

<b><u>MEETING</u></b> <b>COUNCIL</b>
<b><u>DATE AND TIME</u></b> <b>TUESDAY 30TH JANUARY, 2018</b> <b>AT 7.00 PM</b>
<b><u>VENUE</u></b> <b>HENDON TOWN HALL, THE BURROUGHS, LONDON NW4 4BG</b>

Dear Councillors,

Please find enclosed an additional report relating to the following items for the above mentioned meeting which will be received by the Council as an urgent late item in the name of the Leader of the Council.

Item No	Title of Report	Pages
1.	Report from the Leader of the Council – Barnet Children’s Services Improvement Action Plan	3 - 72

Kirstin Lambert, [kirstin.lambert@barnet.gov.uk](mailto:kirstin.lambert@barnet.gov.uk), 020 8359 2177

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	<p><b>Council</b></p> <p><b>30 January 2018</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>Leader of the Council</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All wards</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Key</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p>Annex 1 – Report to Children’s, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee, 16 January 2018, Update report on progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Ofsted Monitoring Visit Final Letter</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Barnet Children’s Services Improvement Plan Data Dashboard</p> <p>Annex 2 – Children’s Commissioners Report into Report into Children’s Social Care Services in the London Borough of Barnet</p> <p>Annex 3 – Statutory Direction from the Secretary of State for Education</p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Officer Contact Details</b></p>	<p>John Hooton, Chief Executive Chris Munday, Strategic Director Children and Young People</p>

## Summary

On 16 January 2018 the Children Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee received a report on the progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan to ensure scrutiny by elected members in improving the effectiveness of the local authority in protecting and caring for children and young people as a corporate parent.

After the Committee meeting took place, a report and recommendations by the Commissioner for Children's Services in Barnet has been published by the Department for Education. Given the significance of this issue, the Leader of the Council, Leader of the Opposition, Chairman of the Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee, the Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Children and Young People have agreed that Full Council should receive and consider the report of the Commissioner for Children's Services.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. That the update report on progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan (Annex 1) be noted.**
- 2. That the Children's Commissioners Report into Report into Children's Social Care Services in the London Borough of Barnet (Annex 2) be noted.**
- 3. That the Statutory Direction from the Secretary of State for Education in respect of the London Borough of Barnet's Children's Services (Annex 3) be noted.**

### **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

- 1.1 To ensure that Council has visibility of the progress of the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and the findings of the Children's Commissioners Report into Report into Children's Social Care Services.

### **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Council are asked to note progress of the Improvement Action Plan and findings of the Children's Commissioner to ensure that all Members are aware of the issues and mitigating actions. Delivering the Improvement Action Plan and addressing the findings and recommendations of the Commissioner is essential to ensuring that children and young people in the Borough are safeguarded.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 None. To ensure that the Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and the findings of the Commissioner are addressed, it is essential that all Members are aware of the Plan and findings and recommendations of the Commissioner.

#### **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 Council are asked to note the report and continue to support the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee and Strategic Director for Children and Young People to monitor the progress of improvements and to deliver the Improvement Action Plan.

#### **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

##### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 5.2.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.3 Social Value**

- 5.3.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.4 Legal and Constitutional References**

- 5.4.1 Council Constitution, Article 4, The Full Council – section 4.1 states that “The Full Council provides a central forum for debate and gives the opportunity for Councillors to ask questions about the Council or matters affecting the Council.”

##### **5.5 Risk Management**

- 5.5.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.6 Equalities and Diversity**

- 5.6.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.7 Corporate Parenting**

- 5.7.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.8 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.8.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

##### **5.9 Insight**

5.9.1 As set out in the report at Annex 1.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1 As set out in the report at Annex 11.

	<p align="center"><b>CHILDREN, EDUCATION, LIBRARIES &amp; SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE</b></p> <p align="center"><b>16 January 2017</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>Update report on progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Reuben Thompstone</p>
<p align="center"><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All</p>
<p align="center"><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p align="center"><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p align="center"><b>Key</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p align="center"><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p><b>Appendix 1: Ofsted monitoring visit final letter</b>  <b>Appendix 2: Barnet Children's Services Improvement Plan Data Dashboard</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Officer Contact Details</b></p>	<p>Chris Munday                  Strategic Director for Children and Young People  <a href="mailto:Chris.Munday@barnet.gov.uk">Chris.Munday@barnet.gov.uk</a></p>

Summary
<p>Children's services in Barnet were judged by Ofsted to be inadequate when Ofsted undertook a Single Inspection Framework (SIF) during April and May 2017. The Council fully accepted the findings of the report and is working collectively with the partnership to drive the improvements needed to transform social care services for children, young people and their families from inadequate to good rapidly.</p> <p>In July 2017 Committee was presented with the recommendations and areas for improvement highlighted by Ofsted, along with a draft Improvement Action Plan developed in response to these. Committee approved the draft Plan for consultation and delegated authorisation to complete and submit the plan to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the Chief Executive and Lead Member.</p> <p>The finalised Improvement Action Plan was submitted to Ofsted in October 2017. Ofsted confirmed that the plan satisfactorily reflected the recommendations and priorities of the inspection report. In November 2017, Committee was presented with the finalised Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and the confirmation letter from Ofsted.</p> <p>In November 2017, Ofsted conducted a monitoring visit of Children's Services, which focussed on</p>

the 'front door' arrangements in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Duty & Assessment Teams. The update on Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan includes reference to this monitoring visit.

This report provides an update on progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan to ensure scrutiny by elected members in improving the effectiveness of the local authority in protecting and caring for children and young people as a corporate parent. This is the third update report to be received by Committee and the reporting period for progress is November and December 2017. The update on progress is structured according to the seven improvement themes in the action plan, and the improvement plan data dashboard has been included in Appendix 2.

### Recommendations

- 1. That the Committee note the progress of the Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan as set out in paragraphs 1.8 to 1.71.**
- 2. That the Committee note details of Ofsted's monitoring visit set out in paragraphs 1.11 to 1.14 and the monitoring visit feedback letter received from Ofsted attached in Appendix 1.**
- 3. That the Committee note and scrutinise the performance information provided in paragraphs 1.72 to 1.85 and Barnet Children's Services Improvement Plan Data Dashboard attached in Appendix 2.**

#### **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

- 1.1 Children's services in Barnet were judged by Ofsted to be inadequate when Ofsted undertook a Single Inspection Framework (SIF) of these services in April and May 2017.
- 1.2 The Council fully accepted the findings of the report and is working collectively with the partnership to drive the improvements needed to transform social care services for children, young people and their families from inadequate to good rapidly.
- 1.3 To enhance scrutiny by elected members in order to support and challenge this continuous improvement, it was agreed at Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding (CELS) Committee in July that an update on the progress of implementing improvements will be a standing item on committee agendas. This is to ensure the local authority is effective in protecting children in need and caring for children and young people as a corporate parent.

#### **Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan**

- 1.4 In July 2017 CELS Committee was presented with the recommendations and areas for improvement highlighted by Ofsted along with a draft Improvement Action Plan developed in response to these, which Committee approved for consultation. Committee also delegated authorisation to complete and submit the plan to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the Chief Executive and Lead Member.



- 1.5 The action plan was finalised as *Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan* and submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Education. The Strategic Director received confirmation from Ofsted on 31 October that "*the plan satisfactorily reflects the recommendations and priorities of the inspection report*".
- 1.6 The action plan sets out the improvement journey and gives focus to transform services, especially social care, from inadequate to good rapidly. The action plan is in line with the three core strategic objectives that cut across all our plans for children, young people and families and underpin the systemic and cultural change needed to drive improvement within the borough:
- Empowering and equipping our workforce to understand the importance and meaning of purposeful social work assessments and interventions with families
  - Ensuring our involvement with the most vulnerable children in the borough positively impacts on their outcomes
  - Providing Practice Leadership and management throughout the system to ensure progress is made for children within timescales that are appropriate and proportionate to their needs and that practitioners are well supported, child curious and focused
- 1.7 The action plan has two elements of improvement planning which are complementary. The first being the turnaround priority that has a forensic focus on social work practice driving our capacity and capability to transform at pace and the second being a series of improvement themes:
1. Turnaround priority: To drive sustainable Practice Improvement at pace
- Improvement themes*
2. Governance Leadership, and Partnership
  3. Embedding Practice Leadership
  4. Right interventions, right time (Thresholds)
  5. Improving Assessment for children
  6. Improving Planning for children
  7. Effective Communications and Engagement to drive culture change that will improve children's lives.

**Update on progress since the last report:**

- 1.8 This is the third update report to be received by Committee and the reporting period for progress is November and December 2017.
- 1.9 The update on progress is structured according to the seven improvement themes in the action plan. Under each improvement theme there is a description of the theme and an update on key activities since the previous update report. There is a detailed update on the turnaround priority to drive sustainable practice improvement at pace.

## **1. Turnaround priority: To drive sustainable Practice Improvement at pace**

1.10 This theme is driving the quality of social work practice to turn around at pace to ensure children's outcomes are improved.

### **1.11 Ofsted monitoring visit and report**

Ofsted undertook their first Monitoring Visit on 14 and 15 November 2017. This was the first monitoring visit since the inspection judgement of inadequate in July 2017.

The monitoring visit focussed on the 'front door' arrangements within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Intervention and Planning Teams, including:

- The quality and timeliness of management oversight and decision making;
- The effectiveness of the MASH in responding to concerns about children;
- The quality and timeliness of assessments.

Inspectors acknowledged that senior leaders understand the improvements required to raise the standard of social work practice. They noted that the pace of change has been consistent and focussed, with evidence that Barnet has started to make progress to improve services for children and young people, including:

- increased use of, and findings from, quality assurance activities, that are verified by Barnet's improvement partner Essex County Council;
- positive staff morale, with staff reporting that they have benefited from increased training, staff conferences and communications from senior leaders;
- structural changes within the MASH, including additional levels of staffing, which has increased capacity, and in turn, improved and consolidated partnership working;
- improved application of thresholds and management oversight in the MASH and Intervention and Planning Teams.

1.12 The timeliness of decision making and quality of case recording and supervision were found to be inconsistent and overall assessments were found to be weak. There is more work to do to ensure that assessments evidence stronger analysis, include fathers and effectively engage the multi-agency partners.

1.13 It was highlighted that although progress is being made, Barnet is making improvements from a very low base. The process of changing the culture of acceptable practice remains a significant challenge if children and young people in are to be safeguarded effectively and their welfare promoted. Overall, the visit found limited improvement in practice, although there is improvement in some areas. The inspector's letter received following this monitoring visit can be found in Appendix 1.

1.14 The next monitoring visit will take place on 30 and 31 January 2018 and will revisit the "front door" and examine care planning for children and young people.

## **2. Governance Leadership, and Partnership**

- 1.15 This theme focuses on strengthening systems leadership for children with sufficient capacity and capability at all levels and governance arrangements that prioritise children and add value to improvements. The theme also seeks to ensure effective corporate support is in place which understands the role of social workers and reflects a collective ambition for children in the borough.
- 1.16 Recruitment was highlighted as a challenge in the Ofsted update report presented at CELS in November 2017. A recruitment campaign entitled *Bouncebackability* was launched on 14 September 2017 to attract experienced practitioners and managers into the borough for key roles across the service. Some of these roles included Team Managers (4 vacancies), Advanced Practitioners (8 vacancies), Social Workers (11 vacancies) and Clinical Practitioners (2 vacancies).
- 1.17 Following our recruitment campaign in September 2017, we have appointed 6 candidates to permanent social work roles. In November 2017, Barnet Human Resources Team was commissioned to approach bespoke recruitment agencies to address the need for high quality candidates. A total of 18 candidates were put forward; 8 were shortlisted for interviews. Of these, 2 candidates have been appointed and 4 are currently going through an assessment process. Another round of advertising will begin in January 2018.
- 1.18 Events for National Care Leavers week, from the 25th October to the 2nd November, provided opportunities for staff, members, partner agencies and care leavers to work together in sharing and understanding young peoples' experiences of being in care, and leaving care, in Barnet.
- 1.19 Care leavers attended all events, delivering insight and feedback, and met with elected members in doing so. 6 Barnet Care Leavers were employed to deliver information about the service to the wider staff group at North London Business Park and attended meet and greet sessions to share their voice with Senior Management Team.
- 1.20 Changes to governance arrangements have been agreed at Senior Management level, including consideration of operational updates to theme committees, the role of Performance and Contract Management Committee, the role and forward plan for Leaders Briefing, as well as looking at quarterly safeguarding meetings with the Council Leader, Chief Executive, Statutory Officers and Lead Members. The Council Leader, Leader of the Opposition and Members will now be asked to discuss and agree changes to the governance arrangements, and the review of Governance arrangements remains on schedule for completion by the end of January 2018.
- 1.21 As part of Barnet's improvement journey, changes were made to the improvement board following the Single Inspection Framework report in July 2017. The Children's Services Improvement Board is independently chaired by our lead improvement partner (Essex County Council Executive Director) and is responsible for the delivery of the Improvement Plan through effective scrutiny, challenge and measuring of impact. The Board is made up of the senior leaders from the Council – including

Members - and has representation from key partners including the police, health and education to bring focus and pace to the implementation of the Improvement Plan and driving work forward.

- 1.22 A scoping exercise has identified the known 'blockers' to efficient service delivery in both Family Services and Corporate finance, which are being worked through. The most urgent systems issue has been resolved, meaning that the finance team in Family Services are now able to progress items in Integra when staff have left or are absent. A number of support staff have been recruited in Family Services, who will be trained to understand the systems they need to support their role.
- 1.23 A review of the recruitment system has been completed, and changes implemented, which includes agreement with Capita to provide additional support to the Family Services recruitment campaign and the timescale agreed as follows:  
*'Candidates to be recruited within 60 working days from the date of the conditional offer being made to the start date of the candidate (subject to individual notice periods and Disclosure and Barring Service checks'*
- 1.24 Corporate Parenting Responsibilities training for members was delivered in December 2017. The training provided an introduction to the statutory responsibilities of members in their role as Corporate Parents. The training aimed to deepen members' understanding of how they can engage the voice of Barnet's children and young people in their work, explore the methods by which they can hold services to account and enable children and young people to talk directly with members about their lived experience and what Corporate Parenting means to them.
- 1.25 A total of 32 members attended the training, and feedback was collected to enable the quality of the training to be reviewed and future training to be informed by feedback from members. The feedback forms indicate that the training achieved its aims and members left more aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities. A shorter training has been scheduled for 25 January 2018 for members that were unable to attend this initial session.

### **3. Embedding Practice Leadership**

- 1.26 This improvement theme seeks to strengthen practice leadership through effective management oversight and increased capacity.
- 1.27 The MASH, Duty and Assessment Teams and Intervention and Planning Service are managed under a single framework which ensures a consistent management approach to children in need of help and protection.
- 1.28 The MASH has a stable management team which is leading the drive for practice changes within the service. This includes chairing fortnightly multi-agency meetings and the daily threshold meetings which is achieving greater consistency in decisions about thresholds. The service has been developing a tracker for managers to ensure the timeliness of decision making is kept under close scrutiny; the tracker will go live in January 2018.

