



Making progress

Achievements Report

October 2017 to March 2019



“An increasingly strong culture of challenge, support and learning is helping to improve practice.”

Ofsted inspection report

March 2019

Foreword

The Trust is now in its fourth year and the last 18 months, which this report covers, has seen significant changes and a continued focus on developing and improving our services.

In April 2018, we said farewell to Nicola Clemo, who had been chief executive since the Trust was established and in October 2018 we welcomed Lisa Humphreys as our new chief executive.

The pace of improvement picked up over this period and in March 2019 we were delighted that after eight years of Slough's children's services being judged as 'inadequate', Ofsted recognised the hard work and commitment of staff and judged services as 'requires improvement to be good'.

This was a huge achievement and testament not just to the hard work and commitment of our staff, but also to the work of the council and our partners.

A number of areas were highlighted for praise. Ofsted judged that senior leaders in the Trust and council were working closely together, that there is an increasingly strong culture of challenge, support and learning, social workers are ensuring that children's needs are identified and responded to proactively and that social workers know their children, visit them regularly and build meaningful relationships with them.

There is, of course, much still to be done to ensure that all children and families always receive the services they need so that children in Slough are safe, secure and successful. We are working to ensure that the quality of assessment and plans for all children in all circumstances are good or better and we have plans in place that are intended to increase the stability of our workforce which will help us to ensure children and families can always build positive relationships with their social workers. Other areas of improvement will require the Trust to work with the council and partners so that together we can always deliver high quality and effective services.

We share with the council an ambition to always provide children and families with excellent services and to enable children in care to achieve their potential. We look forward to building on our achievements to date and working with the council to ensure that children in Slough are safe, secure and successful.

Robert Tapsfield
Board Chair



Robert Tapsfield



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Introduction

Welcome to Slough Children's Services Trust's (SCST) achievements report.

This report covers an 18 month period to 31 March 2019 allowing for the incorporation of the Ofsted inspection at the start of 2019 under its new framework - Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) - and also taking into account leadership changes at the Trust during the spring and autumn of 2018.

The Trust was established in October 2015 to manage children's social care services in Slough. These services had been judged as 'inadequate' since 2011 and an alternative delivery model was chosen as the best route to improving services.

Our ambition and vision is to deliver excellent children's social care services in Slough that will ensure children are safe, secure and successful.

To do this, we are striving to develop and sustain a viable not-for-profit organisation that is an employer of choice, has strong and inspiring leadership throughout the organisation, encourages innovation and works well with partners.

The Trust is currently contracted to deliver children's social care services until 2021. The need to continue to improve services has led to the Trust and the council to consider how best we can achieve this in the longer term.

Significant progress has been achieved in the last eighteen months and the main body of the report gives more details on these changes and on the improvements that been made.

However, there is much more still to be done and our focus is on working with the council and partners to continue to improve services so that all children in Slough can be safe, secure and successful.



Leadership changes

The last 18 months has seen significant changes in leadership, both at a senior and board level. Having steered Slough through its transition into the Trust and led its first two years of organisational development, chief executive, Nicola Clemo took a well-earned retirement in 2018.

Whilst recruitment for her replacement took place, the Trust benefitted from the guidance of an experienced director of children's services (DCS) and strategic leader, Andrew Bunyan, who filled the role on an interim basis from April to September 2018. After a rigorous recruitment process, which included questions from some of our children looked after, Lisa Humphreys started as the new chief executive in September 2018.

Leadership at the Trust was praised in the most recent Ofsted report, with an emphasis on the benefits of its increasingly strong partnership with the council. Improved management oversight and accountability over the last six to nine months were also highlighted. The link to the full report can be found in the next section.

The Trust Board has also undergone significant changes. As well as a new chief executive, two new non executive directors have been appointed, and the director of children's services at Slough Borough Council now sits as an observer.



