

# Decision Pathway – Report

**PURPOSE:** Key decision

**MEETING:** Cabinet

**DATE:** 06 June 2023

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Children’s Services (Ofsted) Improvement Plan 2023-25</b>		
<b>Ward(s)</b>	<b>Citywide</b>		
<b>Author: Fiona Tudge</b>	<b>Job title: Director Children, Families and Safer Communities</b>		
<b>Cabinet lead: Cllr Asher Craig</b>	<b>Executive Director lead: Abi Gbago, Executive Director for Children and Education (DCS)</b>		
<b>Proposal origin:</b> BCC Staff			
<b>Decision maker:</b> Cabinet Member <b>Decision forum:</b> Cabinet			
<p><b>Purpose of Report:</b></p> <p>Following the full standard <a href="#">ILACS</a> inspection in January 2023, Ofsted have requested an action plan that responds to inspection findings within the <a href="#">Bristol report</a> to be provided by 23 June 2023.</p> <p>In response to this, a new Children’s Improvement Plan has been prepared for the period 2023 – 2025. The previous improvement plan has reached the end of its lifespan and requires a reset in the context of newly identified improvement priorities and the transformation programme for children and education.</p> <p>This report describes the development of plan and provides a draft plan that gives Cabinet members the opportunity to assure itself that the plan responds effectively to areas for improvement raised by Ofsted and other existing key improvement priorities.</p>			
<p><b>1. Scope</b></p> <p>The plan articulates key improvement activity across children’s social care and early help services that fall within the ILACS Inspection Framework. Improvements for SEND services will remain out of scope and will be included in the local area SEND Partnership Plan.</p> <p>A draft plan showing areas for improvement and key actions is provided at Appendix A.1.</p>			
<p><b>2. Purpose</b></p> <p>The main purpose of the plan is to deliver Ofsted recommendations and the required improvements from inspection findings. Due to the comprehensive framework and inspection process, this covers most known areas for improvement in scope. A review of the following has also been undertaken for completeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key outstanding recommendations from peer reviews</li> <li>• Outstanding key improvements that carried forward from previous improvement plan</li> <li>• Delivery of key service plan changes</li> <li>• Anything else from quality assurance / performance / feedback we need to address that meets plan inclusion criteria (below)</li> </ul> <p>To ensure available resources are used in the best way, improvement work will be focussed on priorities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pose a significant risk to children’s outcomes</li> <li>• Address system-wide and leadership challenges</li> </ul>			

- Require additional resources, capacity or partnership activity to deliver the required change

### 3. Strategic Fit

The plan reflects the strategic intent of [Belonging Strategy Vision](#) which also underpins the Council’s Corporate Strategy and key improvement areas identified in Service Delivery Plans for 2023/24.

The plan will be able to stand alone, so it can be published and shared with Ofsted and will enable accountability for delivery of the necessary improvements across children’s services. The plan has been created alongside the Children and Education Transformation Programme and has consistent aims. Some elements of the plan will be delivered via the programme and are clearly identified. These include some workforce initiatives to better recruit and retain social workers and work to improve sufficiency of homes for children in our care.

### 4. Timescale

The plan will cover the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25 with a refresh process at the end of year 1. This will allow for more meaningful actions and measurement over the year and the opportunity to ensure the plan remains purposeful in year 2.

### 5. Development of the plan and priority areas for improvement

The draft plan, provided at Appendix A.1, shows key areas for improvement, actions and timescales under the four themes from the Ofsted ILACS inspection framework. These themes reflect a child’s journey through our services and the leadership and system-wide arrangements necessary to deliver good services and outcomes for children. The themes are shown below with priority activity included within the plan:

#### Theme 1: Improving the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

- Further development of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements with key partners to ensure more timely decision-making for children
- New operating protocol, in line with our practice model and threshold document, to ensure consistency of practice in relation to triage and decision making for children
- Joint work with health to improve timeliness of Initial Health Assessments for our children in care
- Oversight arrangements and workforce development to improve assessments and support to children living in private fostering arrangements
- Work with partners to improve the timeliness and consistency of child protection strategy meetings when children may be at risk of significant harm

