



Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Title	Family Services Quarterly Update
Date of meeting	Monday 15 January 2024
Report of	Executive Director for Children’s Services
Wards	All
Status	Public with an EXEMPT Appendix 1&2 (Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended).
Urgent	No
Appendices	<p>Appendix 1 – Family Service Self Evaluation (SEF) November 2023 (Exempt)</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Ofsted Advisors letter to Barnet containing report findings, following Annual Engagement Meeting (AEM) on 7 November 2023 (Exempt)</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) Performance Report</p>
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Summary

The report gives an update on Family Services progress and asks Members to scrutinise performance. The report updates Members on our Annual Conversation with Ofsted that took place on 7 November 2023. As part of the ILACS framework, we discussed our progress against the recommendations from previous Ofsted focussed visit and Inspection as well as our self-evaluation (appendix 1). The report also contextualises the data that can be found in appendix 3, Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

Recommendations

- 1. That the Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to scrutinise progress and comment on the Family Services self-evaluation summarised in this report and provided in appendix 1.**

- 2. That the Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee scrutinise the activity around our annual conversation with Ofsted summarised in this report and provided in appendix 2.**
- 3. That the Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to scrutinise and provide comments on the ChAT performance report summarised in this report and in appendix 3.**

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. Self-Evaluation

1.1 Each year Local Authorities in England are required to develop a Self-Evaluation. This is to aid continuous improvement and is considered as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. Members have previously reviewed self-evaluations as part of their role in scrutinising performance. The self-evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and opportunities for further development. It forms the basis for discussion with Ofsted in our annual engagement meeting. The self-evaluation in appendix 1 is not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

1.2 The key message from our self-evaluation is that our social work practice continues to develop since last inspected and we continue our work to improve outcomes for children and young people. In summary our assessment of practice is as follows:

1.3 Our organisational strengths:

- A strong consistent leadership.
- A tenacious committed workforce.
- Good schools and good educational achievement by pupils.
- Whole systems approach to corporate parenting.
- Strong partnerships.
- Financial support to innovate and change.
- Good Member relationships.
- Cross organisation working
- Development of residential provision in response to placement sufficiency crisis.

1.4 We are proud of:

- Our child focused work, including participation and co-production.
- Our response to migrant children and families
- Our co-production with parents especially those with SEND.
- Our broad range of Early Help services.
- The work we are doing to support parents with complex trauma.
- Our agile service developments.
- Growing our own responsive workforce development programme.

- Permanency planning with a strong number of early permanency placements and children in foster care who are matched with long term carers.
- Our care leaver centre and Lifelong offer for care experienced young adults.

1.5 We need to continue to:

- Deliver accessible and joined-up services for children and families.
- Develop further placement sufficiency to meet complex needs and maintain placement stability.
- Be responsive to the needs of a changing population; including migrant families, those living in poverty and counter impact of disproportionality.
- To work in and with local communities and partners to keep children safe from extra-familial harm.
- Respond to the increasing demand in relation to Autistic Spectrum Disorder developing further our multi-agency approach to support and intervention.
- Grow our offer to further improve young people's, including care leavers, access to education, employment, and training post 16

1.6 Our future plans:

- Continue our approach to recruitment, retention and developing our workforce.
- Find ways to meaningfully measure the impact of innovations and service developments on children and families.
- Develop internal expertise and outward-facing shared services (i.e SEND/parenting Hub).
- Implement plans for a more responsive 24-hour Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- Build on success of Early Help for stronger team around the school approach.
- A focus on Elected Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing Education (CME), which includes the work identified for EHE through task and finish groups and as a result of the Member scrutiny process.
- Implement plans for community-based Autism Support Hub.
- Implement Lifelong Links approach and develop Family of Choice conferences for our care experienced young people.
- Implement innovative training options for young people who are unable to access learning by conventional routes.

2. Annual Engagement Meeting

1.6 On 7th November 2023 we met with colleagues from Ofsted for our Annual Engagement Meeting. This is an annual meeting between the Executive Director of Children's Services and Senior Leaders with the link senior Ofsted advisors for social care and education. The meeting considers a range of information including the self-evaluation and the CHaT. There are also discussions about the impact of national policy changes and local contextual issues.

1.7 It was a positive meeting, and our self-evaluation was well received and seen as reflective. The Ofsted advisors recognised that education outcomes for children in Barnet are consistently good or better and our sector-leading work on the development of practice and resources for children in areas such as participation and co-production, Early Help and leaving care. They confirmed the ILACS inspection will take place next year and gave advice

to further strengthen the SEF including clarity on repeat contacts into the MASH; evidencing how our Return Home Interview processes are informing children's plans; evidencing how we track the risk and impact of cumulative harm for children subject to Public Law Outline interventions (PLO/pre-proceedings); and tracking the impact of placement moves on children's outcomes. All these areas have been strengthened and evidenced in the SEF.

