



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report:

Meredith Dixon-Teasdale, Strategic Director of Children's Services

Report of: Meredith Dixon-Teasdale, Strategic Director of Children's Services

Report to: Education, Children and Families Policy Committee

Date of Decision: 19th March 2024

Subject: Update report from the Strategic Director of Children's Services

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? (<i>Insert reference number</i>)				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i>				

Purpose of Report:

The paper provides a Strategic Director's update on the performance and governance of Children's services, including progress in meeting DCS (Director of Children's Services) accountabilities and delivering on our statutory requirements. It also provides an update regarding progress in relation to the Council's Delivery Plan, key strategic events and issues on the horizon.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Education Children and Families Policy Committee:

1. Notes the Strategic Director of Children's Services report and agrees key activity for the coming months.

Background Papers:

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children’s Services

Lead Officer to complete:-	
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.
	Finance: Kayleigh Inman
	Legal: Nadine Wynter
	Equalities & Consultation: Climate:
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	SLB member who approved submission: Meredith Dixon-Teasdale
3	Committee Chair consulted: Councillor Dawn Dale
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.
	Lead Officer Name: Meredith Dixon-Teasdale
	Job Title: Strategic Director, Children’s Services
Date: 05/03/24	

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 This report starts with recognition and gratitude for all those working in children's and education system, who continue to work together to ensure our children and young people are safe, healthy, attaining and moving towards an independent adulthood.

1.2 Leadership and Partnership

I have continued to establish good working relationships with Leaders across the system who work for or with children, young people and their families. I continue to lead on a number of Partnership Boards and also to attend others to ensure advocacy for children and young people.

I have attended both the Primary and Secondary Partnership Meetings run by Learn Sheffield. It was a very helpful meeting to hear schools view about how we are supporting our children and young people to stay in school, what more we can do and how we improve our governance and decision-making processes. This conversation was supplemented by Learn Sheffield very helpful insight reports that give a clear picture of where we are as a city and draws out where we could concentrate our efforts to potentially effect transformational change for our children and young people by focusing on speech, language and communications skills. Here is the link to the Learn Sheffield reports [Learn Sheffield | By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration.](#)

I continue to work with health colleagues through the Children's Delivery Group and Health Care Partnership to both look at joint commissioning services and also raising the profile of children and young people's needs in the health system. Our priorities for the coming few years are: Best Start in Life; Neurodiversity, SEMH and Speech Language and Communication; and how we share risk and resource to ensure our children with most complex needs are placed in a local home in Sheffield. This also is supplemented by conversations with CEX across the Health system about a focus on children and young people including ensuring clear oversight of the emotional health and well being pathway within Children's Governance.

Work on Race Equality is ongoing. A well attended meeting took place with Education system leaders - Linda Joseph and Linda Goodall are leading this work. A letter is to be sent out on behalf of the group to all schools to gain a baseline of staff in schools from the global majority. This will then inform work around mentoring, training and recruitment.

We have had a good focus on Early Years and reprioritising this area across the Council this was also supported by a very good Early Help Workshop which brought organisations and staff from across Sheffield to look at how they can prioritise prevention across the age ranges but also within early years.

I have made a commitment to attend all Special Schools in Sheffield before Easter. My visits to date have been illuminating and helpful and will support with the transformation work we are undertaking to improve outcomes for our children and young people in the City.

As chair of the Youth Justice Board we had a very helpful development session. A key activity is improving attendance at the Board particularly from Senior Leaders and also improving the profile of the work of our very good team. I have committed to speaking to all

statutory partners to ensure the right level of leadership. It would also be helpful to bring regular updates to this Committee on the work in this area.

I have again visited a number of our children's homes. I have again seen great work taking place with our children. The OFSTED inspections of our homes sees continued progress at improving outcomes and also building on robust strong leadership and management.

Finally, I attended the Cynefin workshop hosted by Learn Sheffield. This highlighted a new and very innovative way to listen to our people and to provide feedback in a timely way. This is an area I and the team are continuing to explore but has a real possibility to shift how we engage and listen.

