

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** February 2022  
**Report of:** Jill McGregor – Corporate Director Children’s Services

### Report Title

Update on Children’s Services’ Improvement Activity

### Summary

This report provides an update and assurance on the progress of improvement activity within Children’s Services since the last update presented to Committee in October 2021.

The report details the actions and progress that has been made following the formal Monitoring Visit by Ofsted, in September 2021; progress against our Ambitions Plan as well as the recent evaluation by the DfE advisor as to the current position and progress in Trafford. (February 2022).

In doing so this report, recaps on the priorities that were outlined to committee in October 2021 and updates on progress within those areas, and of the identified short-term priorities.

### Recommendation(s)

- To note the contents of this report and the work that has been progressed to date.
- To agree to receive further updates
- To offer scrutiny and challenge to the service.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers:  
Updated Ambitions Plan  
Ofsted Monitoring Visit – Published Letter  
Previous Report to Committee - October 2021  
Revised Children’s Services’ Structure

Please specify whether the content of the report relates to any of the following areas. If the report does not relate to an area just put N/A.

Corporate Priorities	
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	
Finance	
Legal	
Equality/Diversity	
Sustainability	
Carbon Reduction	
Staffing/E-Government/Asset Management	
Risk Management	
Health and Safety	

### **Monitoring Visit**

As reported to Committee in October 2021 Ofsted undertook their second formal monitoring visits on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September with the report subsequently published on 2nd November 2021 (See background papers - Formal published letter).

Following the findings of this monitoring visit, the Service undertook an exercise to review whether the Ambitions Plan (Improvement Plan) and associated planned improvement activity fully addressed the key finding and whether any additional actions needed to be taken to support an acceleration of progress against critical priorities. These priorities included some specific actions within the areas of:

- Workforce stability
- Leadership and management
- Quality of practice

These action that has subsequently been progressed in respect of these key areas is detailed below

#### **Workforce Stability**

Workforce stability has continued to remain a significant priority for the service and is to be routed through Ambition 3 of the Ambitions plan under the action; ‘Creating the Conditions for Practice to Flourish’. The impact of workforce instability was recognised during the Monitoring Visits, but it was also recognised that were factors that had contributed to this including the service redesign and continuing to work through the pandemic.

Despite this a number of actions have been progressed to improve the stability of the workforce these include:

- Implementation of the revised service structure and a detailed programme of change management to support “go live” with the new arrangements becoming operational on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021
- Continued roll out of Care and Confidence modules to support the workforce through this change
- Establishing a systematic programme of recruitment campaigns and engaging an external recruitment company to enhance the approach
- Continuing to work with interim staff who are in a position to consider permanent employment with Trafford.
- Strengthened the induction programme ensuring that managers and practitioners are welcomed and supported in new roles and responsibilities.

The impact of these actions has started to be seen in terms of both recruitment and retention activity. 14 new permanent social workers were recruited over the last 6 months, one agency social worker joined Trafford permanently, one agency social worker converted to a permanent advanced practitioner post and two agency team leaders are now permanent practice managers.

This was further recognised in the DfE advisor’s January highlight report:

*“Investment and appointment of a specialist recruitment agency to recruit to leadership posts on a permanent basis in the new structure and experienced Advanced Practitioners and Social Workers. This is beginning to show results and the churn in the workforce seen last summer is beginning to stabilise. Trafford are receiving good applications from good candidates”*

(Claire Burgess – DfE Highlight Report – Jan 22)

## **Leadership and Management**

There is a vast amount of activity taking place in this area including the embedding of the new Supervision Framework, and development of the Investing in our People Strategy. Since the last report, a new recording and monitoring system for supervision has been implemented that is providing an accurate self-view of frequency of supervisions. Quarterly thematic audits by Heads of Service have commenced that will serve to help evidence the improved quality of supervision. All practitioners have received a supervision in the month of December and January, with the only exceptions being where there has been sickness. The Practice Improvement and Learning Service are scheduled to complete a whole service audit to benchmark the quality of supervision across all areas against this new framework.