#### Theme 2: Improving the experiences and progress of children in care

- Service redesign to identify transition needs of young people through timely assessments under the Care Act framework
- Further development of the specialist service and targeted education support for children seeking asylum
- Guidance and training to improve the quality and timeliness of life story work for children in care

#### Theme 3: Improving the experiences and progress of care leavers

- Delivery of phase 2 of regional care leaver offer to create an equitable offer
- Improving the housing offer for care leavers, including an out of custody pathway

#### Theme 4: Improving the impact of leadership on our work children and families

- Initiative to recruit and retain social workers, including bursary scheme and international social work scheme
- Working with health partners to secure improved health offer for children in care and care leavers, including mental health offer

- Develop joint processes across Children and Education services to oversee the welfare and safety of children who are missing education and who are electively home educated
- Enhancing performance management arrangements to enable better leadership oversight
- Improved oversight arrangements for children in care living in unregistered provision
- Further development of the way we identify and support children experiencing extrafamilial harm

## **6. Improvement partnership arrangements**

Following a second *Requires Improvement* judgement under the ILACs inspection framework the Council has now formally engaged with Newton Europe, the DfE improvement delivery partner, as part of an Enhanced Diagnostic Programme to support us in identifying and developing parts of the children's system that will deliver greatest benefit. Any relevant focussed improvement work arising from this will be incorporated into the plan following the diagnostic phase in June 2023.

The Council has also partnered with Islington Council as part of DfE funded Sector Led Improvement Partnership arrangements. Islington will provide support with implementation of agreed areas for improvement, including the redesign of services for adolescents and improving performance management and quality assurance arrangements. They will also share best practice and act as a critical friend throughout our improvement journey.

## **7. Delivering the Plan**

The majority of the plan will be delivered within services and existing budgets as part of agreed service-level activity and practice development. Any key dependencies and programmes for delivery that have been agreed outside of existing service budget and capacity are identified within the plan. This is mainly via the Children and Education Transformation Programme and DfE-funded projects such as the development of two new in-house children's homes for children with more complex needs.

## **8. Working across the organisation and with partners**

The inspection report identifies areas for improvement around the effectiveness of some of our joint working with our health and the police partners. Within the plan there are strategic actions to ensure more effective local authority engagement and influence within partnership and commissioning arrangements, and more specific work with partners to focus on known areas for improvement, including the development of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements and securing a better health offer for our children in care and care leavers.

While recognising that corporate and political support for children's services is improving, the report says this could be strengthened to drive improvement at a quicker pace. Report findings also highlight where we can work more effectively across our organisation to secure the best outcomes for children. Examples include the housing pathway for care leavers, ensuring the welfare of children not attending school, and performance management arrangements to enable more effective leadership oversight.

Planning work has been undertaken across the Council and with partners to develop joint plans to secure the necessary changes in these areas. We are also strengthening our Corporate Parenting arrangements, via Local Government Association (LGA) support, which will further strengthen organisational ownership for improving children's outcomes, particularly for our children in care and care leavers.

## **9. Role of the Transformation Board and monitoring arrangements**

The newly formed Children and Education Transformation Board will oversee implementation of the plan and will monitor it regularly by exception to ensure sufficient progress and impact is being made.

All the actions are at a consistent level to ensure progress can be monitored over time alongside key success measures and milestones. The monitoring of actions, milestones and Key Performance Indicators will be via a dashboard which will routinely be brought to Board meetings.

Progress, risks and issues against delivery of the plan will be reported by exception to Corporate Leadership Board and Lead Member via the Transformation Board. Progress will also be reported to Ofsted and DfE as required, including Ofsted annual conversation meetings.

The Policy, Improvement and Partnerships Team will support monitoring and reporting arrangements for the improvement plan.

**10. Progress to date**

While we are required to submit a finalised improvement plan to Ofsted by 23 June 2023, activity is underway to address key areas for improvement. Practice developments in the way we oversee children in unregulated placements and in private fostering arrangements are now being embedded and we have improved joint processes with health to secure more timely provision of initial health assessments for children in care.

