

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

19 January 2021

Ofsted Annual Conversation and summary of self-assessment

1. Background

1.1 Under the ILACS inspection framework Ofsted arrange an annual conversation with every local authority. In Wiltshire our annual conversation was held in November 2020. In preparation for the meeting we shared our latest self-assessment and performance data for children's social care.

1.2 This short report provides a summary of the key elements from the self-assessment including the performance data, that we shared with Ofsted. A separate power point presentation has been prepared which summarises the key points from the letter we received from Ofsted following the annual conversation (attached Appendix 1).

1.3 Ofsted use the annual conversation as an opportunity to scrutinise performance, service development and progress on any actions set at the last inspection. This assists Ofsted in determining the timing and scope of any subsequent inspection activity. Feedback received from Ofsted at the end of the annual conversation was positive, they noted continuing strong performance including throughout the Covid period.

2. Highlights from self-assessment

2.1 Families and Children are central to our approach in Wiltshire. We are ambitious for them, for our staff and leaders and together we are determined to ensure all Wiltshire families thrive.

2.2 In June 2019 Ofsted undertook a Children's Services inspection. Their findings largely mirrored our self-assessment. Ofsted reported that through 'strong political and corporate support, senior leaders have succeeded in stabilising the workforce and giving social workers the time they need to work purposefully with families and children' they went on to say that 'there have been significant improvements since the last inspection in 2015' and as a result 'the local authority has improved its services for children and offers a consistently good response to families and children'.

2.3 Since this time, we have remained focussed on further improvement and have not diverted from this despite the challenges the Covid pandemic have presented.

2.4 With strong, passionate political, strategic and operational leadership, and a robust culture of learning and self-evaluation we retain a thorough knowledge of our strengths and areas for development. Our relentless attention to improve our services and multi-agency partnerships over recent years has enabled us to deliver consistently good services that ensure that the needs of families and children are met at the right time by the right people.

2.5 The Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP) created following the cessation of the LSCB has developed well, it continues to be led by our Independent Chair who has been with the partnership for the past four years.

2.6 Quality data and performance information at all strategic and operational levels remains strong. Our performance and quality assurance frameworks are closely interwoven and provide opportunity for intelligent challenge and feed directly into our commissioning and Recovery and Transformation Programmes.

2.7 Our ambitious and innovative Families and Children Transformation programme (FACT) has recently been reviewed to ensure we remain focussed on the correct partnership priorities. The Executive programme board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services, with the Chief Operating Officer of the CCG as Vice Chair. The programme has five driving principles:

- Resilient communities with Equity of Opportunity
- Help when you need it
- We are Better Together
- More time to be with Families
- Investing in our Staff

2.8 Our staff are our most important resource and a core strategic priority has been the establishment of a motivated, stable, well trained and supported workforce. At the core of our practice is a shared value base that ensures that decisions we make are always for the betterment of the most vulnerable in our community. Our practice model promotes child-centred and relationship-based practice, and we are systematically developing this approach. We have clear career development opportunities and investment has supported our aim to deliver manageable caseloads and the effective recruitment and development of staff and leaders. This is supported by a strong workforce development programme that promotes continuous development for all staff, with a focus on improving practice and outcomes for children.

2.9 We operate a well-established multi-agency arrangement via our Integrated Front Door which includes our MASH, Early Support Hub and the Emergency Duty Service. Referrals for early help and targeted support receive the same level of attention and management oversight as referrals for safeguarding services. The service facilitates families and professionals in accessing support within the council's 'no wrong door' principle. Our approach is based on a conversation-based threshold that supports our principle of warm handovers. We are committed to removing any 'refer on' culture and working instead to ensure professionals are having the 'right conversation at the right time' to enable families to access services that meet their needs. To support this approach we introduced the Early Help Navigator (EHN) role in June 2020, the EHN's are developing an in-depth understanding of the community partnerships within Wiltshire, acting as a central point of contact for early support referrals and providing families with appropriate information or introducing them to the relevant support locally.

2.10 There is a clear focus on providing support at the earliest opportunity for families. In 2017, we strengthened the local authority's Early Help offer with the deployment of Family Key Workers with the introduction of the Support and Safeguarding Service.

2.11 The Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University was commissioned to undertake a review of Wiltshire's arrangements to support and safeguard children and vulnerable families, this review was completed in September 2019, it reported:

- The service is generally providing a good, sometimes excellent service to local families who are vulnerable.
- Overall good to excellent engagement with families.
- A very high proportion of good to excellent assessments across both statutory and family support cohorts.
- In many cases and in some parts of the County in particular, the plan generated a 'gripping intervention' for families, in particular where there was regular contact with the social worker / key worker.

2.12 We are now launching the Wiltshire Early Support Assessment to further strengthen our early support offer in Wiltshire as well as working with partners via our recovery programme to further enhance the earliest support offer to families.

2.13 Following investment we have delivered the first phases of one integrated case management system (CMS), replacing five existing ones. We are ambitious to work with our partners in maximising the use of this holistic system including partner engagement with both our new Early Support Assessment and the Graded Care Profile 2 which will be used within the new CMS System.

2.14 The quality of frontline social work practice is assured by an established auditing framework, with a robust moderation process and linkage to targeted learning and improvement. Our own observation and auditing of front-line practice tells us that the detail of case recording of practice and management oversight does not always capture the detail of high-quality direct work and frequent reflective discussions, while we are focussed on developing this further, we know that our social workers do prioritise contact time with families and know them and their needs well.

