

A good
start for
every child

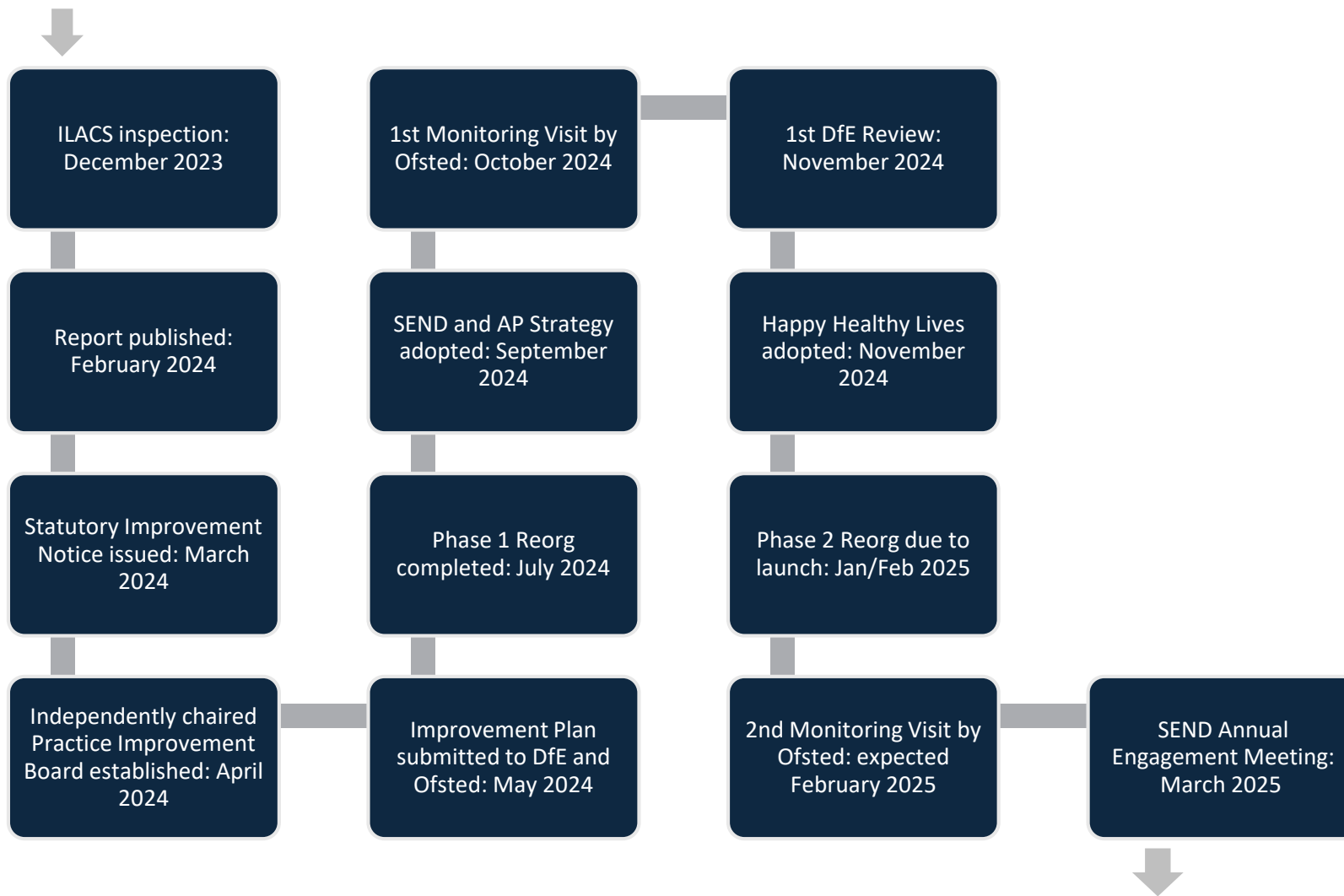
Enabling our children and families
to lead happy, healthy lives.

