



Independent review and ongoing challenge/support of Buckinghamshire County Council's children's service improvement approach and plans

Department for Education

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Following an Ofsted inspection and subsequent 'inadequate' judgement, the Department for Education (DfE) appointed RedQuadrant to act as an improvement partner to Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC). The remit of the work was, firstly, to provide an independent review of both the council's own analysis of the problems leading to the negative judgement and their plans to remedy these and, secondly, to provide ongoing challenge and support to the council in its improvement journey. The following report addresses the first of these requirements. The findings are structured to consider the effectiveness of the current plans as well as the council's capacity and capability to ensure changes are made and sustained.

Key findings: The effectiveness of the current plans for improvement

1. The updated improvement plan is now broadly fit for purpose. We have identified some revisions, including the definition of clearer responsibilities for partnership working and the development and delivery of the Early Help offer, as well as the securing of corporate commitment to swiftly progressing the plan.
2. A children's scorecard has been developed to include required success measures, targets and current progress that should be viewed alongside the improvement plan to provide a holistic view of progress against identified actions and the associated impact.
3. The new BSCB (Safeguarding Board) Development and Improvement Plan, while not quite complete, is also fit for purpose. If it is implemented fully and individual actions are completed to timescale, it is likely to have a significant impact on improving children's safeguarding in Buckinghamshire.
4. The improvement plan has been updated to reflect progress and revisions to plans. Weekly focus is given to workstream - level project plans, with the Chief Executive attending, at our prompting, to ensure a tight corporate overview. Progress in some parts of the plan has been delayed by insufficient corporate support, particularly in recruiting and retaining social workers.
5. An audit of practice in January 2015 showed that work is below required standards. There is a gap between the implementation of improvement actions and the impact on practice and key performance indicators.

Key findings: Capacity and capability for improvement

6. Political commitment to the improvement of children's services is clear and articulated; and the need for significant change has been accepted. However, the response has been reactive rather than proactive, and we have concerns that the scrutiny process is not rigorous enough to anticipate and address future issues in good time.
7. The Improvement Board convened for the first time in January 2015. Terms of reference were agreed, but the different roles of oversight, advice and challenge, were not clear. This is exacerbated by the board being chaired by the Chief Executive who is now closely involved in the detail of the improvement activities.
8. Key senior personnel including the DCS and interim Service Director for Children and Families appear capable of providing the necessary strategic management and leadership to lead the improvement plan.
9. We have concerns about the staff level below the Directors as a number of senior


management posts are held on an interim basis. There is an opportunity to strengthen this group through permanent appointments, some of which will need to be from outside the authority. Similarly, there may be an over concentration on the number of interim posts within the front line and by first line managers, risking increased staff turnover and the negative impact of this on service users.

10. The appointment of five practice improvement managers (PIMs) in November 2014 has provided some much needed additional managerial capacity between Heads of Service and the social work teams or units. They should enable Heads of Service to focus on more strategic matters; it is as yet too early to see the impact.
11. The corporate teams were presenting children's services with a number of blockers, which appear to stem from either a denial or lack of comprehension of the situation by members of the corporate team, and are then reflected in a lack of urgency in effecting necessary change. Following our intervention, the Chief Executive has acted to ensure a more rapid and effective response in HR processes and business support for social work teams.
12. The lack of pace appears to have been an endemic organisational issue. We have witnessed delays within the improvement process that indicate a lack of urgency across the council e.g. the inaugural Improvement Board was held five months after the publication of the inspection report.
13. We believe this lack of pace stems from a failure at corporate level to both own and drive the change through the provision of regular review, support and challenge to the improvement process. It is notable that the Chief Executive remained unaware of several key facts pertaining to the process, such a number of major actions that were not been completed. When we mobilised the process through the setting of actions and timescales, clear progress was made; however, this role was not assumed corporately. Further direct input from us led to the Chief Executive becoming much closer to the improvement process and holding corporate colleagues to account. It is too early to be certain that this impact on pace and accountability will be sustained.
14. There are strong indications that staff within children's services do not fully believe the council can effectively implement change. Morale is low among frontline staff. They report feeling undervalued and unsupported. The council is aware of this, but a comprehensive plan is not in place yet. Issues regarding pay are on track to be improved as a new retention package will be implemented in April 2015.
15. There is a fundamental lack of strategic partnership-building by the authority, which creates a significant gap in the improvement work. Key voluntary sector leaders are unable to describe a coherent early years' strategy or how they contribute or could contribute to the improvement agenda. Thresholds need to be jointly re-visited and partners enlisted to design a credible Early Help support strategy.

Key findings: Overall

We have witnessed an accelerated improvement in both the plans and the implementation against the plans. However, as this has only recently started (January 2015), impact is not sufficiently visible yet, especially on frontline work and therefore on outcomes for children. Also, because of its recent nature, it is unclear if the focus and culture of improvement will be sustained. An overview is provided in the table below.

