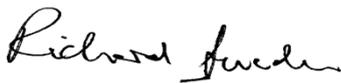# LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	Cabinet 21 June 2016
Report Title	Post-Ofsted scrutiny review - a report of the Social Care and Education Scrutiny Committees
Chair of Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Richard Sweden, Chair of Social Care Scrutiny Committee (2015-16) Cllr Louise Mitchell, Chair of Education Scrutiny Committee (2015-16)
Cabinet Portfolio	Cllr Grace Williams, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Report Author/ Contact details	Kate Bell, Head of Policy & Public Affairs Culture & Communities 020 8496 4933, kate.bell@walthamforest.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Public Access	OPEN
Appendices	1. Report of the Social Care Scrutiny Committee: Post-Ofsted Scrutiny Review, April 2016. 2. Report of the Education Scrutiny Committee: Educational Achievement of Looked After Children, February 2016 3. EIA screening

1.   SUMMARY

1.1   This report presents the findings of the year-long review undertaken by the Social Care and Education Scrutiny Committees into the impact of the improvements made by the children's social care division following the November 2014 Ofsted inspection.

1.2   The report puts forward a number of recommendations. It is hoped that these recommendations will add value to the existing improvement

programme and support the Council to drive further improvements to children's social care services in Waltham Forest.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1.1   Note the findings of the reports as set out in Appendices 1 and 2

2.1.2   Agree to ask officers to implement the recommendations of the Social Care and Education Scrutiny Committees' post-Ofsted review reports, as set out in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.6, noting that the implementation of those recommendations must be met within the existing budget allocation, and reporting back to Cabinet if they cannot be implemented or cannot be met from within the existing budget allocation.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1   In November 2014, Ofsted (the government body which inspects and regulates services for young people) inspected children's services in Waltham Forest. Ofsted found that these services 'require improvement'. Following this assessment, the children's social care division within the Families Directorate committed to undertaking a range of measures to continue to improve the quality of services provided for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, and care leavers.

3.2   As part of the goal to embed sustained improvement in services, the Social Care Scrutiny Committee conducted a year-long review into the impact of the improvements made by the children's social care department. The review focussed on four areas of improvement: recruitment and retention; child sexual exploitation; care leavers; and voice and influence. These were identified as being of particular importance to the Council following the findings of the Ofsted report. A fifth theme was explored by the Education Scrutiny Committee, which reviewed the educational outcomes of looked after children. Each of the themes was guided by a question which supported the Committees to focus their investigations. This report deals first with the findings of the Social Care Scrutiny Committee, followed by those of the Education Scrutiny Committee.

3.3   The Social Care Scrutiny Committee considered evidence from a range of sources. This included officers from the children's social care division alongside individuals with lived experience of services, for example foster carers and members of the Children in Care Council. Evidence was collected in a range of ways, including via formal meetings, written submissions, and supporting research from officers. The evidence made available throughout the review was used as the basis for the recommendations of this report.

3.4   The report (attached as **Appendix 1**) outlines the Social Care Scrutiny Committee's findings on these themes and proposes recommendations to help improve the services provided by the children's social care division in Waltham Forest. The recommendations (which are explained in full in Appendix 1) are as follows:

Recommendation 1: The Children's Social Care division should assure itself that the information gathered by social workers is not more onerous than necessary to deliver a good service, by adopting a principle of reviewing and reducing information gathered as changes are implemented, and report back to scrutiny in one year on how recording practices have been streamlined.

Recommendation 2: In order to assess the impact of streamlined IT systems and improved training for staff on time spent doing frontline activities, the department should commit to bringing the outcomes of the annual Organisational Health Check to Scrutiny.

Recommendation 3: The department should continue to use regular feedback from children and families who use the service to assess the improvements made by the new recruitment and retention strategy.

Recommendation 4: The Children's Social Care division should bring the outcomes of the audit of *Multi-Agency Planning* and *Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation* meetings, and outcomes of the renewed return to home interview process, to Scrutiny in autumn 2016 to demonstrate how changes are creating a positive impact.

Recommendation 5: The Council should review the guidance provided to schools on how to increase the involvement of parents and Governors in safeguarding children specifically regarding issues of CSE.

Recommendation 6: To review how joint working with the voluntary on the Safeguarding Children's Board can be enhanced

Recommendation 7: The Department should review how it conducts outreach work and stays in contact with older care leavers, to ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to keep the number of care leavers out of touch with the service to a minimum.

Recommendation 8: The Department should review how and when budgeting is taught to children in care, taking into account best practice in this area.

Recommendation 9: The Department should explore the viability of a mentoring scheme for care leavers.