Lisa Humphreys

Inspections, monitoring and outcomes

Monitoring visits

During the period this report covers, the Trust has received three Ofsted monitoring visits:

October 2017: This visit focused on looked after children and highlighted some areas of improvement but reported that support was inconsistent.

January 2018: The focus here was on children in need and early help and following the visit, Ofsted reported continued improvement in some areas including social work; appropriate priorities were in place but weaknesses in management oversight were also identified.

May 2018: This visit concentrated on children in care. The subsequent report stated that 'the service that children in care receive is much better than it was two years ago' and improvements in overall consistency were recommended.

LGA peer review

The Trust commissioned the LGA to complete a peer review in May 2018 and the findings mirrored those of the monitoring visits. Social work practice was improving but it remained inconsistent and that strengthening compliance and management grip had been a significant challenge.

Partners in Practice

The Trust also received agreement from the Department for Education to commission Essex County Council as Partners in Practice. Work carried out as part of this agreement included audits and workshops which gave staff insight into best practice in other local authorities.

Focussed inspections

In June 2018 the Trust also underwent an Independent Fostering Agency inspection by Ofsted which rated the service as 'requires improvement to be good' and a Voluntary Adoption Agency inspection during October and November 2018 which rated the service as 'good'.

Full Ofsted inspection

A single inspection framework (SIF) inspection was expected in autumn 2018 but following Ofsted's decision to introduce its new ILACS framework, the full inspection was delayed until January 2019.

The outcome of this full inspection was that after eight years of being judged 'inadequate', children services in Slough received the improved judgement of 'requires improvement to be good'. The report was published on 4 March, 2019 and noted that significant progress had been made and highlighted a number of achievements.

Areas praised included the recently introduced single integrated 'front door' for accessing early help and statutory social work services; the quality of social work including assessments; the virtual school which was described as having 'transformed'; and better support for care leavers, with the number in education, employment and training having increased.

'When children need help, care and protection, they receive much better support than they did at the time of the last inspection.'

'...senior leaders from the council and the trust now work closely together to deliver improved services for children.'

'An increasingly strong culture of challenge, support and learning is helping to improve practice.'

'Increased stability and development of the workforce have been key elements supporting practice improvement.'

A number of recommendations were also made including the need to improve the consistency of social work, the service provision for privately fostered children, the sufficiency of local placements and the stability of the workforce. The Trust is already in the process of acting on these points and will report progress in these areas in the next achievements report.

The full report can be found at the following URL: <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50059652>



Self assessment

The latest Ofsted report highlighted that senior leadership at the Trust and the council 'have a realistic understanding of the work needed to further strengthen quality and standards. This is well articulated in the joint self-assessment.'

The self-assessment is an internal evaluation of services and something which all children's services and trusts are required to produce. The Trust's evaluation correlated with the Ofsted report and anticipated the judgement of 'requires improvement to be good'.

Social work practice

There have been many improvements in social work practice over the last 18 months, with Ofsted recently stating, 'Children in need of help and protection receive a much better service than they did at the last time of inspection.'

This section is not an exhaustive list of those achievements but highlights some key areas.

A new 'Front Door' and increased practical partnership working

At the end of 2018, the Trust introduced a single integrated 'front door' approach for accessing early help and statutory social work services. This has been strengthened by the addition of other agencies, including a health visitor, and the Multi-Agency Support Hub (MASH) is now located by the Front Door team.

A Domestic Abuse Triage system, involving daily meetings with the police, health partners, the Trust's domestic abuse co-ordinator and the front door team has been introduced to improve decision-making with these partners.

This is ensuring children's needs are identified and responded to proactively. Ofsted recently reported that workers 'respond effectively to all new enquiries' and partnership working was highly praised.

Feedback from our partners states that they have more confidence in the service being offered, that there are better working relationships and that Trust staff are increasingly responsive to issues raised.