- 1.29 The Duty and Assessment Teams continue to struggle to achieve timely throughput of assessments which has culminated in higher caseloads. Additional social workers and management capacity has been allocated to the Service to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to provide quality assurance. The Heads of Service are now chairing transfer meetings to ensure that closed assessments are moved out of the service swiftly to allow capacity for new assessments.
- 1.30 The Children in Care teams and the Care Leavers service are now managed by an experienced Head of Service who provides consistent management oversight and child focussed leadership. The additional team manager in Children in Care ensures caseloads are better managed. The timeliness of supervision is improving. The tracker that reports weekly on visits to children in care is assisting to improve timeliness of visits and provides the team managers with current information for use in supervision and performance management.
- 1.31 The practice development worker within these service areas provides leadership in the development of practitioners' confidence in direct work and life story work. The life story work completed by care leavers was recently used during member's training on corporate parenting. The Corporate Parenting Officers' Group is a forum for practice leaders from within Family Service and partner agencies to ensure a consistent and creative approach to care planning for all children in care and care leavers.
- 1.32 The 0-25 Disability service is yet to have the advantage of a stable staff group. The changes made to the leadership framework will provide the basis for the improvements needed. A working group has been established by the Head of Service with Adult Social Care that will deliver an agreed protocol to improve transitions for all children and young people with disabilities within this service.
- 1.33 The disability service is working to improve the consistency of threshold application and is currently not consistently offering the right level of support to families and young people. The Head of Service is overseeing the review of care support packages and the audit activity has been increased to better understand the priorities for improvement.
- 1.34 Improving management oversight remains a key area of focus; across the service, there are clear expectations being set about the need for managers to quality assure the work of their staff and facilitate reflective practice in supervision. A half day event for Family Services managers held in November was the first for the Management and Leadership Faculty of Barnet Children's Practice Academy.
- 1.35 Practice Development Workers are providing targeted practice based support to practitioners which is now aligned to the supervisory and management framework for staff. Support to Team Managers is also available to improve the quality of one to one and group supervision so that it provides a more reflective space in which managers can effectively challenge and support to staff and facilitate child focused practice.

- 1.36 Alongside, the Leadership and Management Faculty will provide opportunities for managers across the service to join together and contribute to the improvement journey through learning and development activities that inspire common purpose and shape leadership style. Building a strong and stable management team will continue over the period ahead with continued recruitment and development of permanent practice leaders that can drive consistent expectations of staff working with children.
- 1.37 Recruitment activities at the end of 2017 resulted in the successful appointment of two new Team Managers for the Intervention and Planning Service, one of which is an internal promotion, both post holders will start in January 2018; there are four Team Manager vacancies remaining across the 12 Duty & Assessment and Intervention & Planning Teams; vacancies are covered by consistent agency staff and with more interviews scheduled for the new year which we anticipate will reduce Team Manager vacancies further.
- 1.38 The Quality Assurance Framework has been strengthened in collaboration with our improvement partner, Essex County Council. Thematic and regular audits of practice are being undertaken routinely to measure the quality of practice against the expectations as set out within the Improvement Plan.

#### **4. Right interventions, right time (Thresholds)**

- 1.39 This theme is focused on developing an effective MASH and proportionate, effective and timely decision making across the whole social care system.
- 1.40 Following consultation with a broad range of partners a new threshold document has been agreed which is based on the Pan London Threshold Document published in October 2017. The threshold document will go live in January 2018.
- 1.41 The daily MASH meetings are supporting stronger multi-agency consideration of thresholds, and the development of a tracker will ensure that decisions are timely so there is no delay in children and families receiving help. The development of the 0-19 delivery model provides an integrated help offer for families and following the successful launch of the East/Central Early Help Multi-Agency Panel meetings, the West locality will be going live in January with the South locality preparing for a launch in March.
- 1.42 Supporting the roll out of the 0-19 delivery model and improved partnership arrangements between Family Services and Schools, Jack Newton, Executive Head Teacher, has been seconded to Family Services three days a week. Working closely with the MASH Head of Service opportunities have already arisen for head teachers to visit the MASH which aims to improve a shared understanding of thresholds and improve relationships with referrers so confidence is developed in the decision making process.

#### **5. Improving Assessment for children**

- 1.43 This theme focuses on strengthening risk assessments and ensuring child focussed assessments to tackle drift and delay.

1.44 As noted previously, additional social work and management capacity has been provided for the Duty and Assessment Teams to assist with the high volume of cases. The additional managers are providing additional quality assurance to assessments, so they are 'double locked'. This is ensuring that assessment quality is not compromised whilst case volume is higher.

1.45 Ahead of the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) of the London Borough of Barnet's services for children in need of help and protection, children in need of help and care leavers during April and May 2017, 280 strategy discussions were reviewed, following which the below initial improvement actions were identified:

- The need to update case recording system (LCS) reporting forms to create mandatory reporting of agency involvement;
- Staff training on how to record multi agency involvement.

Data is currently indicating a positive move towards increased multi agency participation in strategy discussions, illustrated in figure 1. This improvement was also noted by Ofsted during their first monitoring visit.

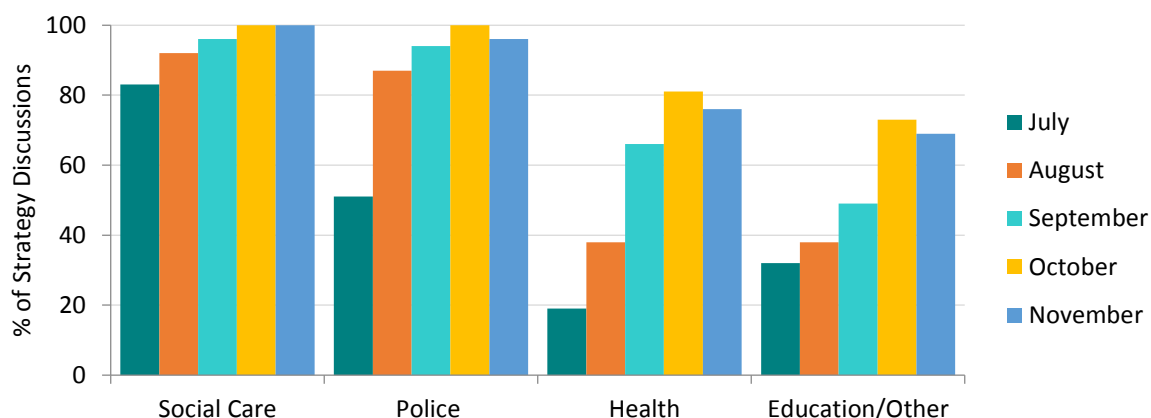


Figure 1: Multi Agency Involvement in Strategy Discussions

1.46 In order to secure sustained improvement, further work is being done to ensure the case recording system (LCS) is configured to enable robust recording of rationales for decisions making. This will be complemented by expectations for Strategy Discussions being outlined in the revised Practice Standards document (Operational Protocol) for social workers.

1.47 An analysis of Strategy Discussions over the period September – December 2017 has been undertaken. There were 224 Strategy Discussions completed in the reporting period relating to 400 children. Full Working Together compliance, involvement of CSC, Police and Health, was achieved in 69% (155) of the Strategy Discussions. Of the 69 Strategy Discussions that were found to be non-compliant, 6 had no Police involvement and 60 had no health involvement.

1.48 The reasons for non-compliance include:

- agencies have been involved but the recording has not reflected this
- agencies have not been invited to participate in discussions due to the time of day of the Strategy Discussion taking place
- agencies have not been available to participate, although some follow up Strategy Discussions were evidenced to include health

The level of detail within data is enabling practice gaps to be identified at a team level. This is allowing targeted and robust follow up activity to take place resulting in all statutory agencies being involved in decision-making processes. A positive finding is that education, whilst not required statutorily, are regularly involved in a good proportion of Strategy Discussions.

1.49 The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is developing wider partnership working with named management and social worker links to the Gangs Panel, Channel Panel and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC); this is promoting robust and timely information exchange leading to strengthened risk assessment.

1.50 A Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Data Analyst has been appointed to support mapping, data and performance reporting activities, and initial reporting is showing a reduction in the number of days that children are missing from home and care. The data is showing that whilst a higher volume of children go missing from home overall, they go missing less frequently than children in care. Improvements have been noted in the length of time that children are missing from home, and the length of time that children are in care is also reducing. The effectiveness of Return Home Interviews in reducing missing episodes and managing risk is currently being analysed.

1.51 The Sexual Exploitation and Missing (SEAM) tool is providing a framework for practitioners to consider and manage children's and young people's vulnerabilities and risk of exploitation. Training has been provided to all staff and SEAM strategy meetings have been held for those children and young people that need them, the actions from these is now being tracked to ensure a planning reflects support for vulnerability and protection against risk.

1.52 All current Connected Person assessments have been reviewed for quality and timeliness, and necessary plans are in place. This has led to the number of unregulated placements reducing over the last six months to one placement as at 18 December 2017. There is more work to do on maintaining oversight on identifying these placements, and the Head of Service is proactively engaging with teams to ensure they are aware of what constitutes a Connected Persons Placement.

1.53 All family placements (Connected carers) are tracked by the Fostering team weekly to ensure assessments are on track, new placements are processed and assessed correctly and placement at risk of becoming unregulated are flagged to the Head of Service and Operational Director. As a result, assessments are improving in timeliness and quality is scrutinised by the Fostering Panel and courts.



- 1.54 Audit activity has largely been focusing on quality of Care Planning in the Intervention and Planning Service to examine if Plans are focused on improving outcomes for children in a timely way. The analysis of the audits will be undertaken in January in preparation for the second Monitoring Visit. Whilst some audits of work undertaken in the Children in Care, Onwards and Upwards and 0-25 services have been completed, there will be an increased focus on this area of work over the next three months.

### **6. Improving Planning for children**

- 1.55 This improvement theme seeks to ensure planning is child centred and that these plans achieve the best outcomes, tackling drift and delay.
- 1.56 Team Managers have attended Practice Leader Signs of Safety training to ensure Plans are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) so they are focussed on what needs to change within agreed timescales.
- 1.57 In the Intervention & Planning Service, all Child in Need Plans over 6 months old are being reviewed by Team Managers, this is being overseen by the Heads of Service with the aim of ensuring that Plans for children are progressing towards identified outcomes within agreed timescales. Children subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) have been audited to measure the quality of practice in this area. The audit has highlighted a need for more robust tracking activity to be taking place to ensure that assessments and agreed actions within PLO do not drift and cause delay to planning for children. The Permanency Assurance Lead appointed in November will be working alongside the Heads of Service and Team Managers in the Duty & Assessment and Intervention & Planning Teams to ensure this area of Care Planning is rapidly improved.
- 1.58 All requests for Initial Child Protection Conferences are being scrutinised by Heads of Service to ensure that thresholds are correctly applied; the ratio of Initial Child Protection Conferences that subsequently led to a Child Protection Plan during September to December 2017 was 83.3% which indicates thresholds for Child Protection are generally good.
- 1.59 Essex partnership work with Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers has commenced, and includes observations; mentoring and reflective sessions are taking place. This work has a focus on involvement of children in plans and meetings.
- 1.60 Quality Assurance activity continues to identify work that falls below expected standards. The 4R's approach (Rapid, Responsive, Reflective Review) has been adapted to focus on whole teams where there is a high ratio of audits grading assessments and/or planning activities for children to be inadequate. The 4R process is demonstrating some impact with tracking showing an improvement on cases subject to a 4R process and timely movement into Requires Improvement or Good grading.

- 1.61 A review is taking place by the Head of Service of every child in care's plan to ensure the plan is the right one and to prevent any drift and delay. An analysis of the findings will be prepared by end of December.
- 1.62 Increased resource into Royal Free London Hospital Trust to increase capacity for the designated Looked After Child doctor to ensure all 0-5 year olds receive a paediatric health assessment on entering care.
- 1.63 A Life Story Worker has been recruited and is working in the Leaving Care service. She is developing tools and providing research and information to social worker and Personal Advisors to enable life history work to be completed with care leavers.
- 1.64 Since July, 39 children and young people have either had life story work completed or are in the process. Work with regard to life story engagement is developing at a pace in the care leaving service.
- 1.65 An awareness campaign for Private Fostering was launched in September, featuring new posters. A new leaflet has been developed and is being distributed to schools, General Practitioner surgeries and children's centres. Notifications received of private fostering arrangements have subsequently increased. Cases are now directly allocated to designated Social Worker from the MASH. Assessments completed and number of children being monitored in private fostering arrangements has increased from 6 in August to 18 in November 2017.
- 1.66 Monthly meetings of the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Officers Group (CPOG) review and track the priorities set out to ensure the joint planning for children in care and care leavers to improve their outcomes.
- 1.67 Increasing the quality and volume of apprenticeships available and undertaken by Children in Care and Care Leavers is a priority for CPOG that was focussed upon in November 2017. There is a specific outcome within the group's action plan regarding this. Both actions to deliver this outcome are currently BRAG rated green, which indicates that they are on track to be achieved by the deadline. Updates from this reporting period include:
- Rollout of Virtual School NEET to in 'Education, Employment or Training' (EET) project which aims to reduce the number of Children in Care and Care Leavers that are NEET by at least half in the first year of the project in June 2018;
  - Closer working between Bridging the Gap and Onwards and Upwards, to provide more opportunities for young people that do not possess sufficient qualifications to access a traineeship or qualification;
  - A coordinated approach proposed for rolling out dates of Barnet's apprenticeships so that it aligns with the finishing of academic courses thereby increasing potential take up by children in care and care leavers;
  - Work to continue with Care Leavers to better understand their motivation and find traineeships that align;
  - Further analysis to be undertaken to understand barriers to EET engagement and the support needed to overcome these. For example, need for additional childcare support or flexibility of traineeships or apprenticeships for young

parents.

1.68 Additional work progress from CPOG during this period includes:

- a 6-week induction programme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children being commissioned at Whitefields school to help newly arrived young people adjust to the country, the education system, and to support social workers with age assessments;
- Progress in embedding the Life Skills Project facilitated by the Family Resource Centre; 2 young people have completed the programme and have successfully moved on from the training flat to being better equipped to manage independent living. This project is ongoing and aims to have a young person in residence at the flat all year round for the four-week programme.
- Further improvement work planned focussing on the provision of advocacy service to more young people and re-tendering the Independent Visitor Service;

1.69 Young people attended the CPOG meeting on 20 December 2017, as it is recognised that they benefit from the opportunity to know and interact with their councillors and be involved in decision making regarding services they receive. The Corporate Parenting Pledge theme of *Championing Rights* was discussed at this meeting. The Lead Member for children was unable to attend; however, young people will be invited to future meetings to engage their voice in corporate parenting.

### **7. Effective Communications and Engagement to drive culture change that will improve children's lives**

1.70 This improvement theme will develop connection via impactful two-way communication and engagement from the top to the bottom of the children's service and strong cross agency engagement and communication from top to bottom. The improvement journey needs to be owned by all. Ofsted reflect in the report from their monitoring visit that the pace of change has been 'consistent and focussed, and has started to raise practice standards' while noting that there are still challenges in making the cultural changes required to ensure that children and young people in Barnet are safeguarded effectively.