Over the coming months

I will continue to develop relationships and work to ensure that we have a common vision and plan for the children and young people in our city linked to the Our City Goals work. I will also continue to be a key advocate for all our children and young people. I am striving to be a clear visible leader where my mantra is that children and young people should belong in a loving family and stable home, they should belong in their local school, be a valued part of their local community where they are listened to and are key to decision making and are celebrated for the dynamism and innovation as key residents in the City of Sheffield.

My focus over the coming months is on key transformation themes which look to improve outcomes, improve independence and also provide cost-efficiency. The key areas are:
Address our high- cost placement issues in collaboration across Education, Health and Social care

Graduated approach ensures our children with SEND are in their local school, with their needs met which is shown by improved attendance at school and higher attainment
Address the increase demand and cost of transporting our children to school particularly focusing on how we promote independent travel for our young people with SEND

1.3 Safeguarding

1.3.1 Residential Service

Over the last month, the residential service and project team have been developing a 10 year residential strategy which sets out the ongoing transformation programme. Over the coming years there is a plan to have smaller children's homes, that represent more of a family home. There is a lot of activity taking place across various workstreams with support from colleagues in Finance, HR and the project team and over the last month we have been looking at developing practice guidance on expenditure within the homes and exploring different establishments that would fit to smaller homes.

There is also a strong focus on practice to ensure there is more consistency across the service. This involves work with the Voice and Influence team who are supporting the service on developing our own Sheffield City Council Children's Residential Logo, and using key messages from previously cared for young people to develop our vision and ethos which will be used in all of the homes Statement of Purpose.

1.3.2 Short Breaks

We have had sessions with the parent carer forum, fostering, commissioning from adults and children, as well as SNIPS, so that we could really understand the needs of families

and children. As part of this there will be a steering group to further develop the offer. We want to start with getting wider feedback from families. We are considering using Disability Sheffield to establish if they will do some scoping work to see what families and children need by offering them sessions.

1.3.3 Fostering and Family Based Care

A new recruitment campaign has been launched on social media for Fostering and Supported Lodgings. This generated over 50 enquiries in January.

An afternoon Tea Party was held to celebrate our Fostering community and thank them for their commitment over the years.

Alongside mainstream Fostering recruitment there has been significant raise in the assessment of Kinship care placements in Sheffield, This allows children who are unable to live at home to live with family members or friends. Between 30th March 2023 and 12th February 2024 we have had 203 referrals into the team for viability assessments. Many of these are sibling groups but a sibling group is counted in these figures as one referral.

During the same period, we have had 165 children referred into our team for a Reg 24 fostering assessment or kinship assessment. At the current time 75 of these have closed (because, for example, an alternative order has been made or the child has moved placements).

We currently have 90 children in Reg 24 placements, this is the highest number ever – this equates to 67 households currently being assessed. There are also 8 assessments awaiting allocation.

1.4 Race Equality

Children's Services have completed the 5-day challenge across social care and pledges have been made on how to become an anti-racist service.

Children's Social Work Matters are writing a piece on a day in the life of social workers in areas where BAME social workers are underrepresented. The areas they will cover is fostering, independent reviewing service, child protection service. This will be used as part of ongoing recruitment.

The experiential days for BAME staff in areas where they are underrepresented start at the beginning of March in the child protection service. Workers have been identified staff will have the opportunity to shadow a Child protection Co-ordinator which will hopefully encourage those communities under presented to apply.

In May Children's Social Work Matters will be doing a video for the service which will be an aspirational video it will be a group of BAME managers talking about their journey into management this will be shared at a whole workforce event.

Over the past 2 years we have had a rolling recruitment of international social workers and we currently have 24 international social workers mainly of African descent. A few more workers are joining us over the next few weeks.

Other upcoming actions:

- Further work needs to be completed on reciprocal mentoring programme. This not quite what Nottingham were offering. This will require financial commitment and will

need to be commissioned. There are currently a group of BAME managers and Ally's who want to be part of this mentoring programme

1.5 Educational excellence

Pat Butterell, Assistant Director of School Effectiveness at Sheffield Council, and Bob Cuff, School Advisor have been actively engaging with schools on a regular basis, fostering positive relationships both directly within schools and through the Learn Sheffield initiative. Meanwhile, Bob has been dedicated to advancing the cause of the Race Equality Commission (REC) and is actively involved in a project aimed at supporting BAME school leaders. Additionally, Bob has been collaborating with the Chamber of Commerce and the Sheffield universities to enhance representation at the school governance level.