Elsewhere, the Trust and council have also worked closely with health partners to commission additional services to close gaps in provision, eg Kooth and the Andy Clinic, for support with anxiety and depression, along with services and support to families whose children have Autism or ADHD.

Partnership work between Trust and healthcare colleagues to improve processes has been largely credited with a significant improvement in the number of children accessing health and dental checks and an increasing focus on improving children's emotional wellbeing.

Assessments, supervision, intervention

Much work has been done to improve assessments, as noted by Ofsted, which are now more consistently of good quality and include sound analysis and detailed context. Social workers strive to establish positive, meaningful relationships by visiting children with increasing regularity.

The child's voice is at the centre of the Trust's social work model and the wishes of children influence their own assessments and plans. The timeliness of assessments, along with CLA reviews, has also significantly improved.

Supervision, management oversight and compliance – something the Trust has previously been weaker on – has seen substantial improvement. Supervision now takes place regularly and managers oversee plans. Social workers are also given the opportunity to reflect on practice and planning for children through hub supervision. We are still working hard on this area to achieve greater consistency.

There has been an improvement in the effectiveness of interventions, which are increasingly resolving need early on. This is evidenced in several sets of data, including re-referral rates. These interventions are leading to sustained improvements in the lives of children and young people. Further information on this can be found within the performance indicators section on page 9.



Permanency planning

Since 2017/18 the Trust has seen better outcomes for Children Looked After through better permanency planning. Since January 2018, 18 children have been matched with permanent foster carers, all of whom were matches with their current carers. There has also been an improvement in the percentage of children who have been in the same placement for over two years.

Work continues to find more in-house foster carers within 20 miles of Slough, which would be both better for the child and more cost-effective.

Members of the adoption team now regularly attend permanency planning meetings which enable us to identify need from an early stage, meaning early permanency can be planned.

Ofsted recently reported that ‘Children’s permanence reports are thorough and children are well-matched moving quickly to live with their adoptive families and enjoy stability.’

Voice of the child

The Trust actively seeks the views of our children and young people to ensure they are contributing to and influencing the development and delivery of services and help bring about change in areas which matter to them.

Their activities during the year included playing a role in the recruitment of our new chief executive. A range of methods are used to engage and capture their views, wishes and feelings which include the Reach Out! forums (our Children in Care Council) and the ‘My Review...My Views’ consultation system.

Two of the Reach Out! group attended the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children Looked After at Westminster. As well as getting the opportunity to share their views about how mental health services could be made better, they also met Nadhim Zahawi, the Minister for Children and Families.

A transformed Virtual School

Our Virtual School was described by Ofsted as having been transformed and is extremely aspirational for our children.

We are proud of the academic and wide range of other achievements of our children and some of them are outperforming their peers.

Every child has a termly Personal Education Plan and the Virtual School provides strong support for improving attendance, reducing exclusions and actively supporting their education once they leave care.

Work is also underway to increase the number of work experience and enrichment opportunities, in partnership with the local business community.

Developments in care leaver support

Services for our care leavers, who are 18 plus, have seen much improvement.

Our local offer has been revised and clearly explains what is available to them. Personal advisors successfully support them to live independent lives, ensuring they are clear about their rights and entitlements.

The number of care leavers who are in education, employment or training has risen significantly.

There are strategic plans to drive improved outcomes, which will act on the recommendations of DfE advisor Mark Riddell who visited the Trust at the End of 2018, with one of the focuses being to ensure care leavers have sufficient appropriate housing.

Conclusion

The achievements the Trust has seen in social work practice are extremely encouraging. Going forward, we will be acting on the recommendations of the recent Ofsted reports, our own self-assessment and feedback from partners to continue to improve the quality and consistency of this work.

Innovation projects and targeted programmes

The Trust prides itself on being innovative and working in different ways to produce better outcomes through targeted prevention programmes. Below are some examples of our achievements in this area.