2.15 Our greatest passion is in our role as Corporate Parent. All leaders and staff are ambitious for, and work to support our children to realise their full potential. We know our children and have strong relationships with them. We are determined in our efforts to support children to live well within their own families.

2.16 In addition to a range of existing services including a successful PAUSE programme and Family Group Conferencing within our transformation programme we have, with our partners, developed the Stronger Families Service (similar to the No Wrong Door approach) to work alongside a dedicated young people's service ensuring our young people access the help they need at the right time and from the right place. We applied and were successful in securing an opportunity to work with the University of Bedfordshire to embed a Contextual Safeguarding approach across Wiltshire from 2019-2022.

2.17 Where our children require care outside of their family, we are working to ensure there is an increased level of sufficiency of provision to match well and keep our children close to home. Our level of stability is a strength. Children and young people are encouraged to keep themselves safe and there is an effective multi-agency approach to addressing risks such as sexual and criminal exploitation and missing. We have a successful Virtual School, and many of our young people are achieving good educational outcomes. We are dedicated to ensuring the health outcomes for our children and we have worked closely with our colleagues across the health economy to improve the timeliness and delivery of initial health assessments.

2.18 The Care Leavers Offer has been an area of focus for us to ensure better outcomes for our young people, with improved access to a stable home, a good education and opportunities for employment. Reflecting good results at A level, BTec and other relevant qualifications, there were 23 young people with confirmed university or higher education places this year. We know

our young people are increasingly living in good quality accommodation. Our stable Personal Advisers group form positive and lasting relationships with our Care Leavers and our In-touch performance remains strong. The Care Leavers Promise unanimously passed in October 2018 has received positive feedback from Care Leavers (the Promise delivers council tax exemption, priority housing, apprenticeships, free leisure passes, etc) however we are aspirational and are developing this further. We are looking forward to supportive challenge when we will welcome the DfE Care Leaver Adviser to Wiltshire, unfortunately this has been delayed due to Covid restrictions, it is currently scheduled for February 2021. Through additional investment we recently launched a downloadable care leaver app for mobile phones which was co-produced in partnership with care experienced young people to ensure it meets their needs. A reference group including care experienced young people and personal advisors have taken on responsibility for ensuring the app is updated and truly accessible to young people. We remain passionate in Wiltshire about our people, our partnerships and our practice. Whilst we are proud that our support to families is consistently good and effective in safeguarding children and securing good outcomes, we aspire to be the most effective service and are confident we are on this trajectory.

3. Context of increased demand and improved performance

3.1 Wiltshire has experienced the same demand pressures that have been felt nationally:



3.2 In the Ofsted inspection in 2015 our overall grading was one of Requires Improvement to be Good, since then we have worked relentlessly to improve practice and, ultimately, outcomes for children and families. This progress was recognised by Ofsted in the Children’s Services inspection in June 2019 when we were graded Good in all areas. Since this time and despite the continuing increased pressures as evidence in the graphic above, we have sustained or improved performance across the majority of key performance areas:

Indicator	2018/19 (Q4, FY or 31 Mar snapshot)	Current position
Agency staff	66	23 (Sept 2020)
Missing Return Interviews completed	48%	76% in Q1 20/21
Re-referral rate	15%	19.4% Year End 19/20. 18.9% Aug-20
Single Assessments within 45 days	74%	81% CIN Census 19/20. 87% Q1 20/21
Private Fostering notifications followed up within 7 days	82%	90% in 19/20, 100% in Q1 20/21
S47s recommend ICPC	33%	46% Q1 20/21
S47s over 21 days of Strategy Discussion	5%	0% since Q3 19/20
ICPCs within 15 days of Strategy Discussion	85%	93% CIN Census 19/20. 94% in Q1 20/21
RCPCs within timescales	93%	97% CIN Census 19/20. 99% in Q1 20/21
CP visits on time under new 2 weekly practice standards	83%	87% Year End 19/20. 94% Q1 20/21
Repeat CP Plan	25%	18% CIN Census 19/20. 17% Q1 20/21
CP Plan ceased over 2 years	5.3%	3.3% CIN Census 19/20. 0% Q1 20/21
CLA 2-year stability	75-77%	77% CLA Census 19/20. 79% in Q1 20/21
CLA placed more than 20 miles from home	34%	34% CLA Census 19/20.
CLA 18 months+ in long term arrangements	66%	67% Year End 20/21
CLA placed out of county	25%	33% CLA Census 19/20. 29% in Q1 20/21
Pathway/Care plans in place	52%	99% Q1 20/21
CLA Reviews on time	81%	100% Q1 20/21
CLA participating in Reviews	75%	96% Q1 20/21
Child into care to moving in with adoptive family (days)	377 (16-19)	346 days (17-20)

4. Areas for continuing improvement

Through self-assessment the following areas for continuing improvement were shared with Ofsted and are now being taken with directorates with progress reported to Performance and Outcomes Board.

- Educational outcomes for vulnerable groups including family and community learning
- Partnership development of our shared early support infrastructure and embedding our new Early Support Assessment
- Whole life pathway service delivery including transitional safeguarding
- Integrated children's commissioning across health and social care
- Voice – having further impact and influence including outcome focused performance framework