Recommendation 10: The Department should commit to bringing NEET statistics for children in care to the social care scrutiny committee annually to review the impact of changes to the service.

Recommendation 11: The Department should ensure that it is optimising its online communications given the importance of hearing the views of children in care and care leavers out of borough, enabling the views of as many young people as possible are heard.

Recommendation 12: The Department should consider developing a measure for how much young people feel listened to in the design and delivery of services for them.

Recommendation 13: The Department should investigate how the voice of young people in care can be routinely incorporated into both strategic and service development, alongside input from the Children in Care Council.

3.5 The Education Scrutiny Committee's review considered the range of education support currently available for children in care, alongside lived experience of this support, in order to establish which areas need to be addressed and improved where appropriate. The Education Scrutiny Committee collected evidence in a number of ways, including meeting with foster carers and looked after children, attending internal meetings such as the Virtual School Improvement Group, and analysing and interpreting data provided by officers from across the Council.

3.6 The report (attached as **Appendix 2**) outlines the Education Scrutiny Committee's findings on this theme and proposes recommendations to help improve educational outcomes for looked after children, in particular around the structure and services on the Virtual School. The Waltham Forest Virtual School Team consists of 3.8 FTE staff, including a Deputy Headteacher, SEN Lead, Advisory Teacher, Data and Scrutiny Officer and Education Welfare Officer. The current temporary structure has been in place for over 18 months. The role of Virtual School Head is undertaken by the Interim Director of School Effectiveness. Over the last few years the structure and the headship of the Virtual School has changed a number of times. At present the day-to-day work of the team is managed by the Deputy Headteacher. The recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: The Virtual School should develop a strategic vision and plan focussed on achieving the best possible outcomes for LAC, to include a sharp focus on challenging all stakeholders responsible for educational outcomes and establishing more ambitious attainment targets.

Recommendation 2: The Virtual School should be supported by an effective data strategy to ensure that all relevant data is available in the correct form to inform the most effective approaches to ensuring LAC achieve their full educational potential.

Recommendation 3: The Virtual School, in consultation with schools and social workers, should develop clear packages of support to deal with common occurrences that have negative impacts on educational achievement including placement breakdown.

Recommendation 4: The Virtual School's remit should be extended so that it reaches from early years to 18 (and to 24 in some cases), a strong package of career advice and support should be developed and

provision for those outside of the formal education system should be enhanced

Recommendation 5: The Virtual School's strategic plan should clearly identify and communicate the roles and responsibilities of schools (and how they relate to those of the Virtual School and foster carers) for ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for LAC, supported by research into best practice in the borough in terms of schools' support for LAC.

Recommendation 6: Foster carers' roles with regards to promoting the education of looked after children should be clarified and publicised as part of a renewal of the support and training package from the Virtual School

3.7 These recommendations were designed to complement the Council's review of the Virtual School (carried out by the Education Team) which took place at the same time as the Committee carried out their review. As such, since the Committee agreed these recommendations at its meeting on 3 February 2016, a number of the recommendations are already in the process of being taken forward as part of the implementation of the Virtual School review.

4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

4.1 The alternative option would be to not ask officers to implement the recommendations made by the Social Care and Education Scrutiny Committees. However, it is the view of the committees that not asking for these recommendations to be adopted would be a missed opportunity in terms of demonstrating to Ofsted the Council's corporate commitment to driving forward improvements for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, and care leavers.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

5.1 The aim of these reports and recommendations is to further embed improvements in the Council's children's social care services. This corresponds with the Council's core duty **"to keep vulnerable adults and children safe and healthy, ensuring that they have dignity and choice in their lives"** as outlined in the Council Priorities 2015-18.

5.2 The reports and recommendations look in detail at five areas that were identified as part of the Post-Ofsted Action Plan. This was put in place following the inspection of children's services in November 2014, as required by the Ofsted Inspection Framework.

5.3 Implementation of the review's recommendations should contribute towards outcome 1 of the borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy - "[we] want people to have the best start in life: [d]evelop, thrive and

achieve". These recommendations should support the following specific priorities under this outcome:

- More young people will leave education with qualifications and skills to fulfil their aspirations
- Children and young people's mental health and resilience will be supported
- Children living in poverty, looked after children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities will flourish and inequalities in their outcomes will be reduced. Safeguarding of vulnerable children will be ensured.
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5.4 The aim of these recommendations to improve outcomes for the borough's most vulnerable children and young people corresponds with the Waltham Forest Sustainable Communities Strategy guiding principle of "[c]reate wealth and opportunity for all residents", specifically the following priorities:

- 16: Relentlessly focus on raising the aspirations and attainment of all children and young people, while narrowing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged; and ensure that success is celebrated.
- 17: Strengthen the relationship between schools, colleges and their communities, harnessing the potential of the Building Schools for the Future and Learning and Skills Council capital programmes to revitalise neighbourhoods.
- 18: Develop an exciting and relevant curriculum, providing vocational, entrepreneurial and academic routes to success, such as apprenticeships.
- 19: Build the resilience, confidence and self-esteem of children and young people, by considering their needs in the planning and delivery of all public services.