Innovation Hub

The Innovation Hub started in July 2017, funded through a DfE innovation grant which finishes at the end of March 2019. The purpose of the hub was to deliver sustainable change to families with social care needs, using a less social work based and more intensive model, with a team working around the family.

Social workers and family support workers, within this hub work with families intensively for 12 weeks to help de-escalate risk and need, providing an intensive service to help keep children out of care. There is a strong emphasis on partnership working with support from a seconded police officer, mental health worker and youth worker.

There has been very positive feedback from families but further to a review we have decided to deliver the services through teams across the Trust.

Inspiring Families

Inspiring Families is a holistic group assessment programme for families experiencing domestic abuse. Groups run weekly for 10 weeks with men and women in separate groups running in parallel and jointly. 67 couples have completed the Inspiring Families programme, with 125 children being supported (up to cohort 9).

Of these, only six couples have been re-referred for domestic abuse within six months of completing the programme. There have been no re-referrals for families who have completed the programme since June 2017 and there is also a large number of participant quotes from children, women and men saying how they are happier, feel safer and know how to deal with disagreements.

Pause Slough

Pause is a well evidenced national programme which works with vulnerable mothers who have previously had at least one child taken into care. In Slough, it has engaged and empowered 17 of the area's most vulnerable women, offering them intensive support through confidence building, role modelling and one-to-one work.

The history of these women would have predicted the birth of a child during the period they were being worked with, and therefore we estimate the programme has supported these women to prevent

13 births which undoubtedly would have led to admission into care and further care proceedings.

Youth Offending Team (YOT)

The YOT has seen a consistent decline in First Time Entrants (FTE), which are at their lowest for three years. This reduction of FTE is aligned with the YOT's increasing focus on preventative work. The YOT has also introduced a project to identify young people most at risk of re-offending and provide them with intensive intervention and one-to-one support.

The Slough Area Partnership, which includes YOT, has been awarded the Achievement for All Quality Mark 2018 for securing better outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs in the youth justice system.

Mockingbird

In November 2018 the Trust officially launched the Mockingbird Programme which provides a new way of offering support to our foster carers through an extended family model and by building a supportive community around the foster carers. The programme was introduced to the UK from the United States by the Fostering Network and currently there are only 20 local authorities in the country using the model.

Organisational resilience, governance and finances

Over the past 18 months, much of the focus has been on developing a resilient model for the future, with an emphasis on strengthening governance, building stability, improving quality and driving efficiency – all with the common aim of improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in Slough.

The Board and committees have met regularly and worked at the development of the overall Trust strategy and key deliverables, monitoring progress along the way. Governance arrangements have been further developed to ensure strong controls around decision-making which is part of the Trust's vision to ensure that all children are safe, secure and successful.

To support the development of strong governance, the Trust engaged accountancy firm RSM to carry



out internal auditing. The first area of focus was to ensure the risk register was fit for purpose. Following this, a decision was taken by the Board to create a risk and audit committee to provide assurances to the Board around risk management within the Trust. The audit plan has been based around key corporate risks identified by the Board, from the risk register.

In building the long-term stability of the Trust, there is recognition of the need to expand the permanent workforce and reduce the number of agency staff. This has become a priority, and recruitment, retention and development have been, and continue to be, key areas of focus.

Finances

The Trust has worked hard at carefully managing within its resources, with the cost base falling by 1% in 2017/18 and 8% in 2016/17. Expectation is for the cost base to fall further through 2019/20 with a number of one-off investments in 2018/19 coming to an end.

Staffing and placements are the two areas where the Trust spends most of its budget. In developing the right culture and model of work, the Trust has lost a number of staff and, as a consequence, there are higher levels of agency staff than initially planned.

Despite this, the Trust has succeeded in reducing agency spend which has decreased by over 40% since 2016/17.

The creation of a social work academy to 'grow our own' social workers is expected to make further progress in reducing the need for agency staff and building greater stability in the workforce.