1.71 The Service User Engagement Strategy has been agreed at Senior Officer level, and now parts of the plan are already in progress. Now that the plan has been agreed, all other recommendations for the engagement plan will commence. The first priority includes producing a Content Strategy, and management of communications surrounding the CELS report.

### **Quantitative performance data**

1.72 Quantitative performance data is based on activity in November 2017. Reporting is of indicators that are subject to additional focus with information about what needs to change and what is being done about it, as well as what is working well. The full Barnet Children's Services Improvement Plan data dashboard for this reporting period has been included in Appendix 2.

### **What are we worried about**

- 1.73 The number of open Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs) continues to be on a steady decline and is at its lowest number since April 2016. The fall in numbers over the summer period of July (767), August (752) and September (720) is partly due to an expected seasonal decline which correlates with the summer school break however the number of open CAFs has continued to decline. The volume of open CAFs at this point last year was 798, representing a reduction of 184 over the year. The number of CAFs closed in November was at its highest since August and has been on an increase since this time. The percentage of CAFs open for more than 12 months is 13% with the majority closing before this time.
- 1.74 The percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days has increased slightly since the last reporting period, with 57% being completed within the time period, 33% away from the target of 90%. There has been a significant increase in the number of assessments being completed, and is over double that of the number completed in April 2017 (April 2017 = 223 and November 2017 = 499). This correlates with an increase in the rate of contacts to referral which is currently at 33% and is at its highest since March 2017 when it was 13.4%. Since April 2017 93% of referrals lead to assessment. During this period 48% of assessments resulted in No Further Action, 19% in Section 17 provision and the remainder other services.
- 1.75 17% of section 47 enquiries resulted in a Child in Need (CiN) plan during this period, the number of CiN plans currently open is at 676 and is at its highest since June 2016 when it was 340. The number of open CiN plans has been on a steady increase since the beginning of this year. This correlates with an increase in the number of CiN Plans opened within the month with there being an average of 73 plans opened during 2016/17 and 109 opened so far this year.
- 1.76 The percentage of CiN visits completed within 6 weeks has shown a steady increase over the last three-months, currently 68.7%. Visits reporting to be out of timescale have been sampled and continue to evidence that the large majority of children have been seen in timescale but social workers have not recorded these as 'visits' on the child's record. A CiN visit tracker has been developed and monitors all overdue, pending and future visits detailing children, social workers and team managers. This will enable increased management oversight for planning and prompting social workers to plan visits in their calendar, re-arrange cancelled and failed visits and record visits that have been undertaken.
- 1.77 Although the number of children made subject to a Child Protection (CP) Plan has been decreasing over the last three-months, they are still double that of the same period last year (13 versus 26). 154 children have been made subject to a CP Plan between April to November 2017 (the majority of these (88%) are under 10-years old), compared to 145 children during the same period in 2016, mainly due to the increase in plans over the last 3 months.

- 1.78 Visits to children subject to Child Protection (CP) Plans are showing an improvement and are currently reported at 72.5%, the 3-monthly average is 71% of visits are completed within 10 days. There are currently 53 children under 5 on a CP Plan, and 44 (83%) of these had been seen within 10 days. 52 children under 5 had been seen within 4 weeks (98.1%). As with the CiN visits that are reporting to be out of timescale, sampling has been undertaken and continue to evidence that the large majority of children have been seen in timescale but social workers have not recorded these as 'visits' on the child's record. Further, the volume of children in sibling groups affects the overall picture. A CP visit tracker has been developed and monitors all overdue, pending and future visits detailing children, social workers and team managers. This enables increased management oversight and interrogation of the data in addition to planning activities to prompt social workers to plan visits in their calendar, re-arrange cancelled and failed visits and record visits that have been undertaken.
- 1.79 Children in Care (CiC) visits within timescale are also showing an increase and are currently at 89%. Although there was a dip in this indicator in September the percentage of visits in timescale has been on an upward trend since this time. This coincides with the implementation of the daily visit tracker to enable team managers to monitor activity in this area. As with the other visit information (CiN and CP) recording visits on the child's file in a timely way remains an area for improvement and the team managers are now able to access information from the visit tracker on their individual staff member's performance which informs supervision and performance management.

#### **What is working well**

- 1.80 The percentage of referrals that are repeat referrals within 12 months is currently 0.1% away from our target of 18%. It remains below our statistical neighbours of 18.2%, and our previous years' figure of 19.2%. This indicator has consistently decreased towards target since May 2017. A deep-dive analysis is being undertaken to understand this indicator further.
- 1.81 The number of Section 47 (s47) enquiries completed during the month has been increasing over the last four months. The number of section 47's leading to a decision to progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) within 15 working days is currently at 92.9%. The sharp rise indicates that the threshold of using statutory child protection procedures to make enquires about children's welfare is being applied correctly; a lower ratio of section 47 enquiries leading to ICPC would suggest the s47 threshold was being used incorrectly and families were being subjected to unnecessary statutory interventions and enquiries.
- 1.82 Children subject to a subsequent CP Plan continue to be low with 7.8% (12 children) being on a second or subsequent CP Plan compared with 9.7% at the same time last year. The majority of children in this category are aged 6 to 10 years (42%). The number of children whose plans ceased during November was 12, compared to 25 the month previously. 75% (9) of cases that ended their Plan in November now have an open CiN Plan, 1 child became a Child in Care and 2 were transferred out of the borough.

- 1.83 Similarly, there has been a general decrease in the number of children with Plans over 2 years, with only two children having been on a plan for two or more years in November 2017 compared to 11 in April 2017.
- 1.84 Figures for participation in Looked After Child (LAC) reviews continue to be above the target of 95% and have been over the last 5-months. This indicator has remained above the target of 90% over the last two-years and continues to be on an upward trend.
- 1.85 The rate of children in care with a time initial health assessment is on an upward trajectory and is at its highest since April 2017 when it was at 31% and now at 77%. Similarly, the percentage of health checks has remained above the 95% target for the whole of this year and is on an upward trajectory. Improved recording on the system has had a significant impact on this figure.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note progress to ensure scrutiny by elected members and improve the effectiveness of the local authority in protecting and caring for children and young people as a corporate parent.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 The continued monitoring of progress and impact of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan is integral to driving the continuation of the Family Services' improvement journey to ensure improved outcomes for children and families. The alternative option of maintaining the status quo will not make the desired improvements or improve outcomes at the pace required.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 As the primary driver of improvement the Children's Service Improvement Board will oversee the delivery of the action plan and is ultimately responsible for its delivery. The Children's Services Improvement Board is independently chaired by the lead improvement partner (Essex County Council Executive Director) and will provide scrutiny and challenge as well as measure impact.
- 4.2 Operationally the Improvement Plan is driven and directed by the Operational Improvement Group chaired by the Strategic Director of Children's Services with senior representatives from key partner agencies. The group will oversee the day to day transformation of services and ensure effective communication and engagement with staff, children, young people and their families.
- 4.3 Reports on the progress of the action plan will be received by Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee, Health and Well-Being Board and Barnet Safeguarding Children's Board.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

5.1.1 The implementation of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan is a key mechanism through which Barnet Council and its partners will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision to be the most family friendly borough in London by 2020.

5.1.2 This supports the following Council's corporate priorities as expressed through the Corporate Plan for 2015-20 which sets out the vision and strategy for the next five years based on the core principles of fairness, responsibility and opportunity, to make sure Barnet is a place;

- Of opportunity, where people can further their quality of life
- Where people are helped to help themselves, recognising that prevention is better than cure

5.1.3 The Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan looks to improve children's participation to ensure that all decisions and planning that affects them is influenced by their wishes and feelings. The action plan also includes actions to strengthen how the views and experiences of children, young people and their families influence service design. This feedback will also help monitor the impact of improvement activity.

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.2.1 Policy and Resources Committee of June 2017 agreed to invest an additional £5.7m in Family Services, some of which has been invested to improve practice to ensure improvements are made which result in better outcomes for children, young people and families. The detailed breakdown of this additional £5.7 million is provided in item 7, CELS agenda 18 September 2017.

5.2.2 MTFs savings for 2018 - 2020 have been reviewed in light of the Family Services improvement journey to consider achievability. The original target for CELS Committee for 2018/19 – 2019/20 was £8.303m, this has been fully reviewed and revised to £5.590m in the 2018/19 CELS Business Planning Report. The report on the Children, Young People and Family Hubs – Outline Business Case, a CELS agenda item for 16 January 2018, outlines the initial proposals and timeline for achieving £2.727m within this target. All the savings proposals, including the additional items totalling £2.863m over and above the Family Hub proposal, can be found in the CELS Business Planning Report 2018/2019 which is provided in item 11, CELS agenda 15 November 2017.

5.2.2 The ongoing improvement will continue to place pressure on existing resources; the additional directed requirement for two assistant heads of service, 3 Duty assessment Team managers and 8 Duty assessment Team social workers has resulted in an additional £0.390 million pressure in the current financial year, and will be reflected in the Q3 monitoring report.

### 5.3 **Social Value**

- 5.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

### 5.4 **Legal and Constitutional References**

- 5.4.1 Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, provided that this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing services appropriate to the child's needs. They also have a duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing services appropriate to the child's needs, provided this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare. They should do this in partnership with parents, in a way that is sensitive to the child's race, religion, culture and language and that, where practicable, takes account of the child's wishes and feelings.
- 5.4.2 Part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 provides the statutory framework for Ofsted inspections. Section 136 and 137 provide the power for Ofsted to inspect on behalf of the Secretary of State and requires the Chief Inspector to produce a report following such an inspection. Ofsted will have monitoring visits on a regular basis in local authorities found to be inadequate. A new Ofsted framework will be in place from January 2018, however monitoring visits will still be undertaken for authorities found to be inadequate. In addition to Ofsted's statutory responsibilities, the Secretary of State has the power to direct local authorities. This power of direction includes the power to impose a commissioner, direct the local authority to work with improvement partners and direct alternative delivery options. Subsequent directions can be given if the services are not found to be adequate.
- 5.4.3 Article 7 of the council's constitution states that the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee has the responsibility for all matters relating to children, schools, education and libraries. In addition to this, the committee has responsibility for overseeing the support for young people in care and enhancing the council's corporate parenting role.

### 5.5 **Risk Management**

- 5.5.1 The nature of services provided to children and families by Family Services manage significant levels of risk. An inappropriate response or poor decision-making around a case could lead to a significant children's safeguarding incident resulting in significant harm. Good quality early intervention and social care services reduce the likelihood of children suffering harm and increase the likelihood of children developing into successful adults and achieving and succeeding. The implementation of the Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan based on inspection findings and recommendations reduce this risk and drive forward improvements towards good quality services.



## 5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies **to have due regard** to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

5.6.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services

5.6.1 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation. Barnet has a diverse population of children and young people. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 52%, compared with 30% in the country as a whole. The percentages of children and young people from minority ethnic groups who receive statutory social care services account for 61% of Children in Need cases, 56% of child protection cases and 60% of all Children in Care. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language across primary schools is 44% (the national average is 18%).

5.6.2 Social workers practice in relation to inequalities and disadvantage is inconsistent. Recent learning from audits and practice week has highlighted attention to diversity and the cultural context in assessments is an area of practice in need of immediate support from management, the Practice Development Workers and targeted training. The action plan addresses the additional work which needs to be done to ensure that children's diversity and identity needs are met; *"5b(ii) Strengthen consideration of diversity in assessment so that assessments thoroughly explore and consider family history including the influence of cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs, norms and expectations"*.

## 5.7 Consultation and Engagement

5.7.1 Consultation and engagement with children and young people is central to social work practice and service improvement across the Safeguarding Partnership. A service user engagement strategy has been developed and is in the process of being implemented. The strategy ensures that how we work with children and young people is child centred, that we know and understand and can capture the lived experience of children and also to ensure that the lessons learnt feed into service improvement.

5.7.2 Our Voice of the Child Strategy Group enables the wider engagement of children and young people in service design and commissioning of provision across the partnership. This includes youth forums such as Barnet Youth Board and Youth Assembly, young commissioners to co-design services and Children in Care Council to improve the support children in care receive. More recently this has included

children in care influencing the commissioning of independent Fostering services and in the CAMHS transformation.

- 5.7.3 The Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan looks to improve children's participation to ensure that all decisions and planning that affects them is influenced by their wishes and feelings. The action plan also includes actions to strengthen how the views and experiences of children, young people and their families influence service design. This feedback will also help monitor the impact of improvement activity.
- 5.7.4 Improving the quality of services to children is a key partnership and corporate priority and collective work is needed across the partnership and the council to drive improvements. The action plan was completed in consultation with various stakeholders. Staff engagement activities have included monthly staff briefings, team meetings, staff conference. Partners have been engaged through the safeguarding partnership board. Senior leaders are members of the Improvement Board and their continued engagement is assured through core multiagency groups and specific forums such as head teacher's forums.
- 5.7.5 There is much more work to do to create the culture needed within services for children, young people and families in Barnet, albeit some positive progress is being made. In January 2018, a survey will be undertaken with staff to obtain insight into engagement levels and to help assess the impact of engagement activities.

## 5.8 **Insight**

- 5.8.1 Insight data will continue to be regularly collected and used in monitoring the progress and impact of Barnet's Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and to shape ongoing improvement activity.

## 6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1 Single Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board report, Ofsted, 7 July 2017  
[https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local\\_authority\\_reports/bar net/051\\_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/bar net/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf)
- 6.2 Statutory Direction to Barnet Borough Council in relation to children's services under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, Secretary of State for Education, 12 September 2017  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/64379/1/Barnet\\_Stat\\_Direction\\_Sept-2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/64379/1/Barnet_Stat_Direction_Sept-2017.pdf)

12 December 2017

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Dear Mr Munday

### **Monitoring visit to Barnet children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Barnet children's services on 14 and 15 November 2017. The visit was the first monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate for overall effectiveness in July 2017. The inspectors were Louise Warren HMI and Tara Geere HMI.

The local authority is starting to make progress to improve services for children and young people, from a very low base. Senior managers have appropriately prioritised improving practice and ensuring the consistent application of thresholds within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the intervention and planning teams. Most children in need of help and protection have benefited from these actions. In most cases considered, it was evident that there is more timely identification of risk and associated actions to protect children and prevent further harm.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the areas of help and protection, including:

- the quality and timeliness of management oversight and decision-making, including compliance with statutory guidance, particularly in relation to section 47 enquiries and strategy discussions
- the effectiveness of the MASH in responding to concerns about children, including the application and understanding of thresholds
- the quality and timeliness of assessments leading to child protection and child in need work and planning.

The visit considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, supervision records, case management records, performance data, audits and progress reports. Inspectors spoke to a range of staff, including managers, social workers, practitioners and professionals from partner agencies.

## **Overview**

Meetings with senior leaders, including the very recently appointed permanent operational directors, demonstrate greater understanding of the improvements required to raise the standard of social work practice. The scale of the task is now more apparent to leaders, informed by the increasing use of, and findings from, internal audits that are verified by the local authority's improvement partner. Such activity serves to reveal practice that is mostly variable, and too often inadequate.