Addressing attendance challenges remains a top priority, and collaborative efforts with Learn Sheffield have led to the development of city-wide strategies. We are pleased to note that the Department for Education (DFE) has expressed a keen interest in joining our efforts to tackle attendance issues.

Learn Sheffield have now completed their self-evaluation.

The evaluation spanning from 2015 to 2023 provides a comprehensive overview of its achievements, challenges, and areas of focus.

Positive feedback highlighted the organisation's strengths, including high engagement, a collaborative culture, and a commitment to integrity. An impressive 98% of leaders recommended Learn Sheffield to their colleagues. While there was notable improvement in Ofsted outcomes, pupil outcomes remained below the national average. Challenges identified included attendance issues, support for disadvantaged children, and addressing the needs of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The Training Program and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) were acknowledged for their positive impact on leaders. However, there were suggestions for improvement in early planning and alignment with organizational priorities. Learn Sheffield is actively reviewing its subscription model to ensure financial viability, with a strong emphasis on succession planning and leadership continuity.

The Sheffield Performance Analysis highlighted the organisation's success in improving Ofsted outcomes over the years. Despite this progress, pupil outcomes, particularly in attendance, remained a priority. Exclusion rates were in line with Core Cities but below the national average. However, pupil attainment lagged behind the national average.

The future direction of Learn Sheffield is outlined with the evaluation aiming to guide improvement priorities and maintain relevance. Continuous development of the Improvement Partner team and Support Partners is recommended.

The Performance Statistics presented various metrics, including Ofsted judgments indicating that 89.8% of settings were judged as good or better. Pupil characteristics revealed that 19% had identified SEND, and 35% were eligible for Free School Meals. While attendance rates were relatively high at 94.5% in primary and 91.5% in secondary, persistent absence stood at 20%. Exclusion rates were above the national average, with 92 permanent exclusions in the 2021/22 academic year. Attainment and progress were reported below the national average, with notable gaps observed in attendance, deprivation, and ethnicity.

Learn Sheffield's proactive use of data, in collaboration with Sheffield City Council and school leaders, was emphasised for trend analysis and to provide support to schools. The evaluation underscored the importance of considering variations in cohorts when interpreting performance data.

1.6 Lifelong Learning and Skills – post-16 and adult education.

The Lifelong Learning and Skills Service presented our 2022/23 Self-Assessment Report and our performance report for term 1 of 2023/24 to our Advisory Board on 22nd January 2024. Our self-assessment is that the Lifelong Learning and Skills Service continues to provide education that is good with some outstanding areas of delivery, which remains in line with the inspection report produced by [Ofsted in](#) May 2023.

The term 1 performance report was shared with the Economic Skills Development Committee on Wednesday 21st February 2024 as an information update about activity against our AEB grant funding from SYMCA (receipt of which had previously been approved by this committee). The committee were also informed about delivery against our Study Programme grant funding and Apprenticeship funding through the ESFA. The performance report was well received.

In summary, performance against targets for retention of learners, attendance of learners and predicted achievement of learners across the service is on track and is expected to exceed national averages across all three areas of our delivery (adult learning, high needs study programme learning and apprenticeships).

Delivery of the DfE “Multiply” (adult numeracy) programme in Sheffield, (again grant funded through SYMCA) is about to enter its final year (year 3) from 1st April 2024 and continues to be a success in Sheffield based on performance against targets. SYMCA have worked with adult learning (FACES) within Lifelong Learning and Skills to consider how our contracted providers can support the region to address underperformance elsewhere by extending their offer in year.

Finally, students at Sheaf have been successful for the third year running in winning the Better Learners Better Workers NHS Promotional Campaign. Students created a rap [video](#) to promote awareness about responding to a stroke victim which the campaign organisers felt was worthy of the top prize, on the back of two previous years where Sheaf was also successful.

