

	<h2>Health and Wellbeing Board</h2> <h3>25th January 2018</h3>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Update report on progress of Barnet Children's Services Improvement Action Plan</b>
<b>Report of</b>	Strategic Director, Children and Young People
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	<b>Appendix 1: Ofsted monitoring visit final letter</b> <b>Appendix 2: Barnet Children's Services Improvement Plan Data Dashboard</b>
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<b>Summary</b>
<p>The Health and Wellbeing Board at its meeting on 14 September 2017 agreed to receive the update report on the Ofsted Improvement Action Plan. This report presents the information that was considered by the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee on 16 January 2018.</p> <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 the 'front door' arrangements in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Duty &amp;</p>

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 Board 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 Board 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 Board note 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.

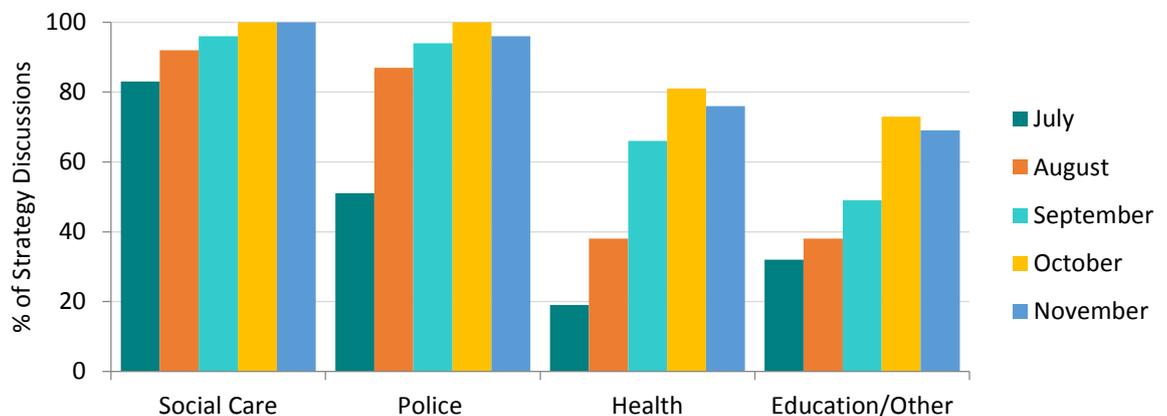


Figure 1: Multi Agency Involvement in Strategy Discussions

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)