Overall, the visit found limited improvement in practice, although there is improvement in some areas. During this visit, this was particularly apparent within the MASH, which has been subject to some structural changes, including and supported by additional levels of staffing. This has increased capacity that, in turn, has improved and consolidated partnership working. Social workers reported to inspectors that they have benefited from increased training, staff conferences and communications from senior leaders. Staff morale was found to be positive, and the vast majority of staff expressed support for the changes implemented or proposed since the last inspection.

The pace of improvement and change is appropriate and commensurate with the size of the task facing the authority. There have been significant changes to staffing and the organisation's structures since the last inspection. This has caused some instability, particularly in the duty and assessment teams. However, all staff interviewed during the monitoring visit reported that the changes made following the inspection have started to improve practice for children and young people. Those social workers spoken with reported that this is impacting positively on morale within the service.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

The appointment of operational managers has begun to assist in improving leadership and managerial oversight across key services. During this visit, the positive impact of these appointments was particularly evident within the intake and assessment, and intervention and planning services. In the cases reviewed, the application of thresholds was almost always appropriate.

Work within the MASH to improve processes and practice is aligned to an increased capacity, and is showing signs of an early positive impact. This has been supported by the introduction of an electronic recording system to facilitate improved communication. This is further supported by daily threshold meetings and fortnightly team meetings. The daily threshold meetings are effective in providing more

continuity and consistency to ensure that children and families are offered an appropriate level of support and advice.

Managers and social workers reported that they now have more manageable caseloads and a greater capacity to progress their work. However, the timeliness of decision-making remains inconsistent and, in some cases, there were significant delays for children. Some children are not being seen in a timely manner following initial referral. In such cases, children are not always seen alone or provided with the appropriate support to ensure that their wishes and feelings are fully considered in assessments. Inspectors also found errors in the use of the BRAG (blue, red, amber, green) rating system. Greater rigour in checking these key decisions is required to ensure that children are safeguarded effectively in a timely manner.

Notably for those children who are subject to a child in need or child protection plan, practice is more robust and they are seen more regularly. Practice for these children has improved because managers are better able to track the timeliness of actions, using newly established performance reports.

The quality of strategy discussions and section 47 enquiries remains variable. Enquiries are not always timely, and not all records evidence the rationale for decision-making. Inspectors have noted improvements in attendance of partners at strategy meetings and within case discussions. However, this was not consistent, and some strategy discussions took place only between police and children's social care.

Case recording has improved, although it remains of a variable standard. Inspectors generally found evidence of case summaries on files, although in some cases the notes were not up to date. Chronologies are not consistently updated or sufficiently thorough. In some cases, partnership working is not comprehensive enough, and key partners are not always involved in providing support to children or parents when required.

The quality of assessments seen by inspectors was mostly weak, and the views of family members, particular fathers, were not adequately sought to inform assessments and planning. Weaker assessments did not always include a comprehensive analysis of risks for children, and they demonstrated a poor understanding of family relationships and parental capacity. Such poor assessments lead to plans that are also weak, as they fail to identify core concerns and the means to address these.

Inspectors found evidence that management oversight is being recorded more frequently on some, but not all, documents and case files. However, this variability also revealed gaps in management oversight. This deficit impedes the efforts to raise the overall quality of assessments to inform interventions. For some children, this leads to inadequate practice. A number of managers who met with inspectors acknowledged that they had not previously considered sufficiently some fundamental

aspects of practice, including the meaningful engagement of children and family members, including fathers.

Inspectors found evidence of very recently improved individual supervision. Two cases were also found to have been appropriately discussed within group supervision. However, generally there was a variability in the quality of supervision records, as evidenced by case files. Some records were too brief and insufficiently detailed for the complexity of the case. Supervision was not found to be reflective.

Strengthened quality assurance processes are assisting in the identification and monitoring of the areas requiring improvements within the service. The cases tracked and audited by the local authority for the monitoring visit were thorough and realistic in their findings. This demonstrates an insight into the quality of practice that is needed to reach the higher standard of practice required. The appointment of practice development workers, the training of existing staff and the recruitment of more experienced team managers are essential to support the improvement journey.

During this visit, inspectors found evidence of improving quality assurance processes. It was also evident that there has been productive engagement with the local authority's improvement partner and that additional resources have been secured to increase capacity within the service. The pace of change has been consistent and focused, and has started to raise practice standards. However, social work practice remains inadequate in many areas. The process of changing the culture of acceptable practice remains a significant challenge if the children and young people in Barnet are to be safeguarded effectively and their welfare promoted.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Louise Warren  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Data Dashboard Barnet Children's Services Improvement Plan

Plan ID	Measure	Previous Period	Latest Position	Change	Change since Ofsted	Target	Rating
To drive sustainable practice improvement at pace							
T1	Audit numbers by type	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Regular Audits	23	15	-8	↓		R
	Thematic Audits	23	38	+15	↑		G
T2	Calibration of audit quality	Will be included when the Essex Triple Loop Audit data is available					
T6	Posts over establishment	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Unfunded Posts	16	28	12	↑		R
T6	Social Work staff makeup	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Permanent	69%	67%	-2	↓		R
	Agency	21%	28%	+7	↑		R
	Vacant	9%	6%	-3	↓		G
T8 2a(i)	Average Caseload Numbers	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Duty and Assessment	30.2	28.6	-1.6	↓	28.3	↑ 12 to 16 R
	Intervention and Planning	15.5	14.6	-0.9	↓	17.3	↓ 12 to 16 G
	Children in Care	14.5	14.0	-0.5	↓	15.9	↓ 12 to 16 G
	0-25	16.8	22.5	+5.7	↑	17.6	↑ 12 to 16 R
	Onwards and Upwards	21.4	19.7	-1.7	↓	21.2	↓ 12 to 16 G
	REACH	14.3	14.5	+2	↑	9.8	↑ 12 to 16 R
Strengthened systems leadership for children							
2a(vii)	Children's input into conferences	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Conferences: attended (PN1 and PN3)	7.7%	12.1%	+4.3	↑		G
	Conferences: views sent (PNO-PN6)	92.3%	98.3%	+6	↑		G
3a(vii)	Case supervisions within 6 week target	Not due	In time	Completed out of timescale	Overdue		
	Duty & Assessment	51%	15%	16%	19%		
	Intervention & Planning	5%	58%	34%	3%		
	0-25 Service	9%	23%	25%	43%		
	Children In Care	1%	46%	44%	8%		
	Onwards & Upwards	2%	37%	60%	2%		
	REACH	5%	19%	64%	12%		
3a(vii)	Management oversight gradings in regular audits	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Inadequate	46%	28%	-18%	↓		G
	Requires Improvement	41%	56%	+15%	↑		G
	Good	14%	17%	+3%	↑		G
3a(ix)	Multi agency involvement gradings in regular audits	Aug.17	Sep.17				
	Inadequate	41%	62%	21%	↑		R
	Requires Improvement	27%	38%	11%	↑		R
	Good	32%	0%	-32%	↓		R
Effective MASH							
4a(iv)	Timeliness of contact decision	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Decision on contact made within 24 hours	70%	64%	-6%	↓	53%	↑
4a(iv)	Timeliness of assessment	Okt.17	Nov.17				
	Assessments completed in under 45 days	37.3%	57.2%	19.9%	↑	88%	↓ 90% R



ID	Measure	Previous Period	Latest Position	Change Since Previous Period		Change since Ofsted Judgement	Target	Rating
<b>Effective decision making</b>								
4b(ii)	Timeliness of pre-proceedings	Okt.17	Nov.17					
		23 weeks	<b>18 weeks</b>	5 weeks	↓	23 weeks	↓	G
4b(ii)	Multi agency involvement in Strategy Discussions	Okt.17	Nov.17					
	Education	73%	<b>69%</b>	-4%	↓	33%	↑	G
	Health	81%	<b>76%</b>	-5%	↓	27%	↑	G
	Police	100%	<b>96%</b>	-4%	↓	56%	↑	G
4b(ii)	S47: length of time open	Okt.17	Nov.17					
		18.4 days	<b>11.4 days</b>	7 days	↓	15.5 days	↓	G
4b(ii)	S47: Outcome	Okt.17	Nov.17					
	C&F Assessment	53%	<b>48%</b>	-12%	↓	54%	↓	
	CIN Plan	9%	<b>17%</b>	+9%	↑	3%	↑	
	Initial Child Protection Conference	31%	<b>28%</b>	+3%	↑	28%	↔	
	Progressing to Child Protection Plan	75%	<b>20%</b>	+1%	↑	27%	↓	
<b>Strengthen assessment</b>								
5a(i)	Timeliness of 'Missing' SEAM strat discussions	Okt.17	Nov.17					
		33%	<b>66%</b>	+33%	↑			
5a(i)	Agency involvement in 'Missing' SEAM strat discussions	Okt.17	Nov.17					
	Police	48%	<b>42%</b>	-7%	↓			R
	Education	38%	<b>50%</b>	+12%	↑			G
	Health	5%	<b>17%</b>	+12%	↑			G
5a(ii)	Thematic audit of panel information in managing risk	Not currently available						
5a(iii)	Average Length of missing episode	Okt.17	Okt.17					
	Form Home	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.6</b>	0.68	↑	1.1	↑	R
	From Care	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	-1.04	↓	2.4	↓	G
5a(iii)	Overall number of missing episodes	Okt.17	Okt.17					
	From Home	<b>48</b>	<b>31</b>	-17	↓	22	↑	R
	From Care	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	-3	↓	45	↓	G
<b>Child focussed assessment</b>								
5b(i)	Consideration of the child's voice in audit findings	Aug.17	Sep.17					
	Inadequate	25%	<b>100%</b>	75%	↑			R
	Requires Improvement	25%	<b>0%</b>	-25%	↓			R
	Good	50%	<b>0%</b>	-50%	↓			R
5b(ii)	Consideration of Diversity in audit findings	Aug.17	Sep.17					
	Inadequate	12%	<b>40%</b>	28%	↑			R
	Requires Improvement	71%	<b>60%</b>	11%	↑			R
	Good	18%	<b>0%</b>	-18%	↓			R
5b(iii)	Multi agency contribution from audit findings	Aug.17	Sep.17					
	Inadequate	41%	<b>62%</b>	21%	↑			R
	Requires Improvement	27%	<b>38%</b>	11%	↑			R
	Good	32%	<b>0%</b>	-32%	↓			R
<b>Child centred plans</b>								
6a(i)	Audit analysis of robust, child centred plans	Aug.17	Sep.17					
	Inadequate	13%	<b>75%</b>	62%	↑			R
	Requires Improvement	44%	<b>25%</b>	-19%	↓			G



6a(i)	Measure	Previous Period	Latest Position	Change Since Previous Period		Change since Ofsted Judgement		Target	Rating
	Good	44%	0%	-44%	↓				R
6a(iv)	Number of escalations of plans	Okt.17	Nov.17						
	To Child Protection	8	7	+1	↑	1	↔		
	To Child in Care	3	6	+3	↑	2	↑		
6a(iv)	Timeliness to resolution (against protocol) of plan	Not currently available							
6a(iv)	IRO and CPC escalations	Not currently available							
6a(vi)	FGC KPIs	Not currently available							
6a(vii)	Pre-proceedings progressing to care proceedings	Okt.17	Nov.17						
		49%	62%	+13%	↑				
6a(vii)	Timeliness of care proceedings	Okt.17	Nov.17						
		30 weeks	31 weeks	1 week	↑	32 weeks	↓		
6a(vii)	Outcomes of care proceedings	Okt.17	Nov.17						
	Placement Orders	0	7						
	Care Orders	6	4						
	SGO	5	3						
	Supervision Order	9	4						
	No Public Law Order	3	8						
6a(ix)	Number of children participating in life story work	Okt.17	Nov.17						
		9	12	+3	↑				

**Plans achieving best outcomes**

6b(ii)	Virtual School Audits of PEPs	Will be available in January							
6b(iii)	Length of final approval of connected carers	Not currently available							
6b(vii)	How many NEET young people	Okt.17	Nov.17						
		160	196	36	↑	196	↔		
6b(vii)	How many NEET care leavers	Okt.17	Nov.17						
		64.6%	64.5%	-0.1%	↓	64.5%	↔	55%	G

- ↑ Positive upward change
 ↑ Negative upward change
- ↓ Positive downward change
 ↓ Negative downward change

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# **Report into Children's Social Care Services in the London Borough of Barnet**

**Frankie Sulke**

**January 2018**

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# 1. Introduction

1.1 Barnet's services for children were inspected by Ofsted in April and May 2017. They were found to be inadequate across all reported categories, with grades of 'requires improvement' in the sub-categories relating to adoption and to the experiences and progress of care leavers. The inspection raised serious questions surrounding the quality of practice and leadership, including in relation to the borough's focus on children, its quality assurance systems and the quality of management oversight. The Barnet Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) was also found to be inadequate. I was appointed Commissioner for Children's Services in the London Borough of Barnet in August 2017 by the Secretary of State for Education. The terms of reference required me to:

- 1.1.1 issue any necessary instructions to the local authority for the purpose of securing immediate improvement in the authority's delivery of children's social care; to identify ongoing improvement requirements; and to recommend any additional support required to deliver those improvements;
- 1.1.2 bring together evidence to assess the council's capacity and capability to improve itself, in a reasonable timeframe, and recommend whether or not this evidence is sufficiently strong to suggest that long-term sustainable improvement to children's social care can be achieved should operational service control continue to remain with the council;
- 1.1.3 advise on relevant alternative delivery and governance arrangements for children's social care, outside of the operational control of the local authority, taking account of local circumstances and the views of the council and key partners; and,
- 1.1.4 report to the Minister of State for Children and Families.

1.2 An accompanying Direction was issued to the London Borough of Barnet instructing their cooperation with the review. The Direction can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/direction-issued-to-barnet-council>

1.3 This report follows my review and sets out:

- 1.3.1 some **background and context**;
- 1.3.2 the **approach and processes** adopted for the review;
- 1.3.3 the **findings of the review** relating to the causes behind the failure and the barriers to sustained improvement;
- 1.3.4 in the light of those findings, the **action being taken by the Council to remove barriers** to make rapid and sustained improvements for children in Barnet, and any **further action required**;
- 1.3.5 **conclusions and recommendations**.

1.4 This report does not seek to reprise the detail of the Ofsted inspection. The reports are available at: [https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local\\_authority\\_reports/barnet/051\\_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/barnet/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf)

Nor does it seek to detail every aspect of practice, structure and context in Barnet. The Ofsted report includes contextual information on the general, children in need and looked after populations in the borough. The Improvement Plan which Barnet and its partners have produced and submitted to Ofsted is available on Barnet's website. My report covers those areas which are significant in addressing the requirements of the terms of reference above, particularly in relation to the future governance and delivery of children's services in Barnet so that vulnerable children in Barnet can get the support and improved outcomes that they need and deserve.