1.7 Early Years Overview

We continue to maintain an overview of the quality of provision both for the Early Years and Schools sectors. Clearly, funding to the sector is a key factor which underpins quality of provision and sustainability of the workforce.

1.7.1 Overview of PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent) settings and Ofsted grades (as of /26/2/2024)

Current Group Care settings = 123 (including 2 maintained Schools)
Childminders = 192

Ofsted Grade	Outstanding	Good	Require improvement	Inadequate	Newley registered	Met	Not met	Agency childminders
Group care Providers	23	90	2	0	8			
Child-minders	12	142	1	1	15	21	0	10- @ home childcare 7- Tiney Community

Group care providers – The 8 newly registered settings are made up of 5 new registrations and 3 re-registrations.

Childminders – Included in the figures above are 21 childminders who are on the early years register but are either not minding early years children at the moment or have no early year’s children on their register at the moment. 4 childminders are not receiving support or engaging with Local Authority – they are not FEL (Funded Early Learning)

The Quality Improvement Team monitor this by contact calls as well as working with Ofsted and Childcare Planning, sharing updates of resignations or information shared by the provider. There are 5 childminders who have informed us they may retire or de-register with Ofsted this year.

We have established links with the childminders who are registered with agencies, the two main ones being used in Sheffield being @Home Childcare and Tiney Community Childminding. The childminders will be included in our weekly correspondence and invited to access the Sheffield Safeguarding training and briefings for Early Years Providers. Childminders will also be invited to access the training we deliver for a cost.

Recruitment and retention within the Early Years sector continues to be a concern. The Early Years team are working with Sheffield City College to promote going into the workforce, Sheffield City Council Sector Routeways delivering a ‘taster’ week of training on Early Years Childcare and Education, supporting apprenticeship events and attending them to promotes working in Early Years as well as working closely with DWP to form a working party with providers to support appropriate candidates being employed within the sector.

1.7.2 Overview of school early years settings and Ofsted grades (as of /26/2/24)

The two schools with EYFS requiring improvement who were not engaging with us were inspected by Ofsted November / December 2023. The reports have now been published, both schools being graded Good for EYFS - though one school is still requires Improvement as an overall grading.

One school is continuing to receive bespoke support since receiving their requires improvement grading. The school have accessed whole staff training, support, and action planning for their EYFS lead and have regular contact calls and visits from their allocated Quality and Access Officer. The school are accessing training for their team to access through our traded service subscription.

All schools have an allocated Quality and Access Officer who contacts them termly to check in and offer support if needed outside of the traded subscription offer, We have recruited to the full-time post and the successful candidate with be in post by mid-April.

Current workload being carried out by EY Quality, Access and Moderation Manager and 1 EY Quality and Access Officer.

1.8 Inclusion

The new exclusion prevention service will commence delivery from the 1st April with Brigantia Academy Trust. This follows a re-tendering process undertaken in autumn of 2023 (see committee report in September 2023 for context). This service is a key strand in our work to support belonging and prevent school exclusions. We are looking forward to working with Brigantia on this new service and thank Sheffield Inclusion Centre for their delivery of this service over a number of years.

2 HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

2.1 This gives line of sight to Committee Members about activity being undertaken in Children Services, specifically the work being undertaken by the DCS and priorities for the next period between committees.

3 HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in relation to Children Services.

3.2 Consultation is undertaken during the development of proposals for the budget and implementation of proposals for the budget as appropriate.

3.3 An overall approach to coproduction and involvement is also a key element of the delivery plan, ensuring that the voice of our children and Young People is heard and young people are happy who have the start they need for the future they want.

4 RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 Reducing risk of Committee Members not being aware of the activity undertaken in children Services. Providing clarity and purpose and ensuring assurance whilst highlighting any risks

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 No financial and Commercial implications

4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1 No legal implications as no formal policy and proposals

4.4 Climate Implications

4.4.1 No Climate implications

4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 There are no other specific implications for this report

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Not applicable – no decision or change is being proposed

6 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 This report provides an update regards Children’s Services activities for Members.