Progress with some transformational work is also supporting improvement, including the progression of the DfE funding children’s homes for children with complex needs. Strengthened joint governance arrangements have now also seen an impact in prioritising our care leavers within local authority housing pathways.

The draft plan will be discussed at Bristol’s Annual Conversation with Ofsted on 12 June 2023. This will enable any final feedback to be incorporated in advance of final submission.

**Recommendations:**

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Children’s Services Improvement Plan 2023-25 at Appendix A prior to submission to Ofsted on 23 June 2023.

**Corporate Strategy alignment:**

The improvement plan will perform a critical role in delivering corporate strategy commitments under the theme for *Children and young people: A city where every child belongs and every child gets the best start in life, whatever circumstances they were born into.*

**City Benefits:**

The plan will drive improvement in services and outcomes for children and families in Bristol.

**Consultation Details:**

The content has been discussed with Lead Member, relevant service areas, partners, and an update will be provided to Ofsted. Our improvement partners, Newton Europe and Islington Council will also support its implementation.

**Background Documents:**

- [ILACS Inspection Framework](#)
- [Bristol Children’s Services Inspection Report – Jan 2023](#)

<b>Revenue Cost</b>	£ N/A	<b>Source of Revenue Funding</b>	N/A
<b>Capital Cost</b>	£ N/A	<b>Source of Capital Funding</b>	N/A
<b>One off cost</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Ongoing cost</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Saving Proposal</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Income generation proposal</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

**Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:**

**1. Finance Advice:** Paragraph 6 sets out that most of the plan is delivered within services and will need to be within existing approved budgets. Programmes funded through Transformation or DfE funding will separately need to keep within the approved allocated funding.

**Finance Business Partner:** Andrew Osei, Finance Business Partner 22 May 2023.

**2. Legal Advice:** HMI has carried out a standard inspection of BCC Children’s Services pursuant to s136(2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (“EIA”). On completing an inspection under s136, the Chief Inspector must make a written report on the matters which were the subject of the inspection (s137(1)) and within 70 working days of receiving that report, a local authority must publish a written statement of action which they propose to take in light

of the report (EIA Regs 2007). Whilst inspectors will offer constructive criticism of the plan (via the DCS or their nominee), it is ultimately for the local authority to satisfy itself that the action plan is fit for purpose. The report and plan comply with the Council's legal obligations in that regard.

The Council must comply with its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children within its area and its duty to co-operate with its relevant partners in furtherance of such responsibilities. The Improvement Plan includes actions to strengthen compliance with statutory duties in respect of private fostering, children seeking asylum, and care leavers in particular.

**Legal Team Leader:** Caroline Harris, Team Manager – Child Protection Team 24 May 2023

**3. Implications on IT:** IT are supportive and available to aid in progressing relevant work and can be engaged through the existing work request process.

**IT Team Leader:** Alex Simpson, Senior Solution Architect 28 April 2023

**4. HR Advice:** The report is for Cabinet to note the new Children's Services Improvement plan following the full standard ILACs inspection, which is to be provided by 23 June 2023. There are no specific HR issues arising from the report, however as and when the action plan is implemented there may be an impact on employees. If this is the case, then we would review the impact on employee at that time.

**HR Partner:** Lorna Laing, HR Business Partner 24 May 2023

<b>EDM Sign-off</b>	Abi Gbago, Executive Director Children's and Education	17 May 2023
<b>Cabinet Member sign-off</b>	Cllr Asher Craig, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Equalities	17 May 2023
<b>For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off</b>	Mayor's Office	26 May 2023

<b>Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal</b> A.1 - Children's Services Improvement Plan 23-25 DRAFT	<b>YES</b>
<b>Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix D – Risk assessment</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix G – Financial Advice</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix H – Legal Advice</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix I – Exempt Information</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix J – HR advice</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix K – ICT</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix L – Procurement</b>	<b>NO</b>