- 1.5 Inevitably, a three-month review of this nature and breadth of scope is an imposition on a local authority and its partners during a period of great pressure for all involved. I have been well supported in my task by colleagues in Barnet, including by the Chief Executive and his senior team; the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and his team; front line staff and their managers; senior managers; the Leader, Lead Member for children and young people; other members; and partners. Their honest engagement has ensured that the review was able quickly to get to the heart of the key issues and helped me to take an open and transparent approach throughout. I am very grateful to all colleagues in Barnet and my particular thanks go to Lucy Law for her excellent logistical support provided during the course of the review period.

## 2. Background and context

- 2.1 Prior to the 2017 inspection, Barnet's services for children and young people were last inspected by Ofsted in 2012. They were found to be 'good' across the piece and earlier unannounced visits also showed the Local Authority's services to have many strengths. Within the context of a strong service overall, some themes in common with the 2017 report were raised in earlier reports. For example, aspects of quality of provision were found to be 'adequate' with issues raised around the variability of assessments and planning, and some drift in cases identified. The difference in inspection frameworks and methodologies is such that comparisons and conclusions are hard to draw. Nevertheless, it is clear that services have deteriorated significantly over the last five years.
- 2.2 Some of the history of senior structural changes in Barnet is relevant to understanding the position reached in April 2017. From 2013, Barnet began to develop and adopt a new approach across the Council to implement a commissioning/delivery split for services. The intention was to bring a similar rigour to internally delivered services as would be found with externally commissioned services. By 2015, a full new senior structure was in place. The commissioning side of the Council, led by a Strategic Director for Commissioning, would specify requirements and monitor the quality of the delivery arm. Those leading the delivery of services reported directly to the Chief Executive.
- 2.3 In relation to children's services, this 2015 structure saw a newly appointed DCS reporting to the Strategic Director for Commissioning rather than to the Chief Executive, with a separate Family Services Director (appointed in 2013), responsible for running children's social care services, reporting to the Chief Executive. A further Director ran the Education Delivery Unit and this was fully outsourced in April 2016. Corporately, the top team comprised a Strategic Commissioning Board (SCB) with a remit to provide overall management and leadership of the Council. This Board included senior managers from the Commissioning side of the Council, including the DCS, alongside the Chief Operating Officer and Assurance senior managers. Those Directors running the services in the Delivery Units were not members of the top team although they attended as required for particular items. Within the context of the challenges facing local Government, and while still having regular assurance sessions, the SCB focused its attention mainly on transformational and strategic change issues rather than on 'business as usual' delivery matters.
- 2.4 All organisational structures can be made to work, and different structures bring different risks. The risks of confused accountabilities in the Barnet structure were higher than in more traditional structures and mitigation of those risks would require particularly close working and understanding between commissioning and delivery senior managers. Issues relating to how children's services were affected by the operation of Barnet's approach are covered in Section 4 of this report.
- 2.5 In terms of governance, in 2014, the Council moved from a Cabinet and Scrutiny system to a decision-making Committee system. Themed decision-making Committees were established instead of a Cabinet and scrutiny committees,

including a Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee (CELS). In addition, cross-cutting decision-making Committees were set up, including a Policy and Resources Committee, chaired by the Leader, responsible for strategic policy and plans; and a Performance and Contract Management Committee responsible for scrutinising performance across the Council in relation to the Corporate Plan, including performance relating to children and young people's services. This Committee looks, in particular, at the large outsourced contracts which Barnet has in place for a significant number of its key services. The Lead Member for Children and Young People became the Chair of the CELS Committee. An informal Leader's Briefing brings together Chairs of Committees five or six times a year. Politically, Barnet is a marginal borough. The Conservatives have an overall majority of one seat. London local government elections are due in May 2018. Issues relating to governance and children's services are raised in Section 4 below.

- 2.6 Shortly after his appointment in 2015, the DCS recognised that there were issues of concern in the borough's children's social care services. In January 2016, Essex County Council was commissioned to carry out a diagnostic exercise to provide an independent view of Barnet's services. That diagnostic was completed in March 2016 and found serious concerns in child protection services with *'individual cases of children left at unacceptable significant risk and requiring immediate attention and re-assessment'*. It also found areas 'requiring improvement' across Looked After Children and other aspects of the service. Following the diagnostic, the DCS was given full responsibility for the delivery as well as the commissioning of family services in Barnet.
- 2.7 Over the year from March 2016 to the point of inspection in April 2017, much activity ensued, designed to improve services and their impact on vulnerable children. In particular, with support from the new Interim Chief Executive and corporate colleagues, a new IT system was introduced, and work was done to improve caseloads and to bring down the level of agency staffing. An Improvement Board was set up under the chairmanship of the Interim Chief Executive and an Improvement Plan was developed. New senior managers in the service were appointed in late 2016. Essex County Council provided periodic advice and completed a follow-up diagnostic in February and March 2017. That exercise found improvements, although it still identified variable and inconsistent practice.
- 2.8 The Council brought in an experienced adviser to review the Barnet Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) in February 2017. In April 2017, she began to work with partners to develop and implement changes to the Board's operation. This work was well received and continued following the inspection result.
- 2.9 In terms of other partnership structures, there is a Safer Communities Partnership Board, a Health and Wellbeing Board, and a senior borough officers' group which meets quarterly. While there is a current Children and Young People's Plan and a Children's Partnership Board, the latter has only met twice since July 2014.
- 2.10 Following the publication of the inspection report, in July 2017, a decision was made to bring in an independent Chair to lead the Improvement Board. The Executive Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council was appointed to this role. He chaired his first meeting in September 2017.



### 3. Approach and process of the review

3.1 In order to meet the requirements of the Terms of Reference in 1.1 above, I divided the review into three phases:

3.1.1 *Phase 1: an intensive period to understand the borough in depth.* This included meeting with: front line staff and their managers across children's social care services; senior managers from across the Council as well as in Children's Services; elected members from both major parties, including the Chair and members of the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee (CELS); Chairs of other key Committees; colleagues from Essex as their role as the borough's Improvement Partner developed; and senior managers across the children's partnership, including senior colleagues from the CCG, police and schools. In addition, as part of Phase 1, I attended a range of existing meetings, including the Children's Services Improvement Board, and throughout the review, I met with staff on the floor as they worked on cases.

3.1.2 The purpose of this Phase was to understand clearly:

- the reasons behind the failures in children's services – i.e. why the recommendations made by Ofsted had become necessary; and why activity undertaken from early 2016 had failed to impact on improving practice and outcomes for children;
- any barriers to rapid and sustained improvement for Barnet's children;
- how those barriers might best be removed, at pace; and
- the Council's corporate and governance capacity and capability to deliver the necessary change immediately and sustain that improvement over time.

3.1.3 Understanding these four factors in depth was critical to the terms of reference of the review which required me to consider whether alternative governance delivery arrangements are necessary to bring about the necessary improvement in Barnet.

3.1.4 *Phase 2: feedback and consideration of ways forward to remove barriers to improvement.* This phase involved feeding back my findings and possible ways forward in various forums to key colleagues. This involved meetings with the Leader, Chair of CELS and Chief Executive; the Strategic Commissioning Board (SCB) comprising the Chief Executive and his senior team; the DCS's Senior Management Team, the Chair of the Improvement Board and key senior partners. Receiving their reactions and views on the evidence I presented, helped to bring forward further evidence in relation to the recommendations made in this report.

3.1.5 *Phase 3: report writing and further feedback.*

3.2 In addition to the work set out above, I joined the Chief Executive and the DCS for a full staff briefing. At this briefing, I shared with staff the terms of reference for the review, including the presumption of withdrawal of services, and set out some principles for the review. I committed to:

- being independent of both Barnet and the DfE, within the terms of the review;
- being transparent, with ongoing feedback to ensure no surprises;
- not repeating the inspection, the findings of which are clear;
- listening and taking account of all views and insights from front-line staff, managers and others, and across the partnership;
- supporting and fuelling their improvement, including that which is already underway – the review must be part of ensuring Barnet’s children’s outcomes improve, not get in the way of that or cause any pause in action;
- minimising the burden of the review by using existing forums to listen and learn as much as possible; and,
- there being no pre-determined outcome of the review.

3.3 In order to ensure the promised transparency, I met regularly with the Chief Executive and DCS to keep them in touch with the review’s progress and ensured that the Leader and Lead Member were fully sighted.

3.4 In line with the terms of reference for the review and the Direction to Barnet, I made recommendations for action throughout the period of the review which were designed to support and steer the improvement efforts already underway.

## 4. Findings – reasons behind the failure and barriers to improvement

- 4.1 As indicated above, my initial purpose was to understand both the reasons behind why the serious and systemic recommendations made by Ofsted had become necessary and the barriers to rapid and sustained improvement for Barnet's children. Work to improve services had been ongoing for at least a year prior to the inspection, following the diagnostic completed by colleagues from Essex. I was therefore also concerned to understand why that work had not had the necessary impact on improving the lives and life chances of Barnet's most vulnerable children. Understanding these aspects would then allow an informed evaluation of how best any barriers might be removed to secure improvement for children, at pace. As set out in Section 5, many of the issues raised in this section are already being addressed by colleagues across the Council in Barnet and by partners.
- 4.2 I found many **strengths** in Barnet, including:
- 4.2.1 committed and dedicated staff at every level of the organisation, including front line social workers and their managers; senior managers and SCB;
  - 4.2.2 strong determination and willingness to put right what had gone wrong from the Leader, the Lead Member, other senior members from both main political parties and from the Chief Executive and his SCB, children's services senior managers and their teams, and from partners;
  - 4.2.3 a clear understanding from senior members and the corporate leadership that children are a priority for the Council and an appetite to make that explicit;
  - 4.2.4 a clear commitment to resource the improvement effort as required with significant resource already allocated and confidence that more will be found if necessary;
  - 4.2.5 the original identification of problems in the service by the DCS;
  - 4.2.6 some strong senior managers within children's services, appointed from late 2016 and through 2017, who understand the importance of child-focused, responsive, purposeful and timely social care practice;
  - 4.2.7 evidence that brings confidence in the ability of the corporate leadership to add value, including in relation to the implementation during 2016 of a new IT system and the reduction of caseloads and agency staff;
  - 4.2.8 clear prioritisation, more generally, from the Chief Executive to secure a stronger focus from top managers on service delivery, including by dismantling the commissioning and delivery split at SCB level to address confused accountabilities and focus on securing good outcomes for residents, while driving up employee engagement;
  - 4.2.9 the commitment of partners and generally good relationships between those partners and the Council; and,
  - 4.2.10 an understanding from politicians from all sides that, despite the marginal political landscape in the borough, the safeguarding of vulnerable children should be everyone's collective concern and priority, irrespective of party

politics.

- 4.3 In relation to the ***underlying reasons for the failure*** in children's services, the reasons ***improvement work had not impacted as expected*** and the ***barriers to improvement*** in the borough, I found a range of issues, particularly in relation to:
- 4.3.1 shortcomings in leadership, and particularly a lack of experience and understanding of how to lead the 'turn-around' of failing, complex children's services to secure impact (*paragraphs 4.4 to 4.7*);
  - 4.3.2 poor use and analysis of performance and management information to drive improvements and to monitor progress and impact for children, and a lack of in-depth understanding of services (*paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10*);
  - 4.3.3 poor engagement and communication with staff leading to a serious disconnect between children's senior management and the front line (*paragraphs 4.11 to 4.16*);
  - 4.3.4 ensuring that governance adds value to the safeguarding of children in Barnet (*paragraphs 4.17 to 4.25*);
  - 4.3.5 resourcing issues (*paragraphs 4.26 to 4.28*);
  - 4.3.6 shortcomings in systems to secure good front-line practice (*paragraphs 4.29 to 4.30*).

## Leadership and 'turn-around' capability

- 4.4 As indicated, colleagues in Barnet at every level are committed and determined to make a difference for their children. From late 2016, there have been some strong appointments of managers in the service who understand what good, responsive, child-focused practice looks like. These colleagues and their teams have been working extremely hard to bring about required improvements. However, while some have worked in improving contexts before, there is a lack of collective experience and expertise in leading the turnaround of a complex set of failing children's social care services and a lack of the overarching leadership required to drive success in these circumstances. While some key and important improvements had been forged by the time of the inspection, in relation to IT, caseloads and agency staff, mostly the improvement activity had not secured either the necessary pace or impact required at the front line for Barnet's children. Serious and systemic issues highlighted in the original 2016 Essex diagnostic remained evident in the Ofsted report a year later with services still not ensuring the safety or welfare of children. Despite the extensive activity, there remained a widespread lack of focus on the child, ineffective analysis of risk and children's needs, poor audit and quality assurance, weak oversight by managers and a lack of timely action leading to drift and delay for vulnerable children.
- 4.5 By the beginning of the review period, three months after the conclusion of the inspection, some improvement was notable at the front door thanks to the work of the senior managers concerned and their teams but, broadly, services were still showing the same systemic issues as had previously been highlighted. While some aspects of poor practice do take longer to improve, there are many where focused leadership and collective problem-solving should have brought about much swifter

impact.

4.6 This lack of 'turn-around' leadership experience and expertise presents the clearest barrier to improvement in Barnet. It has led to a lack of clarity, inconsistency and poor engagement in terms of setting expectations around practice standards and protocols across children's social care services. In addition to these core practice improvement issues, there were a number of matters arising from these shortcomings that required equally urgent attention:

4.6.1 critically, a focused, 'SMART' Improvement Plan was needed which clearly identified the correct priority areas and the actions required. The Improvement Plan being used and developed was unclear and not sufficiently focused on practice or leadership; it did not include timescales; it had not involved partners in its development and it did not provide a framework for galvanising staff and partners, nor for monitoring progress and impact. This was quickly accepted, and, with the support of Essex, partners and others, a new and stronger Plan was developed for submission to Ofsted;

4.6.2 a robust, inclusive Improvement Board was needed, supported by a structure which ensures actions are taken and monitored. The Improvement Board in operation was an internal Board, chaired by the Chief Executive which met too infrequently to impact on practice and received over-optimistic and unspecific reports on progress. A decision had already been made following the inspection to bring in an independent Chair for the Board and, following advice, it was quickly agreed that the new Board should include members; senior representatives of partners from schools, health and the police; and corporate colleagues. However, the first externally chaired Board only took place in September 2017, four months after the conclusion of the inspection;

4.6.3 the senior team in children's services (SMT) needed to work more effectively as a team, providing collective, strong leadership, and taking a more creative, problem-solving approach to achieving impact;

4.6.4 partners needed to be engaged and to be recognised as core participants in safeguarding children in the borough, with strong joined up approaches, comprehensive information sharing, and clarity in relation to expectations of their roles and of what they can expect from the Council's services.