Spend on placements has reduced since 2016/17, despite a 12% growth in demand over the same period. This reflects the increased focus on permanency planning and the fact that timely placements with special guardianship orders and adoption have increased.

As well as this, in-house resources for fostering and residential placements have been further developed. This combination of factors has enabled us to make placements more cost effective where possible and to offset the continuing growth in demand.

The council has supported the Trust with additional funding in the budgets for 2019/20, allowing for demographic growth, which will help the Trust to deliver ongoing balanced budgets.

The Trust's commissioning function has been developed, with the introduction of contract management and commissioner posts. This has enabled both the contracts with providers and the quality of the services they deliver to be more closely monitored.

The Trust works from its commissioning strategy, alongside the draft sufficiency strategy, and has joined the Southern Consortium for Residential Placements which allows for a wider pool of providers to help with the provision of sufficient placements at competitive prices.

The tender for our short breaks services is ongoing and expected to be delivered in the first quarter of 2019/20.

Measuring performance

Quality assurance and performance management arrangements have been strengthened, as highlighted in the latest Ofsted report, supporting our vision to ensure that children are safe, secure and successful.

Regular performance surgeries provide an understanding of practice and accountability across the service.

Performance information is now readily available for managers, including a live reporting tool which is beginning to provide more effective oversight of day-to-day practice. The Trust is working on a self-serve reporting tool, developing exception reporting where not covered by the dashboard tool.

This is a major step in delivering timely information aimed at driving accountability through the Trust and improved recording of data which will enable greater strategic decision-making at the right time.

During the period of this report, the processes around data collection have been improved and, consequently, our data is of a higher quality. This is crucial for measuring our performance against various criteria and ensuring we are delivering better outcomes for children.



Below are a number of performance indicators which evidence service improvements across a number of areas. Most are benchmarked, giving us solid evidence of our progress compared to statistical neighbours and the national average.

Performance indicators

- Repeat referrals reduced from 20% to 15% (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019) demonstrating the effectiveness of social worker interventions. This compares favourably with 19% for our statistical neighbours and an England average of 22%.
- The number of repeat child protection plans has more than halved from 23% to 11% (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019). For statistical neighbours, this figure is 19% and the England average is 20%.
- The number of child and family assessments authorised within 45 working days has increased from 58% to 72% (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019). This shows significantly improved timeliness, although still needs further improvement, given statistical neighbours stand at 87% and the England average is 83%). Overall, the quality of assessments has improved with more detailed context and analysis of risk, and management oversight of assessments is also improving.
- Children subject to child protection plans rate per 10,000 has increased from 38 to 50 (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019). This is now more closely aligned with our statistical neighbours' rate of 55. The England average is 45.
- CLA rate per 10,000 has increased slightly from 49 to 49.5 (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019) but still remains below statistical neighbours (62) and England average (64). The number of children in care proceedings has increased and the number of children accommodated under Section 20 has reduced. 95.4% of CLA have timely reviews, with 94.9% of children participating. DfE benchmarking data is not available.
- The number of CLA with an up-to-date health assessment has increased from 86% to 95% (from 31/03/2018 to February 2019) through joined-up working with partners. This compares favourably with 91% for statistical neighbours and an England average of 88%).
- 87% of our children attend 'good' or 'outstanding' schools. All of our CLA have a current personal education plan (PEP). DfE benchmarking data is not available.

Our Workforce

The recruitment of a permanent workforce remains a priority for the Trust and a number of activities during the last eighteen months have supported this, including advertising through different media, attendance at recruitment events and the implementation of a master vendor contract.

In September 2018, the Trust had a stand and a presenter slot at one of the UK's main social work recruitment events Community Care Live. The stand attracted a number of people who took part in informal interviews and were then invited to an open day at our offices the following weekend. The Community Care Live event was followed soon after by Social Work in the South, a similar social worker recruitment exhibition located in Winchester.

