

**Decision Maker:** Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> October 2013

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

**Title:** Looked After Children - Care Practice Diagnostic - Pilot

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**Chief Officer:** Terry Parkin, Executive Director

**Ward:** All Wards

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1. Reason for report

As part of the London Borough of Bromley Children's Social Care continuous improvement programme, the London Borough of Bromley volunteered to be a pilot authority to test the introduction of the Local Government Association (LGA) Looked After Children Diagnostic Assessment. This report sets out the key findings of the diagnostic and the recommendations for future improvement.

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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The PDS Committee are asked to consider and comment on the outcomes and recommendations of the Looked After Children Care Practice Diagnostic.

### Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
  2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People.
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No cost
  2. Ongoing costs: N/A.
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Children's Social Care Division
  4. Total current budget for this head: £Total Current budget for this head £31,230,850
  5. Source of funding: Mainstream, DSG and other government grants
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### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): Current 337 FTE
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
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### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-statutory - Government guidance.
  2. Call-in: Call-in is not applicable.
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): 280 Looked After Children
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### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### Background

- 3.1 As part of a pilot Local Government Association (LGA) led programme, Bromley agreed to test the methodology and process of a peer review programme to examine and improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. In particular Bromley hoped to be assisted in our business planning in the areas of;
- Achieving excellent outcomes for children in care and care leavers
  - Quality of practice within Children's Social care
  - Service user engagement
  - Placement choice and stability.
- 3.2 This was not an inspection. A team of peers used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the quality of services and outcomes for children in care and care leavers with the London Borough Bromley. The purpose of the review is to help inform future improvements in services and to build on the current improvement programme.

The London Borough Bromley invited the Review Team to undertake the Pilot Care Practice Diagnostic as it has spent considerable energy working to improve safeguarding practice and had recently re focused attention to improving the outcomes for looked after children (LAC) and care leavers. The team undertook the review in June 2013.

Highlights from the executive summary indicate that the Peer Team thought that the London Borough of Bromley understood and presented its context well. That overall the service provided was achieving key objectives and had made significant strides in improving services for looked after children however as expected, there was more that could be done to step up the pace of change and improve outcomes.

The Peer Reviewers considered senior Councillors give a strong lead on the priority of children's services, including a focus on Corporate Parenting.

It was the Peer Team's belief that the leadership of the current Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Social Care) has appropriately defined the scope and scale of the challenges in children's social care and is working to address them for LAC and care leavers.

The recent bringing together of most of children's social care under one Assistant Director and the physical co-location of many staff in the Civic Centre, they felt provided an opportunity to respond in a more co-ordinated manner to the needs of children and families.

The team acknowledged that Bromley has recognised the imperative of continuous improvement has increased its focus on LAC and had created, through the new Education, Care and Health Services Department and Director, a real opportunity to step up the pace of change.

They accepted that the London Borough of Bromley regards itself as a very "lean" Council, but acknowledged that elected members have supported investment in additional social work staff and training and have enhanced the placements budget, which is an important indication of its commitment to the service for LAC and supports Social Work caseload management.

## **Key Messages from the Review**

There were many areas of good practice that were identified by the Review Team in the detailed feedback and various areas for development. The Key points were:

### **Strengths**

- The Council has already taken some key strategic steps, re-structuring and co-location over the last two years to improve services for LAC.
- Increased emphasis on improving the quality of social work practice supported by appropriate training is evident
- Increased resources, for social work numbers, recruitment and retention have been made available
- The Council is in the process of simplifying strategic partnership arrangements
- There is a clear Children's Safeguarding and Social Care Performance Improvement Plan
- Good focus on educational outcomes, well supported by the Virtual School,
- Corporate parenting responsibilities are well understood
- Housing and other supports for care leavers also appear to be good.
- Social workers always spoke with warmth and understanding of the child
- Key Health partners are engaged and contributing to good health outcomes for LAC
- The progress of care proceedings appears well managed and there is the potential for the care proceedings pilot to speed up decision-making further.
- Adoption and permanency planning arrangements and performance shows significant improvement although more could be done.

### **Areas for Consideration and Improvement**

- A simplification of our existing partnership arrangements along with some elements of our activity
- A systems approach to level up the existing variable quality of social work practice, care planning and the quality of recording. Practice can be very good but is variable.
- A continued focus on improving IRO practice and strengthening their accountability for making general improvements in looked after children outcomes.
- Ensuring that continued internal challenge and challenging target setting is clearly driving and maintaining improvement.
- A need to improve the extent to which children's views are heard, captured and inform service development
- The Peer team felt we could improve service delivery by increasing delegation, decision making and accountability to staff

The Peer Team acknowledged that we have set up a wide range of mechanisms to improve and modernise service delivery to Looked after Children. They liked our increased emphasis on looked after children which they could evidence is already showing improved outcomes and perceived we now had a good opportunity to step up the pace of change.

## Next Steps

In response to these key messages we have revised our business planning process and focussed the large part of our planning on an 'outcomes based model' ensuring that Children and Young People are the key focus of all our systematised improvement over the coming three years. The new Social Care Business Plan for 2013 – 2015 is currently being finalised.

Ensuring that the voices of children and young people are included in planning their own care and services at both individual service user level and at strategic level is a major area requiring greater development. A number of new pieces of work are currently underway, including commissioning an external survey and a new advocacy project.

At the heart of what the Peer Team suggests for Bromley's consideration is the need for an increase in the pace of modernisation of services for LAC, so that the key principles from the Munro Review (and social work reforms) are evident in the way the Council works with and for vulnerable children. This will involve a shift towards Bromley emphasising professional judgement over process, a priority on understanding the child's journey and hearing the child's voice and a stronger definition of positive outcomes for LAC.

## 4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As part of our business plan we are developing an 'over-arching' looked after children strategy encompassing the main learning points from this care diagnostic and including our LAC sufficiency strategy.

We are also developing an 'Active involvement strategy' we will contain all the information on how LAC and Care Leavers are consistently involved directly in needs analysis, service planning and redesign.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Financial, legal and Personnel implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	