



PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:

Children's Social Care Improvement Plan and External Monitoring

ELT Lead:

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Policy context:

An update of progress against the improvement plan submitted to DfE and Ofsted following the issue of a statutory improvement notice in March 2024

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress by the Starting Well Directorate in delivering improvements to Children's Services in response to the report published by Ofsted in February 2024 which rated our services 'inadequate'.
- 1.2 Following the publication of the inspection findings, our first Ofsted monitoring visit took place in October 2024, with a focus on children in need of help and protection.
- 1.3 It was noted by the Ofsted inspectors that the reduction in caseload volume delivered by adding capacity through the first phase of the service re-organisation has had a positive impact, however there are areas where focused improvement continues to be required.
- 1.4 The letter from the first monitoring visit is not published, however subsequent letters will be.
- 1.5 Oversight, challenge and support has been provided by the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Advisor (Jane McSherry), alongside the first DfE review undertaken in November 2024.
- 1.6 The 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.
- 1.7 A statement by Councillor Ford providing an overview summary of the findings from both Ofsted and DfE has been published on the Council website.

1.8 As part of the ongoing monitoring of a local authority in intervention, our next Ofsted monitoring visit is due in February 2025, and the next DfE review due to take place in May 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that members acknowledge progress made and the next steps in the improvement journey, noting requirements to deliver the necessary changes.

3. REPORT DETAIL

3.1 Our improvement plan was submitted to Ofsted and DfE on 31st May 2024. Work had already commenced in a number of areas outlined in the plan, including work in relation to the re-organisation of Havering's core statutory social work services.

3.2 An overview of the activity so far and feedback from external scrutiny is shared in Appendix 1

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial Implications and Risks:

The improvement plan was costed at c£5.000m in addition to the £11.2m growth that was added to Starting Well in 2024-2025 most of which was for funding additional social worker and management posts. In addition it was decided not to pursue staffing and Early Help savings that had been written into the budget in previous budget rounds. As there is a statutory requirement to respond to the Ofsted inspection and a risk of Central government intervention should the Council not do so these costs were effectively unavoidable. The £2m funding allocated to Havering for social care was therefore used entirely for Starting Well (Children's Services) to partially fund the first year of the improvement plan. Starting Well requested DfE grants of £0.671 (Improvement Grant of £0.352m, Mockingbird foster carer contribution of £0.155m and Service leaders in Practice contribution of £0.164m).

This left a c£2.330m shortfall in funding for the full year effect. As no further support from Central Government has been received this has fallen to the Council to finance and so has contributed to the widening budget gap that must be met by borrowing.

The Director of Starting Well started implementing the Improvement Plan after its approval by Cabinet. Additional costs have been incurred throughout the years for the Improvement team (estimated to be c£0.400m) and the new staffing structure has been recruited to. Initially this meant increasing numbers of agency workers but as the year has progressed there has been some success in recruiting more permanent staff and directors. However there is an in year overspend on staffing of £1.340m (this is less than the full year cost because recruitment has been ongoing throughout the year.)

Additional funding will be built in the budget for 25-26 during the MTFs process – however this is also ultimately likely to be financed by borrowing until such time as the full costs of Childrens Services are recognised in our financial settlement.

Legal Implications and Risks:

There are no apparent legal implications in noting the content of the Report.

Human Resources Implications and Risks:

There is no direct or indirect impact to any staff member resulting from the Starting Well Ofsted Improvement Plan. The areas that require support from HR colleagues are outlined in the plan and any work undertaken (i.e. service redesigns) will be done following the necessary processes and procedures.

Equalities Implications and Risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have ‘due regard’ to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: ‘Protected characteristics’ are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender, and sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

Specific projects and programmes of work within the Ofsted Improvement Plan will have an Equality and Health Impact Assessment undertaken as needed, and any subsequently identified issues responded to.

Environment and Climate Change Implications and Risks

The Council has committed to taking action towards the organisation and the borough becoming carbon neutral by 2040.

No significant detrimental climate change implications or risks are expected as a direct outcome of this report. The full Improvement Plan is a lengthy document and in monitoring and reporting against progress, printing is kept to a minimum to reduce organisational CO2 emissions.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Feb 2025 Starting Well Improvement Journey overview presentation