Families and
communities looking
after themselves
and each other

Starting Well Improvement Journey Overview

People (Health) Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee
11 February 2025

Tara Geere
Director of Starting Well, Statutory Director of Children's Services



LB Havering Improvement Plan on a Page

Hearing and responding to the voice and lived experiences of children and families in all that we do

1. Stable and Able Workforce	2.Improving Practice to Achieve Consistently Good Outcomes	3.Removing Barriers to Improving Practice	4.Governance, Leadership and Management Oversight
Deliver a social care structure that has sufficient capacity to meet the needs of children and families	Ensure that all cohorts of children are seen alone, where appropriate, and within suitable timescales, with recorded purposeful, planned and focused direct work	Develop a robust Starting Well Communications Plan for both internal staff and external partners	Develop a robust Starting Well Communications Plan for both internal staff and external partners
Improve recruitment, induction and retention of staff through delivering our workforce strategy with explicit career pathways	Improve the quality and timeliness of all assessments, plans and reviews with a focus on management oversight and achieving stability for the child	Review of all processes and forms within our Case Management System (Liquid Logic) to reduce inefficiencies, and secure investment to improve where required	Review of all processes and forms within our Case Management System (Liquid Logic) to reduce inefficiencies, and secure investment to improve where required
Review and update all training and development programmes for all staff in line with 10 days of training offer	Work with partners to develop consistency in application of thresholds, improve quality of referrals and raise awareness of early help and targeted support offer	Review use of technology and equipment to support practice e.g. 4G enabled laptops and AI apps pilot for supervision –	Review use of technology and equipment to support practice e.g. 4G enabled laptops and AI apps pilot for supervision –
Refocus our systemic model of practice and embed across all service areas	Review and update our response to cohorts of children (CiN, CP, CiC) including private fostering, children placed with parents and children living in supported accommodation	Review and relaunch of all tools for direct work and engaging children and young people e.g. Mind of My Own and Life Story App	Review and relaunch of all tools for direct work and engaging children and young people e.g. Mind of My Own and Life Story App
Take annual health check of the workforce survey	Review and update our response to contextual safeguarding, vulnerable adolescents and transitional safeguarding	Improving the way we use our performance data to identify and respond to emerging needs	Improving the way we use our performance data to identify and respond to emerging needs
Update and embed our Case Recording Standards, Practice Standards and our Staff Guide	Review processes for oversight and decision making across all areas of practice, including the independent reviewing service	Review of management systems (Fusion, LXP, Power BI) to give greater management oversight of practice	Review of management systems (Fusion, LXP, Power BI) to give greater management oversight of practice

Equality, Diversity and The Social Graces are considered in all aspects of practice, and our support offer to staff

Ofsted undertook their first monitoring visit on **8th and 9th October**. This visit focused on the experience of children in need of help and protection, including children with disabilities and families in Public Law Outline. There was also a focus on assessments, children who had been discussed at MARAC, and the impact of this, as well as the effectiveness of our quality assurance processes.

Inspectors met with 12 social workers over the two days, as well as undertaking case sampling. They also received a suite of evidence in advance via the prescribed Annex A of the inspection framework and met with senior leaders.

The final letter was received on 31st October. This letter is not published, however subsequent letters will be.

Areas of Improvement

-In majority of cases seen, assessments are thorough and timely

-Noticeable improvement in practice in the Assessment Teams

-Strategy meetings are well attended by partner agencies

-Staff report that they are happy working in Havering; managers and leaders are visible and supportive; caseloads are becoming more manageable and there is a range of training opportunities available.

-Corporate support is in place, inspectors heard from both the lead member and CEO and reported that they are committed and supporting with a whole council approach.

-The new structures with added capacity are supporting practice improvements

Areas for Continued Development

- Practice in PLO (Legal Proceedings) needs further improvement; this was acknowledged and work is already underway including the recent appointment of a highly competent Court Progression Manager.
- Impact of audits (including multi-agency) on outcomes for children; ensuring that the processes are supportive and are undertaken alongside workers / managers.
- Quality of practice remains inconsistent with some pockets of good work seen but in other areas improvements are not yet embedded ; we anticipated this and told inspectors this is what they would find.
- Further improvements needed in specialist practice areas e.g. child sexual abuse; this will be responded to as part of Phase Two Reorg to add capacity to our specialist exploitation team.
- Need to expand our methods of gaining feedback from children and families, however a good range of direct work tools seen. It was acknowledged we are working towards gathering more feedback.
- Evidence of management oversight but this is not yet being recorded consistently. Actions identified through QA activity and oversight panels need to be tracked by front line managers through supervision.
- There are sometimes delays in decision making or acting on decisions when they are made.
- There is some evidence of over-optimism in case decisions, however application of threshold mostly appears correct.

