

DECISION-MAKER:	CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
SUBJECT:	CHILDREN AND LEARNING SERVICE – PEER REVIEWS AND OFSTED ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT MEETING
DATE OF DECISION:	16 JUNE 2022
REPORT OF:	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN AND LEARNING

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Appendix 2 attached to this report is confidential and therefore not for publication by virtue of category 7A (obligation of confidentiality) of paragraph 10.4 of the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules, as contained in the Council's Constitution. The Partners in Practice (PiP) peer review final report has not been received by the City Council yet. The attached report is a draft summary that is subject to change and the Council has a duty of confidentiality to our Partners in Practice until the date of publication of the final report.

BRIEF SUMMARY

For the inaugural meeting of the Panel for the 2022/23 municipal year a request was made by the Scrutiny Manager to brief the Panel on the outcomes from the following reviews which took place or are still taking place, within the Children and Learning Service at Southampton City Council (SCC):

- The Local Government Association (LGA) peer review focusing on the governance of the service.
- The Partners in Practice (PiP) peer review focusing on looked after children and care leavers within the service.
- The Ofsted annual engagement meeting reviewing the context of the Children and Learning self-assessment.

This report outlines the feedback from the above peer reviews and the Ofsted annual engagement meeting.

A further report focusing on the details of the next steps and the context of the Children and Learning Improvement Plan will be produced and presented at the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel on Thursday 21st July.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

	(i)	That the Panel notes the context on the LGA peer review, the PiP peer review, and the Ofsted annual engagement meeting.
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REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	To enable the Panel to scrutinise the Council's update on the range of peer reviews and engagement which has taken place within the Children and Learning Service to date.
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
2.	None.
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
	LGA Peer Review
3.	SCC invited the LGA to undertake a peer review of Children's Services, with a focus on finance. The review took place in March 2022 and was undertaken by Alison Michalska (Ex Director of Children's Services and LGA Children's Adviser) and Barry Scarr (Ex Director of Finance and LGA Finance Adviser).
4.	The LGA were provided with numerous background documents including financial information, performance information and transformation plans. The review team conducted a number of interviews and group sessions remotely, over one week commencing Monday 7 th March 2022.
5.	An initial view of feedback was presented to officers on Wednesday 16 th March with a full briefing to the Acting Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer, Director of Children Services, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care on 7 th April.
6.	In summary, and as detailed in Appendix 1, the LGA concluded that the transformation programme has the right elements in place and is focusing on the right areas however, they had little confidence that the savings can be delivered in the timescales. Since the feedback was received, dedicated Destination 22 savings and benefits session have taken place to review the predicted savings, check that these are achievable and create implementation plans to ensure they are delivered on time.
7.	The majority of the specific areas identified by the LGA are being addressed through existing plans or activity, for example through Destination 22 (D22) project plans or the Improvement Board focus areas.
	PiP Peer Review
8.	The PiP peer review focused on looked after children and care leavers and took place, in the main, during the week beginning 16 May 2022. The aim of the peer review was to analyse practice in relation to children in care and care leavers and identify what works well and what needs to improve. Hampshire auditors worked alongside SCC managers to build their case auditing skills.
9.	An initial feedback session took place on Thursday 19 th May 2022, with further remote case auditing taking place during the week beginning 23 rd May. We are awaiting final feedback.
10.	The peer review consisted of interviews with over 10 children and young people, 20 collaborative audits, Team Time discussions with workers and managers, as well as sessions with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Leadership Team • Personal Advisors • Head of QA and Performance Team