4.7 Other issues relating to leadership were evident across the Council, as well as in children's services, which were not supportive of the improvement effort and therefore presented barriers:

4.7.1 **Silo working** was pervasive throughout the Council. While lack of 'join up' is often seen in large organisations, the silos found in Barnet at the corporate level mitigated against the potential of SCB to make a strong contribution to support the improvement for children. Equally, silos across children's services and partners more generally, including between safeguarding and education services, did not maximise improvement

capacity. The silo working across children's social care services has led to inconsistent practice and risk at points of transfer where the child is not put at the centre of considerations. As set out in Section 5, corporate SCB colleagues, education colleagues and partners have all been quick to respond to the findings of my review, recognising their responsibilities, and acting on them, including by becoming active members of Barnet's Improvement Board;

- 4.7.2 While recognising the need to act decisively and effectively with both **capability and capacity** issues, Barnet has been too slow in taking effective action as necessary, including to appoint new managers to rebuild capacity and capability and bring confidence to front line colleagues. There was a need for a greater sense of urgency to establish pace and momentum;
- 4.7.3 There are some **cultural issues** to be addressed at the corporate level which may relate to the legacy of the commissioning/delivery split. Because the focus of SCB had become higher level transformational and strategic change issues, day to day 'business as usual' matters began to be seen as less important and were not normally discussed at top level. In addition, Family Services had become particularly siloed within SCB which meant it did not benefit to the full from corporate support. SCB's culture has not been one of collective problem solving or understanding about the quality of the delivery of basic services. There is strong potential to deliver on the Chief Executive's objective to develop a more positive, high performance culture which can help to secure rapid and sustained improvement;
- 4.7.4 The Council is a **process-heavy organisation** with multiple approval requirements for even fairly straightforward matters. This leads to frustrations and delays which mitigate against establishing a nimble and creative improvement culture.

## **Use of performance information to drive improvement and understanding of services**

- 4.8 Until the appointment of the DCS in 2015, and the diagnostic exercise conducted by colleagues from Essex, there was little awareness of the problems developing with children's social care.
- 4.9 While many within the service were acutely aware of the failings described by Ofsted, both before and after the inspection, there was a general lack of in-depth understanding elsewhere. Prior to the inspection, this was exacerbated by over-optimistic reporting of progress, including to the Improvement Board, and by inaccurate information arising from audits and quality assurance processes. Following the inspection, while there was a widespread acceptance of the outcome, there was a lack of real appreciation by many, including at corporate and governance levels, about the extent of the failings and the impact on children. The

common, accepted narrative from many was one of being 'almost there'. This lack of understanding of the scale of the inadequacies in services represented a significant barrier to improvement, particularly when coupled with the lack of experience and expertise to deliver the systemic improvements required, at pace.

4.10 While there is a clear understanding about the importance of using performance and management information to drive improvement and monitor impact for children, systems and approaches are poor. This represents a distinct barrier to further improvement and is also a contributory factor as to why the impact of improvement activity since 2016 has not been sufficient. There are significant amounts of data and information about performance within the borough but analysis and use of that data and information are under-developed. Monitoring has tended to focus on quantitative indicators without significant reference to the quality of practice and the impact on children. Systems are unduly bureaucratic and are not yet useful to front-line social workers or their managers in driving improvement. Some of these systems stemmed from corporate requirements which added burden without necessarily supporting either improvement or an understanding of services at corporate and governance levels.

## **Engagement and Communication**

4.11 There is a serious disconnect between senior managers in children's social care and the front line. This is a significant barrier to improvement and also a core reason for the lack of impact of improvement efforts so far. While there have been extensive efforts by the DCS and his senior team to communicate changes to staff, these have not been successful in fully engaging front line colleagues and their managers in a collective, consistent improvement effort. It must be recognised that the churn and instability experienced by any Council following a failed inspection makes good communication and engagement particularly challenging as many staff move on and many arrive. However, it is critical to make progress in this area in order to develop a momentum for change and a nurturing and dynamic culture of improvement in which high standards and expectations can be set and met.

4.12 The lack of purposeful and systematic engagement with staff in Barnet leads to a lack of clarity and understanding about what is required of them. Equally, staff do not feel that they have the opportunity to contribute their expertise to developments – they are 'receivers' of change rather than agents of change. Many staff report frustration about the lack of follow-up when suggestions or requests are made.

4.13 Dealing quickly and decisively with capability issues is critical in improving children's social care services. Finding ways to be honest and open with staff about these changes is essential to building momentum and setting expectations. Because of the time it has taken to establish a more stable core of high quality managers, social workers have, over a year or more, experienced a chain of new managers arriving and introducing new systems without those social workers being involved or trained, with many reporting that they do not understand the changes or why they are being introduced. Those managers then quickly leave, and new managers repeat the cycle. Staff report that there is very little communication about leavers or new arrivals. While there is understanding about the need for change, including in

relation to personnel, they feel that there is a lack of transparency about how new staff are appointed.

- 4.14 While there is an established narrative around Family Services in Barnet, it has not reached the front line as a galvanising or clear vision which has meaning for social workers' everyday work.
- 4.15 A number of whistleblowing complaints have been made by staff over the last year, including very recently, relating to cultural and leadership as well as practice issues. I am satisfied that these recent complaints are being dealt with appropriately at the corporate level, including through independent reviews where required.
- 4.16 As already indicated, in relation to partners, greater engagement and involvement were required across the piece. There were particular engagement issues with schools. They were not surprised by the outcome of the inspection and had generally poor experiences with children's social care services. While there is effective communication and engagement between schools and the Local Authority's outsourced education function, the lack of direct engagement between schools and senior managers within children's social care does not build understanding or relationships in relation to safeguarding issues.

## **Governance**

- 4.17 While issues relating to governance in Barnet were not the primary cause of failure in children's services, they can make a significant difference to fuelling and supporting the improvement effort going forward. The key question arising during the review was how to ensure that governance adds value in Barnet, particularly to those working to safeguard vulnerable children and secure the best outcomes for them.
- 4.18 As already indicated, there can be no doubt about the commitment of the Leader of the Council, the Lead Member and senior members of both major parties. All are determined to do what is required to put right the failings which have let their children down.
- 4.19 Nevertheless, it became clear that governance in Barnet has not been sufficiently focused on safeguarding children. Most members did not have a good understanding of safeguarding issues; of safeguarding work in the borough; of the needs of vulnerable children in the borough; and, significantly, of the problems growing in the service and the implications for children of the findings highlighted in the recent Ofsted inspection.
- 4.20 This is not surprising given the history of how issues have been dealt with in Barnet's Committees. Following a generally reassuring update on safeguarding going to the Children's, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee (CELS) in September 2015, members of that Committee requested regular updates on the work. However, despite the new DCS's growing concerns about the service, these were not forthcoming, and members did not follow-up on their request. Even when



concerns grew to the extent that a decision was made to commission Essex to provide a diagnostic in January 2016, nothing was reported to the Committee.

- 4.21 Following the serious issues raised in the Essex report in March 2016, bilateral discussions were had between the DCS and individual members. The Leader and Lead member (Chair of CELS) were well briefed by the DCS on concerns raised, and the restructuring took place to give the DCS full responsibility and accountability for the service, as outlined in paragraph 2.6. However, the CELS Committee did not receive any reports relating to concerns highlighted in the Essex work. In May 2016, the regular general report on performance across the Council went to the cross-cutting Performance and Contracts Management Committee (PCM). Safeguarding data was set out in the body of the report but not highlighted as a particularly key issue for concern. Nevertheless, one member of that Committee requested that the CELS Committee should receive a report on safeguarding. This report was taken two months later, in July 2016. The report was over-optimistic and reassuring.
- 4.22 The CELS Committee did not receive any further report on safeguarding until a year later, in July 2017, after the publication of the Ofsted report. That report in July 2017 set out the Ofsted findings and recommended that CELS takes a standing item on safeguarding and asks for 'deep dives' into areas of concern. This was agreed by Council in the same month.
- 4.23 There are a variety of issues and questions arising from this unsatisfactory history. They include:
- 4.23.1 whether the remit of the CELS Committee is too broad. There is no doubt that the Committee had full agendas during the period concerned, taking controversial items including on libraries, school funding and school places;
  - 4.23.2 whether the split is appropriate between CELS as a 'theme' Committee tasked with looking at strategy, 'transformation' and policy but not performance, and PCM as the Committee that looks at performance across the Council. Given that PCM's prime focus has generally been Barnet's large outsourced contracts, there is a question over whether that Committee has the capacity or capability to scrutinise and monitor complex children's services effectively;
  - 4.23.3 why the culture in Barnet leads to over-optimistic and over-reassuring reporting to members. This may be due to factors such as the marginal nature of the borough's politics; the concern to maintain Barnet's reputation; custom and practice; and/or a misplaced concern to make serious safeguarding issues public prior to an Ofsted inspection. Whatever the cause, it does not serve Barnet's children effectively.
- 4.24 Notwithstanding the shortcomings in how the Committees oversaw safeguarding services, it is important to note that, as indicated earlier in this report, the quality of performance information being received by the Committees lacked the analysis required to allow effective scrutiny in any case.

- 4.25 In relation to members' under-developed understanding of children's social care, safeguarding and their responsibilities with respect to Barnet's most vulnerable children, training has been available but there has not been systematic monitoring of its quality or of member attendance. There has been no training in relation to how members can more effectively support, challenge and scrutinise the impact of their services.
- 4.26 While individual senior members have made clear their commitment and prioritisation of children during my review, the Committees tend to operate in silos. This brings less opportunity to develop a collective drive or approach for key Council priorities such as children across Committee Chairs, irrespective of their individual responsibilities.

## **Resources**

- 4.27 While the issues arising for children in Barnet were not primarily related to resourcing, it is the case that additional resource will be required to improve services and ensure that vulnerable children in Barnet get the outcomes they deserve.
- 4.28 This is fully recognised by the Leader, members and the SCB corporately. Their commitment has been evidenced by the allocation of an additional £5.7m to the base budget for Family Services, most of which is aimed at covering demand and inflation requirements within children's social care. Of that sum, £1.8m is currently earmarked for improvement work. However, it was not clear that the resource was correctly focused on what will be required. It is also likely that more resource will be needed to deliver the new Improvement Plan effectively, including to secure further management capacity across services.
- 4.29 In February 2017, £7.4m of savings relating to Family Services had been proposed for the two financial years 2018-2020. £3.6m of this related to children's social care services. As part of the budget-setting process, the children's social care savings were reviewed following the Ofsted inspection and rightly found to be both undeliverable and inappropriate. They were adjusted down to £0.7m.

## **Systems to support practice and the front-line**

- 4.30 The Ofsted report details the extensive concerns found relating to children's social care practice and these remained evident during my review.
- 4.31 As indicated, there was work in 2016 to implement an effective IT system for children's social care and address caseloads and high numbers of agency staff. Notwithstanding these efforts, and the efforts of the DCS and his senior team to support their extremely hard-working staff, there were a number of additional barriers to improvement evident during the review, relating to Ofsted's findings and practice on the ground, including:

- 4.31.1 a significant lack of a problem-solving and child-focused culture to underpin practice and improvement work;
- 4.31.2 poor auditing systems; a lack of accuracy in auditing; and slow feedback to social workers, which in turn slows down learning, engagement and improvement and makes it difficult to monitor progress in relation to impact for children;
- 4.31.3 issues relating to the IRO/CPC service, the culture within which it operates and its placement within the children's social care structure;
- 4.31.4 poor responsiveness to referrers from partner agencies, including schools, and the need for direct contacts with schools to build personal relationships, and better communication, engagement and understanding;
- 4.31.5 caseload issues still evident in some parts of the service;
- 4.31.6 the need for additional management capacity in some key services;
- 4.31.7 heavily bureaucratic and process-ridden practice, with multiple approval requirements, and historic systems taking up social workers' time and causing significant frustration, exacerbating workload issues and reducing time spent with children and families;
- 4.31.8 some difficult interface issues with Barnet's external contractors particularly regarding IT set-up and HR, although dedicated individuals within these services do a considerable amount to mitigate difficulties;
- 4.31.9 although an acceptable IT system is in place, issues still needed addressing, including duplicate systems, delivering usable and useful reports, and interface issues in some services, including adoption.

## **5. Action being taken to remove barriers to make rapid and sustained improvements for children in Barnet and further action required**

- 5.1 There is no doubt that the causes of failure and barriers to improvement in Barnet are real and challenging. However, there is also no doubt that the response of the Council and its partners to the failure and to the findings and recommendations of my review has been positive and encouraging. There is now a much more consistent understanding and acceptance of the extent of the failings in services for Barnet's children.
- 5.2 For example, it was quickly accepted that there was a need for a much more focused Improvement Plan to bring clarity for all about the priority areas for action. It was encouraging to see a higher quality Plan developed at pace, with the support of the new Chair of the Improvement Board, and involving partners and corporate colleagues as well as children's social care senior managers. Although the Plan is a high-level document, it provides a much more comprehensive framework to guide and galvanise the improvement effort and it is supported by a more detailed 'action log'.
- 5.3 Equally as important and encouraging has been the transformation of the Improvement Board. Having earlier rightly decided that there was a need for the Board to be externally chaired, Barnet also accepted the need to expand the Board to include the Leader, Lead Member, corporate colleagues, and partners, and, latterly, the newly appointed Chair of the BSCB. Thanks to the new Chair of the Improvement Board, Dave Hill - the Executive Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council, it now operates on a much more frequent basis and is a robust, challenging and supportive forum, clearly focused on driving and monitoring the implementation of the Plan.
- 5.4 Most important has been Barnet's acceptance of the finding that there is a need for greater 'turn-around' leadership expertise and experience. As set out earlier, high quality, child-focused senior managers had been appointed prior to the inspection and more have joined the service and the senior team during the course of the review period. Barnet's social workers also work extremely hard and are fully committed to the children of the borough. If talent in the organisation is to be focused to best effect, the DCS and his senior team would need to be guided in how to secure the necessary impact, pace and sustained improvement.
- 5.5 It had always been part of Barnet's intention to engage Essex more fully as their Improvement Partner in order to support the improvement effort. The Executive Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council had agreed to lead Essex's input to Barnet as part of his and his Council's commitment to sector-led improvement. As the findings of my review emerged, it became clear that the nature of Improvement Partner work from Essex would need to be changed and strengthened. The Essex Executive Director and his team, who are highly experienced in how to lead sustainable improvement and change, would need to provide focused leadership, clear direction, training, monitoring and support if they

were to support and coach Barnet's senior managers effectively to bring about the necessary change and impact. A new specification for Essex's role was therefore developed and Barnet colleagues are now engaging positively with Essex within this new **Improvement Leadership Partner** model.