Going forward these visits will be every three months, with a different focus. The next visit will be in February 2025, with a focus on the experience of children in care, including those with disabilities.

The review took place on **12th and 13th November** as part of the Department for Education's intervention processes as outlined in our Improvement Notice.

DfE met with;

- Social Workers (including ASYEs and NQSWs)
- Service Managers
- Representatives from partner agencies (Education, Health, Police)
- Independent Chair of the Improvement Board.

These discussions, as well as the feedback meeting with the Council Leader, Lead Member, Chief Executive and Director of Children's Service, added a valuable dimension to the overall picture and gave helpful insights into the progress and challenges facing the service.

The letter from DfE noted that it was evident throughout the review that staff are committed and passionate about working in Havering, and there is positivity around the drive to improve services for children.

The next review will be in approximately six months' time, where conversations will be held with the same staff group as far as possible

Where we have improved;

- The restructure has created more coherence within the service and has allowed more focus on that areas where improvement is most needed
- Commitment, visibility and transparency of the senior leadership team
- Caseload volumes are reducing (though increasing complexity can impact upon morale in some teams)
- Introduction of AI tools such as Co-Pilot and Magic Notes
- Strategic partnership was described as strong with good access to training and improved application of the escalation process by all partners.

Areas for continued improvement;

- Two-way communication across the service areas, and across the safeguarding partnership (including referral and assessment outcomes)
- Further support for ASYEs and newly qualified social workers
- Further training for auditors
- Liquid Logic Case Management System (*improvement work in partnership with Islington Children's Services is underway*)
- Induction for new staff
- Consistency in threshold understanding across service areas and across the safeguarding partnership
- Quality and consistency of supervision and management oversight
- Ensuring the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is fully understood across all service areas

1.2 Launch of Phase 2 re-organisation; consultation planned to launch by end of January 2025 (originally planned for completion by November 2024); delay has impacted on a number of actions.

3.2 ASYE Programme of Support; career progression opportunities are currently under review. The ASYE handbook outlines the programme of support for NQSWs completing the ASYE. NQSW ASYE caseloads are monitored by the PSW.

3.3 Practice Standards were launched in September 2024. Workshops to take place in January/February 2025 to ensure all staff have a clear understanding of the practice standards and expected application to enhance accountability, compliance and quality.

3.4 A programme of Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) Support through DfE including training delivered by Centre for Systemic Social Work (CfSSW) for permanent staff; A schedule of training has commenced in January 2025.

4.1 Develop and implement caseload weighting tool; this will be reviewed by SMT in January 2025 with an update to Practice Improvement Board in January with advice to take time and implement in a planned and purposeful way.

4.4 Ensuring our staff feel supported, cared for and that their health and wellbeing is priority; programme of staff conferences and managers forums commencing from February 2025. Reduction in caseload volume is positively impacting upon staff morale.

5.2 Review of transfer protocol and the processes and standards associated with case transfer; Protocol reviewed and re-launched, system review work will further support this.

7.9 End to end review of services provided to children with disabilities, including raising awareness across the partnership around the additional vulnerabilities of children with disabilities and SEND;

- Re-organisation of CWD and SEND services; finalised in September with additional capacity added.

- Review of Short Breaks processes and pathways is underway

- SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024-28 published in September, children's version being planned

- Review and update of SEND Local Offer is underway

8.4 Improving the effectiveness and impact of IRO's on outcomes for children in care;

- IRO and CP chair roles were separated in April 2024

- Escalation policy updated in April 2024 and there is greater evidence of IROs escalating issues on behalf of children and young people

- Further service meetings will be attended by the IRO Service Manager between January and March 2025 within the Safeguarding and Children in Care service

8.11 Recruitment, assessment, training and support of Foster Carers is effective and robust - First Mockingbird constellation (Ohana) launched on 24th November, with six fostering families.

9.6 Introduce a Council offer of apprenticeships for young people leaving care; one care experienced young person has interviewed and been offered an apprentice role within Starting Well. Further roles in areas of the Council are being scoped, including the addition of ring-fenced apprenticeship roles within Highways contracts.