1.8 Ofsted Advisors report on the findings of the AEM and the notes are in appendix 2.

3. Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) Performance Report

- Performance remains relatively stable across the majority of all key indicators, when compared to the same reporting period in the previous year and the previous six month period.
- There were 10174 contacts to MASH between April – November 2023 which is 6% lower than the same period in the previous year (n= 10863) although is 11% higher than pre-pandemic reporting. The multi-agency training on the refreshed Continuum of Need and Support may be having some impact on the volume of contacts being received into MASH which is steadily decreasing over time; there is an expected reduction in contacts during school holiday periods.
- There were 1408 referrals to Children's Social Care in the period April – November 2023 which is a 5.5% increase from the 1334 reported in the previous six months, although 10% lower than the same period in 2022 (n= 1580)
- There is a 7.5% reduction of Early Help Assessments (EHA) in this reporting period when compared to the same reporting period in 2022 (n=2030>1877). However, the volume remains significantly higher than the period between April – November 2019 when the number of open EHA's totalled 1316.
- The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan is 241 in this reporting period which is a 17% reduction from the 293 reported in the previous six months. Children subject to a repeat Child Protection Plan have increased from 15% (15 families) to 22% (18 families); analysis shows that 11 families have a 2 year+ gap between Child Protection Plans and there are also two families with large sibling groups.
- The number of Children in Need in the reporting period is 1556 which is a 12% increase from the previous six-month reporting period (n=1386). The volume is 6% lower than reported in same period in the previous year (n=1661) which is reflective of the increases and reductions in the volume of Child Protection Plans in the same period.
- 68% of Social Work Assessments were completed within the recommended 45-day timescale in the reporting period, this is a small improvement from the same time last year and is reflective of a period where assessments took longer to complete due to staffing challenges in the Duty & Assessment Teams. The timeliness of assessments is tracked through live data reporting available on PowerBi which shows an improvement in timeliness which is expected to be reported in the coming months. 93% of children were seen during assessment; unborn children cannot be recorded as 'seen' in the data.
- 70% of s47s did not require an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), this is being closely monitored by managers to ensure that s47 thresholds are applied appropriately.

However, 99% of children who progress to an ICPC are made subject to a Child Protection Plan which demonstrates appropriate thresholds being applied for children in need of a Child Protection Plan to safeguard their welfare.

- ICPC's held within 15 days of a Strategy Discussion has improved slightly from 76% to 78%; an analysis of this data shows some delay has been caused by difficulties in securing interpreters for ICPC's, some children being born in the intervening period and other children where a second Strategy Discussion has been required to collate further information to inform decision making.
- During this period 110 children came into care of the Local Authority up from 82 during the previous period.
- 74 children ceased to be looked after by the Local Authority, similar figure to 77 as reported in September.
- 17% (19 children entering care were UASCs, up from 14% (11) during previous period.
- Number of children in care is 374, slight increase from 342 reported in September.
- Children looked after within our own provision remains at over a third of the total cohort and will increase as we increase local sufficiency.
- Children looked after who have had a health check in the last 12 months has risen from 68% to 73%. 71% of children looked after have had a dental check however there are known data collection issues which is being addressed to ensure that our performance reporting improves.
- Number of care experienced adults is at 323, again a slight increase from 319 in the last reporting period.
- Our performance on staying in touch with 17-18 year olds and 19-21 year olds remains at 100% and accommodation suitability remains high for both cohorts at 99% and 97% respectively.

The children's workforce is stabilising further following a period of recruitment challenges earlier in the year. A number of agency staff have been on-boarded into the permanent children's workforce and continued investment in Newly Qualified Social Workers will potentially result in all currently agency-filled social work posts being permanently filled next year. The London Pledge continues to stabilise the agency market and improve quality of candidates in London with agreed notice periods and references for agency staff on assignment. Barnet is preparing to develop an internal social work Apprenticeship Scheme supported by Department of Education Employment Support fund. The scheme will provide career progression pathways for otherwise qualified staff working in Family Services.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

4.1 None.

5. Post Decision Implementation

5.1 None.

6. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Parenting

- 6.1. In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers’ strategy Keep on Caring which outlined that the “ [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.’
- 6.2. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and;
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Risk Management

- 6.3 Any Family Services risks are recorded on the Family Services Risk Register and monitored each quarter by the Senior Leadership Team with escalations to CMT if necessary.

Insight

- 6.4 Family Services uses a comprehensive suite of performance information, as part of its self-assessment and to support decision making and, including local and regional datasets, audit and financial analysis. This information is scrutinised by Senior Leaders in a variety of forums including Placement Board, Performance Board, MTFS Board and quarterly meetings with the Lead Member for Children and Families, and the Chief Executive.

Social Value

- 6.5 All commissioning activity includes social value as a standard monitoring item.

7. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

- 7.1 None in the context of this report.

8. Legal Implications and Constitution References

- 8.1 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, if 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. Under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must consider how the child or young person can be supported to facilitate their development and to help them achieve the "best possible educational and other outcomes".

8.2. Local authorities have specific duties to care leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The corporate parenting duties and powers under the 1989 Act include:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and,
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

8.3. Under the Barnet Constitution Part 2 C, the Children & Education Overview and Scrutiny Sub- Committee shall perform the overview and scrutiny role and function in relation to:

- All matters as that relate to Children's Social Care
 - All matters which relate to services pertaining to the education and well-being of children and young people including youth services.
- Receive and comment upon any external inspections and reviews.

9. Consultation

1.1 My Say Matters is the Family Services consultation and participation programme for children and young people

10. Equalities and Diversity

10.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public-Sector Equalities Duty which Page 11 of 12 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

10.2 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.

10.3 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young people are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or belief, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status and sexual orientation. We continue to closely monitor this, as report appendixes notes, in our performance data.

11. Background Papers

11.1 None