- 5.6 It is important to note that the support now being led by Essex is very different from the role played by Essex during 2016 and in the run-up to the inspection. At that point, Essex had been contracted simply to conduct diagnostic exercises pre-Ofsted to give an objective view of children's social care services. While colleagues from Essex stayed in touch with the DCS and his team during that period, Essex played a very light touch role, advising on specific issues as requested. Their role as now agreed with Barnet, in the light of the findings of the review, is significantly more intensive and broadly cast, developed from and building on Essex's successful track record elsewhere.
- 5.7 While practice in Barnet remains inadequate and too variable, there has been some encouraging progress on the ground with notable improvements in the capacity and capability of the MASH team and improved working with partners. This is thanks to the leadership and hard work of the Operational Director, her Heads of Service and their teams. While the borough has been too slow to act, some systems issues have now been addressed, including dismantling the duplicate IT systems operating in MASH. Critically, following Essex's advice and calibration, the auditing system is now much improved and more accurate. The quality assurance framework is contributing to setting more consistent expectations. There is a stronger sense of realism and less over-optimism about practice and improvement. These factors were endorsed by a recent Ofsted monitoring visit.
- 5.8 This section of the report sets out more of the action already being taken and planned by the Council and its partners to remove the barriers set out in Section 4, and includes further action required. It covers:
- 5.8.1 leadership, 'turn-around' capability, resourcing and practice (*paragraphs 5.10 to 5.12*);
  - 5.8.2 use of performance information to drive improvement and understanding of services (*paragraphs 5.13 to 5.17*);
  - 5.8.3 engagement and communications (*paragraphs 5.18 to 5.22*);
  - 5.8.4 governance (*paragraphs 5.23 to 5.26*).
- 5.9 To remove most of the barriers highlighted and bring about rapid and sustained improvement for children in Barnet, action is needed at three levels in each of areas set out above:
- 5.9.1 at practice level, to inject strong standards and approaches, pace, quality and consistency and the necessary management oversight;
  - 5.9.2 at Council level, to ensure that senior management and members support and fuel improvement and have robust but not over-bureaucratic approaches to performance management and quality improvement; and,
  - 5.9.3 at borough level, with partners playing their part in order to build the necessary capacity across the system to safeguard children and secure

their life chances and choices.

## **Leadership, 'turn-around' capability, resourcing and practice**

5.10 As indicated above, it is very positive that the Council has accepted that they need additional expertise in turning around the failures in their children's social care services to secure more rapid and sustained impact for their children and young people. They accept that they need a greater sense of urgency, acting more swiftly to build capacity, capability and momentum, thereby developing a culture of improvement which has a positive effect on staff at the front line, building morale as progress and stability become evident.

5.11 In relation to this area of concern, and the findings of the review:

5.11.1 the Council has accepted the more robust role to be played by the Essex team, led by the Executive Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council, as their Improvement Leadership Partner. In relation to the leadership required to turn around services, the specification for Essex's role now includes:

- reporting directly to the Chief Executive on the pace of progress and on any additional requirements to secure the necessary improvements. Regular sessions with the Chief Executive and sessions with corporate leaders from SCB as required are taking place and are aimed at supporting the Chief Executive in providing strong corporate oversight, engagement and support;
- as well as robustly chairing the Improvement Board, giving direction to ensure that the officer improvement structure below the Board is effectively implementing the Plan;
- working directly with partners and other Barnet colleagues as required to support their contribution to the implementation of the Plan;
- support, direction, training, monitoring and supervision to the DCS and his SMT, guiding their activity to ensure pace and focus on what makes a difference for children;
- supporting the team to provide strong, collaborative, problem-solving, creative and engaging collective leadership for their services and for children;
- individual coaching for the DCS and members of SMT to build their expertise in order to secure a sustainable approach going forward;
- particular direction on securing a strong child-centred culture going forward;
- specific advice on key leadership areas, including on capacity and capability issues within children's social care; on the quality of appointments at management level; on the optimum use of the additional resource allocated for the implementation of the Improvement Plan; on the level of additional resource that may be required; and on the appropriateness of any savings proposed for the service;
- specific and regular support for MASH and the duty and assessment teams, particularly focusing on timeliness, thresholds and efficient operating;
- specific and regular support for the IRO and CP reviewing services, with training and development to support it adding maximum value;

- advice on the positioning of the IRO and CP reviewing services within the children's social care structure;
  - advice on removing unnecessary processes and bureaucracy from practice; and,
  - advice to ensure that effective and consistent practice guidance, thresholds and protocols are in place and being used.
- 5.11.2 the Chief Executive is providing significant support for the improvement effort, seeing it as part of the important work to develop a more positive, high performance culture across the Council. Investment has been committed into manager development to build skills and a 'permission' culture within the organisation. It is clear that this work will be critical to creating the right environment for children's services to thrive;
- 5.11.3 individual corporate members of SCB have recognised that they have a significant amount to contribute to the improvement of children's services and have responded with real energy and commitment to the findings of the review. They are working with the Chief Executive to develop SCB itself into more of a problem-solving team, focused on delivery as well as on transformational approaches to meet the ongoing challenges facing local government. In addition, they have taken responsibility for relevant aspects of the Improvement Plan and ensured that their areas of responsibility are feeding into the improvement effort. That includes action on legal services, performance management, audit and assurance, HR and finance, and improving links with adult mental health services;
- 5.11.4 important work has also begun at the corporate level to reduce historic organisational bureaucratic structures and processes, including to reduce the number of boards and approval mechanisms that slow down activity and cause frustration among staff;
- 5.11.5 there is an acceptance that the Council was slow to address capability issues across management in children's social care services with the first small tranche of strong managers only being appointed in late 2016 and early 2017. There has been greater urgency during the review period and there is now a new SMT, new heads of service, and more action taken across management tiers to secure better capacity and capability to support social workers. However, sustainability remains a concern as two new SMT members are on single year contracts, and four out of the five key Heads of Service are agency workers. To build confidence and the right environment for sustainable improvement, stability at these senior levels is critical;
- 5.11.6 although the Council took too long to engage partners in the core improvement work and in the Improvement Board, partners themselves have responded swiftly and effectively, contributing well to the development and early implementation of the Improvement Plan;
- 5.11.7 after a protracted period, a strong appointment has been made to the position of Chair of Barnet's Safeguarding Children Board. He has made a promising start, contributing to the Improvement Board and working with the

Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council, the DCS and SMT to begin to align the work of BSCB to maximise effort and impact on practice and children across the partnership.

- 5.12 This encouraging start indicates that the Council now more fully understands the extent of improvement required and is prepared to work with their Improvement Leadership Partner to increase pace, impact and sustainability. However, it is too early to judge the impact or effectiveness of the actions and intention listed above. It will therefore be key for the Council to:
- 5.12.1 ensure all the actions and intentions actions set out above are in train and that they are monitored closely to ensure they are having the necessary impact;
  - 5.12.2 ensure close monitoring of the implementation of the Improvement Plan to ensure that it is proceeding according to specified timescales;
  - 5.12.3 ensure that there is effective engagement with Essex as their Improvement Leadership Partner and that the impact and progress of the Partnership is monitored as part of the Improvement Plan;
  - 5.12.4 engage partners fully in the implementation of the Plan, ensuring clarity across agencies and Council divisions and directorates about roles and requirements;
  - 5.12.5 given the number of senior agency appointments, secure stability within the management of the service, taking advice from Essex;
  - 5.12.6 keep training, development and support for staff and partners under review to ensure that capability continues to be built and maintained;
  - 5.12.7 as part of the monitoring work of the Improvement Board, keep the resourcing of the Improvement Plan under review to ensure that it can be delivered effectively and sustained, increasing resource further if necessary; and,
  - 5.12.8 protect children's social care from cuts to its base budget in the medium term.

## **Use of performance information to drive improvement and understanding of services**

- 5.13 Going forward, it is essential that effective systems are in place at every level to have a clear and accurate view of how services are performing for children and young people. At practice level, social workers, their managers and their senior managers need to use management and quality information more effectively for children. At senior management levels in the Council, SCB must be sighted on the quality and performance of services. At governance levels, members need to



understand the strengths and weaknesses of children's services and the implications of that for their decision-making. In relation to the BSCB, their work to scrutinise and support safeguarding across the partnership needs to be aligned to the improvement effort as set out in the Improvement Plan, and their deliberations need to be well informed and sighted on the relevant issues.

5.14 The Council has accepted the need to improve performance management, to increase their capacity and capability for analysing data and information, and to reduce the bureaucracy currently associated with its operation. However, even though an improved performance framework has been established for the Improvement Board, it is not yet being used effectively. There is some improvement in the usefulness of reports for the front line in some areas but progress in using and analysing performance information to drive improvement generally remains slow.

5.15 Better progress has been made, taking advice from Essex, on adopting more effective auditing processes within children's social care. There is recent evidence of audits now becoming more accurate. This will help auditing and quality assurance to become more useful to staff as a core part of their learning and development and encourage a better, more consistent understanding of what constitutes good practice with children.

5.16 In relation to this area of concern, and the findings of the review:

5.16.1 Essex, as Barnet's Improvement Leadership Partner:

- has established a case audit system based on the 'treble loop' principle to speed learning and consistency, with face to face and written feedback to Barnet's managers. As part of this, Essex has calibrated managers' audits leading to more accurate auditing as evidenced in the recent Ofsted monitoring visit;
- has introduced a performance data tool which allows for more straightforward scrutiny;
- is providing specific further advice on using performance management information effectively to monitor activity and secure impact;
- is working with SMT to improve their skills and focus on quality and impact, guiding them to ask the critical 'so what' questions to support their problem-solving around areas requiring rapid improvement; and,
- as well as providing ongoing evaluation and feedback to Barnet on progress, more formal three-monthly stocktakes have been organised with Heads of Service required to account for progress in their areas. The first of these is scheduled for early December 2017.

5.16.2 the Chief Executive has initiated an internal performance and governance review which has resulted in reducing layers of bureaucracy. From November 2017, he has established a monthly review of performance and delivery at SCB where the team will consider reports of progress against key organisational priorities. This is a change for SCB which previously focused more on transformation and change projects;

5.16.3 some additional capacity for supporting the monitoring of the Improvement Plan has been secured and is supporting improvements.

5.17 It is early days for the improvement of performance management in Barnet. However clear and encouraging the intentions, it will be key for the Council to:

5.17.1 ensure that the work with Essex is being successful in building skills in this area and, in particular, that the audit and quality assurance functions speed learning and development and secure a consistent understanding of expectations and practice standards;

5.17.2 ensure that the intended performance management systems are effectively implemented to drive and monitor improvement; that they are analytical and provide useful qualitative and quantitative information for the front line, managers, the Improvement Board, SCB, the BSCB and members;

5.17.3 ensure that systems are not overly bureaucratic so that they take attention and capacity away from the core job of improving outcomes for children.

## **Engagement and communications**

5.18 The Council has accepted the need for improving engagement with staff in order to address the disconnect between senior management and the front line. It is encouraging to see how determined colleagues in Barnet are to improve engagement and communications with a range of action being taken.

5.19 This is, of course, as important to the recruitment and retention effort as it is to securing strong two-way understanding, effective lines of sight and a collegiate culture with everyone working towards common aims. As staff confidence in the improvement builds, Barnet will be seen as a safe and exciting place to work and recruitment and retention of high quality staff will become easier, bringing stability for children. While this is not yet evident across services in Barnet, early signs of this positive effect can be seen in the MASH where, thanks to the Operational Director, her Heads of Service and their teams, morale is higher and improvement efforts are beginning to show results.

5.20 Communication and engagement with partners is also key to building the necessary relationships and understanding to enable everyone to work together for children. The Council needs to bring to bear the full capacity of the partnership if progress to improve children's services is to be rapid and sustained. Engagement with partners has improved but will need continued efforts. Focused work with schools has increased, although their engagement is always more challenging, given the number of organisations concerned. Nevertheless, headteachers are working positively with the Council to contribute to the implementation of the Improvement Plan.

5.21 In relation to this area of concern, and the findings of the review:

- 5.21.1 Essex, as their Improvement Leadership Partner, is supporting and advising colleagues in Barnet on establishing and sustaining an effective approach to engagement and communications to secure strong two-way dialogue between front line staff, their managers and senior managers within the service;
  - 5.21.2 opportunities to engage have been increased, including holding a children's social care managers' development session headed up by the Chief Executive and DCS to begin to galvanise the team and secure a culture of shared endeavour;
  - 5.21.3 the Chief Executive, as well as the DCS, is making strenuous efforts to attend team meetings and other corporate colleagues are meeting with front line managers to listen to their perspectives;
  - 5.21.4 approaches to cascading information are being improved and the DCS's regular briefings are taking place fortnightly;
  - 5.21.5 a social worker survey is going out to staff in January 2018 and this will give the opportunity for staff to feed back on morale and cultural issues as well as the normal range of questions. A full staff survey is due to be conducted in April 2018;
  - 5.21.6 an Executive Headteacher is being seconded to support children's social care with their engagement of schools.
- 5.22 There is no doubt that the Council is making significant efforts to address the barriers to improvement in relation to engagement and communication. There is good recognition that strong engagement takes considerable time and effort and is an ongoing process. To secure impact, it will be key for the Council to:
- 5.22.1 ensure that the planned engagement and communications activity comprises a comprehensive engagement strategy, designed to build a positive, shared culture and to ensure that the Improvement Plan is understood by those who need to take or support action, including across the Council and partners;
  - 5.22.2 ensure that schools, in particular, are clear about what they are expected to do to support the improvement effort and that they have clear, responsive contact points within children's social care; and,
  - 5.22.3 ensure that when information is cascaded, it is received and understood.

## **Governance**

- 5.23 This report has already made clear the commitment of Barnet's members to their children and young people and to the improvement of services designed to improve outcomes for them. The Leader has expressed his personal determination to put right the failures found in the inspection and the Lead Member and other senior

members are equally focused on the need to support, fuel and resource the improvement effort. The Leader of the Opposition has likewise been clear about the priority he and his group place on serving the most vulnerable children in the borough. This is particularly encouraging given the marginal nature of the borough. It brings confidence in the stability of Barnet going forward, irrespective of the outcome of the local government elections in May 2018. At that point, Barnet will still need to be focusing on and prioritising the significant improvement of its children's social care practice.

5.24 Some work has taken place to increase members' understanding of children's social care services and practice. The Leader and Lead Member, along with the Chief Executive, joined a recent 'Practice Week', observing audit and other sessions.

5.25 There is recognition of the need to address the governance issues arising during the review in order to ensure that members understand children's social care and are supporting its improvement across its Committees. The issues raised in Section 4 of this report are therefore being considered. In particular:

5.25.1 the CELS Committee is taking a report on safeguarding at every meeting;

5.25.2 the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in Essex is due to provide coaching and training for key members, including members of the CELS Committee, on corporate parenting;

5.25.3 more comprehensive member training is being developed for the new intake in May 2018;

5.25.4 it has been agreed that all the 'theme' Committees, including CELS, will receive quarterly performance reports, beginning in January 2018. This should help to ensure that any performance slippage does not fall between the remit of two or more Committees;

5.25.5 the Chief Executive and SCB have undertaken to prepare a review in relation to governance issues with options and proposals for the incoming administration to consider post May 2018;

5.25.6 the Chief Executive is considering the introduction of a quarterly 'Safeguarding Summit' involving the Leader, Lead Members for Children and Adults, the Chief Executive, DCS and DASS.