10.1 Improve the way we use data to understand and respond to emerging needs

- Training for managers in accessing, analysing and understanding performance data to be included as part of new induction being developed
- Narrative is provided against monthly data pack as standard and quality is improving
- Power BI heat map of known SEND and social care needs; on hold due to SLIP Liquid logic improvement work (see below)

10.2 Review of all processes and forms within our Case Management System

Initial SLIP partner had to withdraw in October. Work with London Borough of Islington commenced in late November with workshops taking place throughout January and initial feedback to Starting Well Leadership Team. Configuration Review taking place in February and March.

10.4 Review of tools and methodologies for engaging with children and young people

Direct Work Toolkit developed by Principal Social Worker and launched in November; need to ensure direct work equipment boxes are initiated and maintained, and direct work champions are identified

10.6 Ensure sufficient administrative support is in place

Roles created as part of Phase one reorg and will be appointed to once Phase two re-org is completed

10.7 Development of AI apps to support managers and staff

- Extended Pilot of Co-pilot launched and will run to March 2025
- Beam Magic Notes to be rolled out in early 2025, supervision templates being developed for pilot

11.1 Ensure there is sufficient financial support to enable the delivery of the improvement plan
Additional funds of just over £11m were allocated to children's services in 2024-2025. We await the budget setting for 2025-26, following the announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement on 18th December. Whilst we welcome the increase in funding, we are acutely aware that it will not be enough to meet all our financial pressures across the Council. The CEO and S151 officer are in conversation with MHCLG regarding a further capitalisation direction.

11.2 Improve engagement with and impact of quality assurance activity
Following feedback from staff groups, Ofsted and DfE on our audit processes, forms and roles and responsibilities are being reviewed, including more focus on outcomes for children, and voice of families

11.3 Review and improve our corporate parenting approach
-LGA Corporate Parenting Review has been undertaken and Council wide training delivered
-Corporate Parenting Strategy to be reviewed and updated in early 2025

11.4 Improve quality and consistency of management oversight and supervision
The supervision policy has been updated and the systemic supervision template will be restored into practice from January 2025, alongside a good exemplar. Training will be available for Service/Team Managers on management and leadership, developing good assessments and developing good plans between January and March 2025.

11.5 Review Starting Well Governance structure
-Scheme of Delegation has been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with ELT. Feedback provided in respect of Statutory DCS role. Agreed changes are expected to be approved shortly.
-Review of governance structure underway and to be taken to Managers Forum in March 2025

- **Assessments completed within 45 working days** continues to remain an area of strong improvement, from 70.4% in April up to the current 96.7% during November
- **CIN who had a review carried out within timescale** currently stands at 98.7%, with 93.5% of CiN cases with supervision in the last two months
- **Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days** was 95.8% in November, compared to 58.3% in April 2024
- Improvement in the number of **CiC placed 20 miles plus from where they used to live** from 54 (19.4%) in September, down to 48 (17.6%) up-to-date 30th November
- Placement stability remains an area of strength, with 9.9% of **children living in 3 or more placements** in the year (up-to-date last year) and 70.7% of children in care under age 16 and **looked after for at least 2.5 years, in the same placement for at least 2 years**
- The percentage of **CiC cases where supervision has taken place in the last 2 months** has increased in month, from 57% at 31st October up to 73.1% at 30th November
- Significant improvement in the number of **16-year-olds placed in Supported Accommodation**, down from 7 in May, to 4 as at 30th November
- **Care Leavers with an up-to-date pathway plan in place** has continued to improve markedly throughout the year up from 51.7% during April to 98% at 30th November

- We have seen a **25% increase in the number of children who are subject of a child protection plan (CPP)** between September and November. Of the children made subject to a CPP in November, a third stepped up from Child in Need (CIN) plans and 4 had previously been on a child protection plan in the last 2 years. We continue to review any over optimism in ending plans early.
- All indicators relating to the health of children in care (**dental checks, immunisations, health assessments** and **substance misuse**) require further improvement, although historically improvements are seen in the final quarter of the year.
- Whilst all indicators relating to **supervisions** and **pathway plans** have significantly improved compared to this time last year, a sustained focus is required to maintain the positive trajectory of practice.
- Both indicators relating to the **percentage of children experiencing multiple changes of social worker** remain off target as anticipated and will continue to be impacted by the transition to the new service structures, and staff turnover as we continue to target temp to perm recruitment, for the remainder of the year.

Questions

The Havering you want to be part of