A Leadership Forum that has been established by the Director of Early Help and Social Care continues to be a key vehicle for strengthening the leaders and managers of the service. This is held on a fortnightly basis and the strength of bringing together the managers across the service has facilitated the development of consistent expectation and standards of practice

The continued embedding of the Quality Assurance framework at every level has resulted in the Service having a clear line of sight to practice and there is evidence of improvement activity being driven by managers. An increased volume of routine audits has been sustained (470 children's case files audited last year, a further 207 further audited via a moderation), and a mixed methodology approach has been introduced. This includes Live Multi-Agency Audit, TSSP Thematic Multi-Agency Audit, and conversational audits.

In addition, there is a developing sense of shared understanding of what "good" looks like. 44% of all audits across the last calendar year were further audited through a moderation. In quarter 2, 82% of all audits had the same grading after moderation).

There is a strong established understanding regarding the quality of practice and the service are now 'able to present an accurate self-assessment' however work is ongoing in respect of 'closing the loop' and getting to a place where this understanding is impacting on improvements for children and families.

### Quality of Practice

There has been a continued to focus on the critical issues that need to be understood to *improve* the quality of practice that is really going to impact for the better for children and families being supported. During this reporting period there has been a concentration on becoming more data intelligent, effectively utilising the now strong performance monitoring arrangement and comprehensive datasets to analyse information and identify emerging issues and trends. A key development in this regard has been the implementation of permanence tracker and scorecard for children in our care

This has enabled the service to track the progress of children's individual plans and whether there is any drift and delay in making long terms plans for our children as well as identify patterns and trends that may need focused attention e.g. this has supported the work in respect of children who are "placed with parents" and subject to legal care orders. The dedicated project approach that has been implemented has resulted in no care proceedings being concluded with the making of a full care order and children being placed with parents since May and there are currently 9 of discharge applications before the Court.

In November 2021 the service held the first Practice Fortnight as part of the continued investment in the workforce, and their development. The event was designed to share experience, learn from one another, and understand more about different areas within the service. The majority of sessions were delivered by operational staff and/or managers, some taking a 'Day in the Life of' format. In total there were over 750 attendances at over 25 sessions, with almost entirely positive feedback:

*"It has been a brilliant fortnight and lots of positive interactions between services. This can only improve the outcomes for children and families we work alongside." Final Single Service Briefing Attendee's comment*

Building on the success of this event, planning for World Social Work Week (and other opportunities for sharing and learning) and a launch of a 'Year of Practice' is currently being progressed and this approach will further strengthen the commitment to continuous learning and improvement and further support the ambitions to not only strengthen practice but to make Trafford the employer of choice.

There has continued to a focus on the implementation of the use Child Impact Chronology through dedicated training and embedding the use of Child Impact Chronologies within procedures and practice standards as routine, understand the key role these play in helping us to understand children's lived experience. Since September, all but two of the 14 families being considered as part of the Legal Gateway process have child impact chronologies and as such, the impact of the work in these areas is starting to be seen.

Fortnightly reports are submitted to the DfE regarding performance in respect of seeing our children, maintaining the position that that only by visiting children can there be an understanding of what life is like for them and that they are safe. Ofsted recognised that *"There has been a determined focus on increasing the time social workers spend visiting children and speaking to them, which has continued through the pandemic. Children are regularly seen face to face and are spoken to alone when appropriate"* but there remained an understanding within the service that there was more to do regarding improving the quality of visits to children.

The Practice Improvement and Learning Service undertook a thematic audit in January looking at the quality of visits. The headlines were shared in January's Improvement Board Steering Group where there was collective agreement to hold a dedicated leadership session to revisit the principles of visiting children. This was hugely successful with the group coming together to agree a programme of further development with all practitioners.

In addition, there has been investment through the procurement of a strength-based intervention programme, (a 3-year contract with a strategic workforce development partner - Strengthening Practice) is crucial to developing and supporting the workforce and will also have a positive impact workforce stability going forward. Strengthening Practice are continuing to work with the whole of the workforce on a bespoke Core Skills programme, as well as a smaller collaboration group. This will support practitioners through an intensive development programme over a three-year period. The work of the collaboration group is currently progressing the development of bespoke Trafford specific learning objectives and focus.