5.26 Notwithstanding the action above, if governance is fully to support the improvement of services for vulnerable children in Barnet, it will be key for the Council to ensure that:

5.26.1 any member training fully addresses the need for members to understand: children's social care practice and services; key issues within the service; the Council's and members' responsibilities in relation to corporate parenting and to safeguarding; and how effectively to support officers through robust scrutiny and monitoring of performance, children's outcomes

and the quality of practice;

- 5.26.2 attendance at mandatory elements of member training is effectively monitored and addressed;
- 5.26.3 the quality of any member training is evaluated;
- 5.26.4 in addition to member training, a programme is developed for relevant members in the new administration to gain strong insight into and understanding of children's social care practices and services and of the needs of the children involved;
- 5.26.5 there is sufficient, regular, opportunity for the Leader, with Chairs of all Committees, collectively to review progress in improving services and outcomes for vulnerable children and to ensure that their needs are prioritised;
- 5.26.6 the officer review of governance is completed by May 2018 for consideration by the incoming administration and should take account of the issues raised in paragraphs 4.17 to 4.25 of this report.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

- 6.1 The purpose of the review was to evaluate the corporate and governance capacity of the Council to make rapid and sustained improvements to their services for children in order to achieve the outcomes that children in Barnet deserve. That evaluation could then inform a recommendation to the Secretary of State as to whether there is sufficiently strong evidence to suggest that the long term sustainable improvement to children's social care can be achieved if operational service control stays with the London Borough of Barnet.
- 6.2 There is no doubt about the systemic failures that were found by Ofsted in Barnet. I have set out my view of the causes of the current failures and the action that I consider necessary to address those causes in order to secure sustained improvement for children, at pace.
- 6.3 Key to that improvement is strong leadership of the turn-around of services - leadership which can secure sustained improvement and focuses on:
- 6.3.1 developing and embedding a strongly child-focused culture, setting and securing consistent, high standards and expectations for practice across services;
  - 6.3.2 prioritising actions which will make a real difference to children's lives and outcomes, securing pace, momentum and clarity;
  - 6.3.3 engaging and galvanising staff, corporate colleagues and partners;
  - 6.3.4 developing strong, creative and cohesive teams, including at SMT level;
  - 6.3.5 acting quickly and decisively to deal with any blockages to improvement for children.
- 6.4 The evidence I have set out in this report indicates that the Council has taken responsibility for its failures. They have accepted the findings of both Ofsted and my review and have demonstrated their commitment and determination to take the necessary action to bring about long-term improvement. They have made an encouraging start in many areas to address the issues, including through committing additional resource on a recurring basis. They have accepted my advice and recommendations throughout the review period, and those of the Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County, in his capacity as Chair of the Improvement Board. Critically, they have accepted their need for greater experience and expertise in the leadership of turning around failing services as described in paragraph 6.3. This has led to their agreement of the need for a strengthened arrangement between Barnet and Essex County Council to provide them with the capacity and capability they need for sustainable improvement of children's services in Barnet, bringing extensive and consolidated experience of how to turn around failure and develop services rapidly.
- 6.5 In this Improvement Leadership Partner model, described earlier in the report, Barnet has agreed that the Executive Director, Social Care and Education in Essex, will report directly to Barnet's Chief Executive on the pace of progress and on any additional requirements to secure the necessary sustainable improvement. He will lead and direct the improvement programme in Barnet, working closely with the

children's SMT and the Council overall to ensure that the improvement effort is effective in securing impact for children; that it is resourced effectively; that the work of the Council overall is well focused; and that the capacity and capability of Barnet's team is enhanced to enable them, in due course, to continue the programme to ensure long-term sustainable improvement, at pace.

- 6.6 This model has good potential to succeed in Barnet, not only because of the experience of the Essex team, but also because of the improved strength of the leadership and management within children services in the borough. Barnet has now secured a larger core of committed leaders and managers within children's services who are child-focused and understand what high quality practice looks like. While there is an urgent need to secure the stability of the senior management in the service, these colleagues are working more effectively with dedicated and hard-working social workers on the front line. The focus and direction envisaged in the new Improvement Leadership Partner model should provide the required ingredients for success for children and young people in the borough.
- 6.7 However, the model will only succeed if senior leaders and managers engage well with the direction and coaching from the Essex team. This will support the acceleration of their own learning and expertise in order that they can build rapidly on their collective strengths and develop further the skills necessary to provide the long-term surety of improvement that children in Barnet deserve and require. Encouraging early signs show that this engagement is good, reflected in the outcome of Ofsted's first monitoring visit to the borough. Inspectors found that, while practice remains inadequate, early signs of progress are clear.
- 6.8 Equally, the model will require good engagement with Essex from the Leader, members, partners, the new Chair of the BSCB, and colleagues from across the Council, including the Chief Executive and SCB. Again, there are clear signs of good engagement with the model across the piece, including from the refreshed and now robust Improvement Board.
- 6.9 While there can be confidence in the model described for Barnet, it is prudent to look at alternative approaches in line with the terms of reference for the review. I have therefore considered a range of alternative governance and delivery arrangements to ascertain whether they would be more likely to achieve rapid and sustained improvement than leaving the services with the Council. There is no doubt that, in the right context, these models can provide a clear focus on children and young people where Councils cannot. I particularly considered the extent to which different models would:
- bring about improvement more quickly;
  - secure more likelihood of sustained improvement;
  - be more manageable to deliver within the Barnet context;
  - build on, rather than disrupt, the very early signs of improvement in Barnet, including to provide confidence and stability for staff who have experienced a significantly long period of churn and instability; and,
  - provide better value for money.

- 6.10 I considered whether a local authority delivery partnership with a successful local authority might be effective in relation to the criteria above. Such an authority could use its management team and key staff to run Barnet alongside or as part of its own services. However, given the appointment of a core of strong managers and the work already started with Essex, this model could duplicate or even undo much of what is already being achieved. The model agreed between Barnet and Essex achieves many of the strengths of this approach in any case, adding necessary expertise into the borough but with a focus on building Barnet's own skills so that they can sustain improvement. As such, this local authority delivery partnership approach could reduce momentum and, critically, would be unlikely to work as quickly or as effectively than Barnet working with Essex to build the skills of its own permanent team.
- 6.11 In relation to other Trust or social enterprise company arrangements, the Council statutorily retains accountability for children's services, even if they are not directly delivering those services. Given the work that the Council and partners are already doing with Essex, these models are likely to have a negative impact on the pace of improvement. In the time taken to get the Trust or company established, improvement should be well on track in Barnet. The establishment processes required are likely to take focus away from the improvement effort at a point where colleagues in Barnet are now working to deliver their Improvement Plan. These models would also be considerably more expensive to implement.
- 6.12 Members and senior officers in Barnet recognise the benefits that alternative delivery arrangements can bring, and Barnet has a history of introducing different approaches in a range of contexts. Their view, however, is that such arrangements are not appropriate or desirable for children's service in their current context as they will prove a distraction and a detraction from the improvement work already in hand.
- 6.13 On balance, my view is that the evidence points to Barnet having made an encouraging start to making the improvements required to ensure children in the borough are safeguarded. While Barnet's initial efforts did not have the desired impact, their work now, with the Essex team, is beginning to show the necessary signs of progress. On that basis, I have concluded that the best way forward for children in Barnet is for the Council to retain control of its services, operating with Essex as their Improvement Leadership Partner.
- 6.14 However, it is still early in the development and operation of this new model. It will be important for Essex and Barnet to keep progress under review to ensure their work together is having the intended impact. In his role as Chair of the Improvement Board, the Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council is well placed to report regularly to the DfE on progress and to raise an alert if he considers that pace of improvement is too slow or that engagement is not as required to ensure success. In addition, following full implementation of the model in six months, further external Commissioner advice should be sought on whether the model has been successfully implemented or if alternative arrangements have become necessary.
- 6.15 Currently, the model has been agreed between Barnet and Essex to run until September 2018, at which point Ofsted will have completed four monitoring visits.



They have agreed that the model should be reviewed before the end of the period with a view to extension if appropriate. This will be a key point to ensure that Barnet has the necessary capacity and capability to sustain any improvement and Commissioner advice may also be necessary at that point.

6.16 Any statutory direction to the Council should make clear the requirement on the London Borough of Barnet to engage fully with the Improvement Leadership Partner model and with the Chair of the Improvement Board in relation to his role in reporting progress to the DfE.

## **Recommendations**

6.17 On the basis of the evidence set out in this report, I recommend that:

6.17.1 the London Borough of Barnet should retain its children's social care services on the basis that they:

- deliver on the intentions and actions set out in this report and in their Improvement Plan;
- work with Essex within the Improvement Leadership Partner model as set out in this report;

6.17.2 The Director for Social Care and Education at Essex County Council, in his capacity as the Chair of the London Borough of Barnet's Improvement Board, should report progress on a regular basis to the DfE;

6.17.3 Further external Commissioner advice should be sought on whether alternative arrangements are necessary after the model has been in operation for at least six months.

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## **STATUTORY DIRECTION TO BARNET BOROUGH COUNCIL IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES UNDER SECTION 497A(4B) OF THE EDUCATION ACT 1996**

### **WHEREAS:**

1. The Secretary of State for Education ("the Secretary of State") has noted in respect of Barnet Borough Council ("the Council") that performance of children's social care services is 'inadequate' as detailed in Ofsted's inspection report of 7 July 2017 ("the 2017 Ofsted report").
2. The Council's failure led the Secretary of State to issue a statutory direction on 12 September 2017 ("the first direction"), requiring the Council to take a number of steps to improve the quality of services, including to cooperate with the Commissioner for Children's Services ("the Commissioner").
3. The Secretary of State has carefully considered:
  - a. Ofsted's inspection report of 7 July 2017, which found that children's social care services are 'inadequate'. The sub-judgments for children who need help and protection, children looked after and achieving permanence, and leadership, management and governance were all rated as 'inadequate'; and
  - b. The Commissioner's report of 8 December 2017 which concluded that in order to provide sustainable improvements to children's social care services the council requires external direction and intensive support.
4. The Secretary of State is therefore satisfied that the Council is still failing to perform to an adequate standard, some or all of the functions to which section 497A of the Education Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act") is applied by section 50 of the Children Act 2004 ("children's social care services functions"), namely:
  - a. social services functions, as defined in the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, so far as those functions relate to children;
  - b. the functions conferred on the Council under sections 23C to 24D of the Children Act 1989 (so far as not falling within paragraph a. above); and
  - c. the functions conferred on the Council under sections 10, 12, 12C, 12D and 17A of the Children Act 2004.
5. The Secretary of State has appointed Essex County Council as the Council's improvement advisers in accordance with, and for the purposes of, the terms of reference ("the Terms of Reference") set out in the Annex A to this direction.
6. The Secretary of State, having considered representations made by the Council, considers it expedient, in accordance with his powers under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996, to direct the Council as set out below in order to ensure that all of the Council's children's social care services functions are performed to an adequate standard.
7. The Secretary of State has extended the appointment of the Commissioner to: enable her to return to Barnet Council to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the intervention that has been put in place. She will make a recommendation in

accordance with, and for the purposes of, the terms of reference (“the Terms of Reference”) set out in Annex B to this direction.

NOW THEREFORE:

8. Pursuant to his powers under section 497A(4B) of the 1996 Act, the Secretary of State directs the Council as follows:
  - a. To comply with any instructions of Essex County Council in relation to the improvement of the Council’s exercise of its children’s social care services functions and provide such assistance as it may require;
  - b. To co-operate with Essex County Council, including on request allowing Essex County Council at all reasonable times access:
    - i. to any premises of the Council;
    - ii. to any document of, or relating to, the Council; and
    - iii. to any employee or member of the Council;

which appears to Essex County Council to be necessary for achieving the purposes of, and carrying out the responsibilities set out in, the Terms of Reference;

- c. To provide Essex County Council with such amenities, services and administrative support as they may reasonably require from time to time for the carrying out of their responsibilities in accordance with the Terms of Reference, including:
  - i. providing officers’ time or support;
  - ii. providing office space, meeting rooms or computer facilities;
- d. To ensure a comprehensive progress report is provided by the Director of Children’s Services to each meeting of the Improvement Board;
- e. To co-operate with Essex County Council six monthly reviews as to whether the Council has made sufficient progress in improving its children’s social care services;
- f. To ensure that the Chair of the Improvement Board reports to the Secretary of State on progress in delivering the improvement plan, on a quarterly basis, the first report being within 3 months of the date of this Direction;
- g. To co-operate with the Commissioner, including on request allowing the Commissioner at all reasonable times access:
  - a) to any premises of the Council;
  - b) to any document of, or relating to, the Council; and
  - c) to any employee or member of the Council;

- h. To provide the Commissioner with such amenities, services and administrative support as s/he may reasonably require from time to time for the carrying out of her/his responsibilities in accordance with the Terms of Reference, including:
  - a) providing officers' time or support; and
  - b) providing office space, meeting rooms or computer facilities;
- i. To co-operate with a Commissioner-led review of the intervention.

9. In consequence of this direction, the Secretary of State revokes the first direction.

10. This direction will remain in force until it is revoked by the Secretary of State.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Suzanne Lunn'.

SUZANNE LUNN

A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education

Dated: 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018

## ANNEX A

### Improvement Advisers

#### Terms of Reference – January 2018

1. Barnet Borough Council (“the Council”) has failed systemically in its delivery of children’s social care services. The 2017 Ofsted report found the service to be ‘inadequate’ overall and for all key judgements.
2. Essex County Council are expected to lead and direct the improvement programme for the Council on those areas of practice that Ofsted has judged to be inadequate. It shall in particular:
  - a. Chair Barnet’s Children’s Services Improvement Board (‘the Improvement Board’);
  - b. Lead and direct the development and implementation by the Improvement Board of:
    - a robust improvement plan which spans children’s services,
    - an effective reporting system that ensures that progress and outcomes are measured appropriately,
    - continuing evaluation and feedback on the effective implementation of the plan and the impact on progress of the Council,
    - developing an effective case file audit system, and,
    - getting best value from the additional resources made available for children’s social care by the Council.
  - c. Ensure that the improvement plan includes clear and specific actions which reflect the journey of the child and which address all recommendations made in the Ofsted report so as to improve the quality of services for children;
  - d. Provide leadership, support and practice advice in line with priorities agreed with the Council and set out in the Commissioner’s report and address areas of weakness identified by the Ofsted report;
  - e. Provide training and coaching to the key members – Leader, Lead member and Committee Chair, corporate parenting panel, including opposition members; and,
  - f. Provide direction, monitoring, coaching and supervision to the children’s services senior team to secure the necessary improvements and to build their capabilities.
3. Essex County Council will provide regular reports to the Department for Education that assess service improvements in Barnet by reference to the Ofsted report. These reports may cover but are not exclusive to practice;

performance; culture; leadership, management and governance; management oversight; early help; and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## **ANNEX B**

### **Non-Executive Commissioner for Children's Services**

#### **Barnet Council**

#### **Terms of Reference**

In line with the recommendations set out in the Ofsted report of children's social care published 7 July 2017 and the Commissioner report published on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018 the Commissioner for Children's Services in Barnet is expected to take the following steps.

1. To bring together evidence to assess the effectiveness of the Council's implementation of the partnership with Essex County Council in their role to lead and direct the improvement programme on behalf of the Council.
2. To advise, if necessary, on relevant alternative delivery models and governance arrangements for children's social care, outside of the operational control of the local authority, taking account of local circumstances and the views of the Council and key partners.
3. To provide a report to the Secretary of State by the end of May 2018.

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