5.5 Finally, the education-specific recommendations should also contribute to the aims of the Waltham Forest Strategic Education Partnership:

- Agree and deliver a shared ambition and strategic priorities for education in Waltham Forest
- Improve outcomes for children and make Waltham Forest a centre for excellence in urban education
- Establish a framework for robust school-to-school support in the borough
- Maximise use of resources by identifying opportunities to collaborate

6. CONSULTATION

6.1   A formal consultation process did not take place in the development of this report because it simply seeks to review the work that has been undertaken by the Council and look at what improvements can be made going forward. There is also no statutory requirement to consult. However, in developing these recommendations the Committees and the Policy and Public Affairs Team worked closely with relevant service areas to ensure that the report's findings support existing work taking place in the Council. In addition, individuals with lived experience of the services being reviewed had the opportunity to give their views.

6.2   Further details of how evidence was collected to inform the review is available in two reports (Appendix 1 and 2).

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1   **Finance, Value for Money and Risk**

7.1.1   The Scrutiny Committees were informed of the available budget provision and ensured that their recommendations have been developed so that they can be implemented within the existing approved budget for Children's Social Care, including provision for the Virtual School.

7.1.2   The recommendations have been developed in consultation with senior officers in the Children's Social Care and Education Improvement teams, and as such form part of the wider work to secure improvements in all the services inspected by Ofsted. As such, these recommendations are intended to ensure that value for money is achieved and the risk is mitigated.

7.1.3   However, if in preparing to implement the recommendations officers find that this cannot be done without additional expenditure, a report should be brought back to Cabinet to explain why the recommendations cannot be implemented.

7.2   **Legal**

7.2.1   Part 6 of the Council's constitution sets out the Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules including, in paragraph 6, the procedure for policy review and development. This report has been prepared as part of the annual work programme agreed by Council following consultation with the relevant Directors and portfolio lead member (Part 6 para. 5.1). The procedure rules provide that in carrying out any such policy review or development Overview and Scrutiny must have regard to available budgets and resources (para. 6.2) and make recommendations to cabinet (6.1.1).

7.2.2   The Children and Families Act (CFA) 2014 implemented a new case management procedure for care and supervision proceedings before the court through the introduction of the Public Law Outline. The CFA 2014 has placed increased emphasis on the information collated and put forward in evidence by social workers with a requirement that the

information and evidence should be far more succinct and analytical, rather than voluminous. This is reflected in Recommendation 1 of the Social Care and Scrutiny Committee - the information gathered should not be more onerous than necessary and should be reduced as changes are implemented. The CFA 2014 has brought about significant changes in this regard.

7.2.3 The Council has statutory duties under a number of statutory provisions in relation to the education and safeguarding of children. The Education Act 1996 and Children Act 1989 place an obligation on the Council to ensure the provision of educational placements for and safeguarding of children in the borough. Other Acts such as the Children Leaving Care Act 2000; Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Children and Families Act 2014 place additional responsibilities to educate, promote the education and wellbeing of children in the Council's care. The recommendations that cabinet is being asked to request that officers implement are consistent with the powers and/or duties placed on the authority under these statutes.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision was undertaken which determined there was no potential for negative impact on those with protected equality characteristics.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

7.4.1 As outlined in section 5 above, the report and its recommendations are expected to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing, specifically the wellbeing of children and young people.

7.4.2 Not only do children in care have some of the poorest educational outcomes, but these outcomes then impact on longer-term issues in the lives of care leavers (those aged between 16 and 18), such as poorer employment prospects and health outcomes. Care leavers are disproportionately represented amongst the prison population and those who are homeless[1]. It is hoped that the recommendations from this review will contribute to improvements in the services for and in turn outcomes for children in care and care leavers, particularly around health and crime.

7.4.3 No impact has been identified in other areas of sustainability.

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[1] p.p. 8-7, *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre and University of Bristol (2015). Available here: http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenOverviewReport_Nov2015.pdf

7.5 Council Infrastructure

7.5.1 None. The activities resulting from the recommendations have been developed in partnership with service areas to ensure they can be delivered within existing or planned resources and staff work plans.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

NONE