Ofsted highlighted that there was work required to strengthen the Safeguarding Unit and the roll of the Child Protection Chairs/Independent Reviewing Officers. This is being progressed through work with Professor Jan Horwath (Emeritus Professor of Child Welfare in the Department of Sociological Studies University of Sheffield). This externally commissioned work with focus on ensuring that the role of the Unit is routed in strength based approaches that support and engagement families in a meaningful way whilst also ensuring that risk is managed effectively particularly in relation ensuring the lived experience of the child is central to safeguarding management and practice.

### **Progress against the Ambition Plan**

Despite the challenges of recent months, the Service has continued to make progress against each of the 8 Ambitions within the plan.

In January, a full review of progress against each of the 8 Ambition took place, considering what has been achieved to date and, where relevant, to give clarity of what needed to be the short-term focus. It provided an opportunity for a sense check of

advancement in all areas of the detailed plan, to highlight those areas where it was apparent that further traction was required, and to reflect on achievements to date.

The updated action plan now outlines the priorities and some areas of focus for the forthcoming year, and it is the intention for this summary to provide key information to be considered on a Partnership basis through a series of round table events through February and March.

As a consequence of the progress that has been made in respect of establishing robust systems and processes (including the redesigned service arrangements) it is now vital to the next phase of improvement that the ambition workstreams are truly multi-agency. This is to both provide challenge and support, but to also ensure that the ambitions for children and families in Trafford are genuinely owned by the partnership.

With this in mind Ambition 8 will focus on quality of practice issues for the partnership e.g., improving the quality of referrals to CSC, the quality and effectiveness of strategy meetings or core groups.

A RAG has been applied to the Ambitions plan (attached) and the progress that has been made as follows:

**RED** - Limited or no progress with the action.

**AMBER** - Action is partially complete and on track with identified work still to do.

**GREEN** - Action is complete and is able to be reworded to reflect slight change in focus.

The document illustrates that there is progress within the vast majority of the multiple actions underpinning each Ambition. Ambition 1 (Leaders and managers at every level understand and influence practice to be consistently good) and Ambition 3 (Quality of Practice is consistently good across the service so that it makes a difference to our children and families) have seen the most substantial progress, alongside Ambition 2 (Children and families receive the right help at the right time from the right professional) where the prototype of the Trafford Team Together (TTT) model has been implemented across two locations (West and North) and is already having a positive impact on the children and families who are benefiting from it. The remit of the TTT model is now being expanded

A formal update of this plan was presented to the Improvement Board on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022 and is embedded within this report.

### Analysis and Summary of Position to Date

During this reporting period progress has continued against those areas that have been identified by Ofsted as needing to improve, and this continues to be monitored internally (through agreed quality assurance and governance processes) as well as through the formal oversight of DfE who recognised that:

*“Trafford has continued to deliver improvement despite a significant redesign and the on-going impact of Covid. This is a positive testament to the strength of the Leadership Team, Corporate and Political Leaders, working together to deliver improvement and make a difference to children’s lives.”* Claire Burgess - DfE January 22

In the most recent meeting with the DfE, following their 6 monthly review, it was reported that the biggest strength is how leaders, managers and all staff talk about children and young people, and that this is rare in inadequate authorities *“Over the last reporting*

*period it has become increasingly obvious that the culture of putting children first in everything that Trafford does is becoming embedded.” (Claire Burgess – DfE Highlight Report – Jan 22)*

This reflects the work and progress that has taken place over the last quarter however the leadership team continue to recognise that there is more that needs to be progressed to ensure a greater consistency of practice. As stated by Ofsted, a key determinant in achieving this is stability within the workforce.

The refresh of the Ambitions plan that is currently being progressed on partnership basis will provide further opportunities to ensure that action is being taken and ultimately that improvements for children and families are sustained.

## **Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

*The recommendations will be set out on the first page of the report. Set out here the reasons for those recommendations if they are not laid out within the main body of the report or consolidate the reasons if they are spread throughout the report.*

*Background Papers:*



Monitoring Visit  
Letter Sept 21.pdf



Improvement Plan 8  
Ambitions Update to



Children's Services  
(Revised Structure - O



CSC Improvement  
Activity & Progress O