In addition to this, the expansion of the social work academy is supporting our 'grow your own' approach to the workforce. The academy will not only support ASYE and Step-up students, it will encompass the new social work apprenticeship model and will reach out to support the ongoing development of all social work staff.

The Trust has created a learning environment where continuous professional development is encouraged and expected to ensure we are constantly improving as individuals and as an organisation. The formation of our learning and development offer has been crucial to this.

The staff survey conducted during October and November 2018 produced a number of positive indicators.

79% of staff agreed they received regular supervision, 72% agreed it was of a good quality and 78% agreed that it enabled them to reflect on practice. 36% of staff disagreed they have a manageable workload and 26% disagreed they have a good work/life balance. 92% of staff agreed that the work they do helps improve the wellbeing and safety of children and young people and only 3% disagreed that the Trust values and respects the work that social workers do with children and young people. Encouragingly, only 11% disagreed that they would recommend the Trust as a place to work.

Clearly the results show there is room for improvement but it is an encouraging starting point.



We are working with a number of external providers to support alternative training methods which will have an impact on practice, while growing the competencies of staff.

Celebrations and events

Celebrating our staff, children, young people and foster carers and recognising their achievements helps us to build a positive culture at the Trust where people feel valued and appreciated.

There is also a need to shout about the Trust as a whole through events, so the public, potential employees and potential foster carers know who we are, what we stand for and what we are striving to achieve. A significant amount has been achieved in this area over the last 18 months.

Our staff

Staff are our most valuable asset and, aside from many specific training events, we have held two Trust-wide conferences in the last 18 months, in November 2017 and December 2018. These focused on bringing staff from across the organisation together, sharing best practice and sharing views. Feedback was positive and the information gathered will be used to help shape future changes.

At the latest staff conference, we launched our staff appreciation scheme, Thanking You. This involves staff writing thank you notes to colleagues for a positive difference they have made through their work or within the workplace. These notes get displayed for everyone to enjoy and, at the end of each month, staff who have been thanked go into a draw to win a voucher. This has been running since January 2019 and, so far, feedback has been positive.

Our children

Being aspirational for our children is central to the Trust and so we are keen to celebrate them and recognise their achievements – something which is important for every child but even more so when you have had such a challenging start to life. Each year we hold a celebration event for our children.

In 2018 this was in November. In February 2019, we held a similar event, which saw children awarded for special achievements, performances from children and a motivational speech from BBC broadcaster

Ashley John-Baptiste who grew up in care. Feedback was positive and we will be reviewing how we continue to celebrate and recognise our children going forward.

Our foster carers

The incredible work of our foster families has been recognised through a number of events during this period including our annual celebration and awards ceremony which takes place during the autumn. It is an opportunity for us to show our appreciation for their work and for our network of foster carers to meet each other.

We organised a mid-year celebration for the children of foster carers called 'Kids Care 2', which recognises and values the importance of the children who share their home and family with foster children.

Going forward

The last 18 months has seen significant progress and achievements right across the Trust, including stronger leadership, improvements in the quality of social work and an increasingly stable workforce. There has been much to celebrate, with improved outcomes for our children and families.

As we move into the first quarter of the 2019/20 financial year, we will build on this progress with our partners, making changes which take on board the recommendations for improvement from our latest Ofsted report and enable us to continue on our path to 'good'.

Our strategic key objectives going forwards are clear:

- A commitment to improving services to 'good', through a continued shared vision and effective social work models in practice.
- A commitment to strengthening our workforce stability and capacity.
- A commitment to delivering services which are efficient and value for money.

These objectives will drive the Trust forward, as all staff strive to achieve them as one team. We look forward to our next report when we anticipate updating on further progress across a number of areas.





*Fostering recruitment Asian Star interview
January 2018*



*Fostering recruitment at Eid Funday
August 2018*



*Foster carer awards
November 2018*



*Mockingbird launch
November 2018*



*Social Work in the South
November 2018*



*Children looked after awards
February 2019*



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