The only young people who are now NEET are: those not allowed to work due to immigration rules; a new parent; and children whose mental wellbeing doesn't allow them to participate. We are mindful that there is ebb and flow throughout the academic year, and we will continue to respond as new situations arise.
30. The Head of Service participated in two London Local Authority Network for Care Leavers meetings: the first on housing; and the second on the contribution of the private sector to education and employment. The first session's impact for young people was that we now offer a guarantor scheme to young people where private renting is their choice of how to obtain a home. This has been offered to two care leavers so far. The second session's impact is a link between John Lewis and Waitrose and the City, and also with the Early Years Foundation. We have asked John Lewis to consider a pre-apprenticeship, to enable those without permanent status but the right to work, with limited language skills to access their workplace and training. The Head of Service is following this up, and is sharing with the VSH and the new Prospects Officer. The anticipated impact is a better choice of employment and training, and jobs for young people.

### **Developing practice**

31. One of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) asked that the Leaving Care guidance be updated with a clearer section on who the IRO is. An insert to the booklet will be provided. The outcome will be reduced confusion and that children understand who the IRO is.
32. Welcome bags. It has come to our attention that some new arrivals have not had welcome bags, only prayer mats. This has been raised with team support and the bags and contacts will be available for all new arrivals, and those who

have missed out.

33. Aware that this is a time of staff transition, and wanting to keep a high standard of practice while new permanent staff are in place, managers are considering some workshops on topics across the Social Care Service, with actions in the Service Development Plan. These workshops will be run by staff for staff, and are another way of upskilling and using our own talent.

### **Systemic Practice**

34. Throughout the last three months, systemic practice has developed through Action Learning Sets. These offer our staff access to and use of research. This is one of the main ways the service embeds research. We have completed two sessions of our six. The absence of the systemic practitioner has meant that three sessions were cancelled.
35. Group supervision has continued, and the last two sessions looked at care leavers not in education, employment or training, as well as intimate partner violence. Case consultations have continued, and we have learned that we need to offer more specialist input into managing risk and supporting families in the bridging hotels. The Head of Service and Systemic Service Manager in Hackney are working on what this will look like, and what will be helpful, being mindful of context of resettlement, colonialism, and race focusing on reducing harm to children and women.
36. The Management Team has had specific systemic group supervisions on race, and will continue to do so. With staff transition comes changes in heritage, which changes power dynamics in the team. We need to pay attention to this if we are to be attuned to families. White staff are continuing to be asked to challenge ourselves on unconscious and then conscious bias, and are supported to do so. We do this as core business.

### **Key Data**

37. The dataset is being brought to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. The number of care leavers is increasing, as is the volume of Early Help, particularly with the Afghan refugee project. Internally, fortnightly supervision records are used to keep track of timely recording as this is our current area for development.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

38. Strategic implications – the work of this department contributes to a flourishing society and the safety and wellbeing of residents. We are aspirational for our children and families and want to support them to thrive economically as well as socially and educationally.
39. Financial implications – the budget is being reviewed, and the TOM proposals should see savings in 2021/22 once permanent staff are in place. Immigration status has also led to a £60,000 year-on-year saving. This is part of a separate

work plan.

40. Resource implications – an expanded staff base has approved in the TOM. The staffing has been temporarily increased to match the increased workload coming from the hotels, and this is covered by Home Office funding.
41. Legal implications – there has been an increased use of legal service with children in acute need. The service needs to review whether legal counsel is needed, and the impact of legal services on children.
42. Risk implications – with staff transition there is risk with, for example, the current Team Manager not having ‘lived’ the last year of work with children and families. There is also a risk of the service’s work covering all areas of Children’s Social Care and Early Help, in which case most social workers and managers will have gaps in their knowledge. This is mitigated by the learning and development offer and regular supervision.
43. Equalities implications – staff are engaged in Leadership in Colour, the Black and Asian Leadership Initiative, managers’ sessions on anti-racism, the use of GRACES (Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employment, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, Spirituality) and systemic trauma informed group supervision and one-to-one casework. It is noted that three of four managers are white, and we have to consciously talk about race and think about anti-racism. This is a shift from previously having two black managers and two white managers. Managers attended the Cultural Competency Conference at the start of December, and keep anti-racism as a live issue. We are mindful that 10 of our staff of 18 are black or are people of colour. The majority of our children and families are black or people of colour. We are mindful in our position as social workers as agents of change, and that we have a duty to practise anti-racism.
44. Climate implications – none.
45. Security implications – none.

## **Conclusion**

46. The work of the Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service is ambitious, with clear direction using systemic practice to meet need and reduce risk. Investing in our staff is investing in our children and families. The service is in a time of transition, and this is being planned for. Strength is offered through action learning sets, practice assurance and impact reviews, and a good learning and development offer. Our goals in the Service Development Plan have been largely met. The three areas for immediate improvement each refer to management recording – some areas are excellent, and others need reminders to record communication immediately..

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Healthy Smiles Looked After Children’s Oral Health Pilot
- Appendix 2 – Service Development Plan

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