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court lead and court expert • Chairs of legal panels • Social Workers • Virtual School Head • Health colleagues • IROs • Foster Carers <p>The initial feedback from the review was split into 4 sections (Social Work with Families, Pathways Through Care, IRO Service and Quality Assurance) all with highlighted strengths, challenges, and areas for development.</p>
11.	<p>In summary, and as presented in the confidential Appendix 2, Hampshire have initially highlighted the following strengths within looked after children and care leavers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visibility of Senior Management. • Virtual School has positive oversight of all children in care of school age. • Nearly all children have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place. • Many practitioners feel that they are on their 'improvement journey'. • Many believe there has been a positive shift in organisational culture. • Practitioners and managers are collectively trying to achieve and improve service. • Participation is valued by children and young people who express their voices. • Recruitment of permanent staff and support for new starters is perceived as positive by NQSWs and overseas workers. <p>Alongside the strengths, Hampshire also highlighted the following areas of development that are to be considered within our service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management oversight and supervision that provides a holistic picture of the child and where care planning is for the child and family. • Develop on Life Story Work as children have been vocal about needing this. • Assessment quality and care planning (needs to be SMART planning). • Audits found supervision has improved in the last 3 months but was too variable to track children's journeys. • The need to develop a performance culture. • Compliance requires prioritisation. • Moving Child Protection Conferences back to face to face for families. • Embedding of auditing as a mechanism to support learning and assurance. • Preparation and 'Ofsted readiness' <p>The peer review also noted that staff retention has been a challenge, and that our experienced Social Workers currently have complex caseloads.</p>
12.	<p>Following the completion of the review and once the final audits have been undertaken, the detail of the feedback will be considered and the Service Improvement Plan will be amended accordingly.</p>
	<p>Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting</p>

13.	<p>The Ofsted annual engagement meeting with the Children and Learning Service at SCC took place on Thursday 26th May 2022. The purpose for this meeting was to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the context of our self-assessment • Highlight the impact of our self-assessment • Present the actions we are taking in response to the previous Ofsted inspection • Present our current financial, political, and professional practice context • Highlight the broader issues that affect the delivery of our service • Discuss the possibility of a focus visit • Discuss timings for the next self-evaluation and engagement meeting <p>A formal feedback letter will be sent from Ofsted by Friday 17th June 2022.</p>
14.	<p>In preparation for the annual engagement meeting, the Children and Learning Service undertook a Self-Evaluation (Appendix 3) detailing all the changes that have been implemented in response to the last Ofsted focused visit in May 2021. This detailed how the service had:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed all children in unregistered placements to provide assurance about the safety and appropriateness of these arrangements. • Created a new fortnightly panel to scrutinise and track arrangements for children in exceptional arrangements. • Improved oversight of face-to-face contact with looked after children. • Created an initial priority action plan with short-term measures to address the weaknesses highlighted. • Through D22, increased ‘frontline’ capacity in our children looked after and care leavers service and eliminated the age 14 transfer point, promoting stability of social work relationships. • Successfully re-launched our Children in Care Council and ran a successful week-long celebration of our looked after children ‘Love our Children’ in September 2021. • Launched our Corporate Parenting Strategic Plan in March 2022, and that we are revising our local offer for care leavers. • Improved our EHE team’s links with the rest of the service and developed an EHE audit tool to check on quality.
15.	<p>During the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted the service discussed current practice and performance, the actions that are being taken to maintain and improve the practice, staff feedback, the key concerns and the priorities for the service moving forward.</p>
16.	<p>We are set to receive the official feedback on the annual engagement meeting from Ofsted by Friday 17th June, as well as confirmation around the next potential focused visit, and timings for the next self-evaluation and engagement meeting. Feedback will be presented to the Panel if it arrives prior to the 16 June 2022 Panel meeting.</p>
	<p>Conclusion and next steps</p>
17.	<p>Since the peer reviews and Ofsted engagement meeting, we have started reviewing the associated action plans, and have begun making amendments to our Improvement Plan in order to consider the various sources of feedback.</p>

18.	After the formal feedback has been received from Ofsted following the annual engagement meeting, and once the PiP has formally concluded, the Panel will receive a further detailed brief on the next steps for the service at the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel on Thursday 21st July.
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RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

19.	None.
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Property/Other

20.	None.
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LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

21.	The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.
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Other Legal Implications:

22.	None.
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RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

23.	None.
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POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

24.	None.
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KEY DECISION?	No
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WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	None
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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

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| 1. | LGA Peer Review – SCC Feedback (May 2022) |
| 2. | PiP Peer Review – Confidential Draft Verbal Feedback May 2022 |
| 3. | Self-evaluation of practice for Annual Engagement Meeting - May 2022 |

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out.	No
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Data Protection Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out.	No
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Other Background Documents: Not applicable.

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
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1.	None
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