**Table 1:
Overview of
Findings**



Direction of travel – up for progress, down for deterioration – strength indicated by one to three arrows.

Critical performance elements	Current status	Direction	Comments
Practice (how well is the work done?)			
Quality of delivery - How good is the content of the work done? -		↑	Not based on external case file audits (not RQ mandate, planned for Ofsted).
Process of delivery - How timely is the work done (speed)? -		↑	
Capacity to deliver - Are there enough appropriate people to deliver? -		↑↑	Most posts filled, but not certain if right people nor if enough.
Improvement (how is the work improving?)			
Plans, analysis and process of improvement - Are the right things tackled in an effective manner? -		↑↑↑	Methods for quick analysis & delivery of improvement progress in place.
Improvement capacity - Are there enough skilled people to improve the work? -		↑↑	More at senior level needed.
Improvement culture - Is the focus and pace made sustainable? -	?		Only able to make assessment at later time as pace accelerated in January.
Leadership and support (are the enabling elements in place?)			
Leadership and governance - Are the changes corporately effectively driven and supported? -		↑↑	This has significantly improved, but only relatively recently.
Working in partnership - Is leadership effective in ensuring good partnership work? -		↑	There is good recent progress, but real impact cannot be evaluated yet.
Support functions - Are the support functions (e.g. IT, HR, Admin) effective? -		↑↑	Some main changes for are planned and not implemented yet (IT, HR)

Conclusions and recommendations

Our recommendations are fully listed in a table on page 35. In summary:

- Maintain the pace and sense of urgency to be modelled by members and senior managers;
- Increase managerial attention to ensure frontline practice improvements are put into place in timely and focused manner;
- Appoint an independent chair to the Improvement Board to increase transparency in challenge of the council and its partners;
- Improve the robustness of member scrutiny;
- Continue to prioritise work improving the corporate support systems such as IT and recruitment and retention;
- Whilst partnership working is improving, clarity of governance and oversight is needed before this can be considered fully effective.
- Strategic and service directors must make improvements a priority, using a change plan within children’s services to build, trust, belief and engagement at all levels.

Overall, our recommendation is based on weighing two elements. Buckinghamshire County Council has not made sufficient progress since the Ofsted inspection, but this has recently accelerated and is now improving well. If the improvement plan and our recommendations are implemented fully and individual actions are completed to timescale, they are likely to have a significant impact on improving children’s safeguarding in Buckinghamshire.

So on the one hand, if the council is taken into a more strict level of intervention this could interrupt recent improvements and, more importantly, the increased pace and ownership from the whole council.

On the other hand, however, the improvement progress is recent and it is unclear if the council will be able to sustain this. So the question is: can we afford to take this risk? It is difficult to assess what would be better for children in Buckinghamshire.

In weighing this, we recommend that the council’s children’s services are not moved to an escalated level of intervention, but that close oversight and challenge continues.

Summary of background and our approach

Events leading up to the inspection: Following the implementation of the 'Hackney model' of social care practice in April 2013, the then Director of Children's Services (DCS) wrote in January 2014 to the Chief Executive outlining a number of serious concerns; namely that the safeguarding of children within the county was severely impaired by rising numbers of referrals, ongoing recruitment issues leading to reduced capacity and an overall unmanageable strain on the social care system.

At the same time, a corporate Task and Finish group was set up as a result of the high budget overspend within children's services; its findings echoed the concerns of the DCS in terms of high workloads, workforce 'churn' and a resultant strain on limited financial resources.

It is clear that there was awareness, both within the service and the wider council, that children's services was struggling to operate at an effective level, thereby placing children at increased risk.

Impact of the inspection: Immediate political attention focused on the particular criticism that the council had not prioritised children's safeguarding and correspondence relating to this distracted the council from the opportunity to publicly articulate its commitment to improve children's services.

The Task and Finish group published its report a month after the Inspection report and flagged increases in demand that had outstripped funding, despite a series of preventative measures designed to improve efficiency and reduce demand. It recommended a significant increase in funding which was agreed by the council.

Key personnel changes were effected and a new Lead Member and Director of Children's Services were appointed.

Despite the speedy establishment of working groups to develop an improvement plan, we have seen no evidence of a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the problems documented in a single place. The consensus view in the authority is that a number of factors came together to create a 'perfect storm', including:

- The reorganisation of staff into small units, leading to a focus on ways of working rather than safeguarding, the loss of experienced staff and the resultant reliance on temporary and newly qualified staff, and ultimately increasing workforce 'churn' and decreasing practice consistency
- The impact of salami slicing cuts in previous years when demand was steady
- A corporate view that Children's Services did not manage its budget in such a way as to build in the ability to respond flexibly to need
- A significant rise in the number of referrals to the authority for which there was insufficient capacity, indicating an inability to predict and respond to seasonal demand
- Ineffective management at a senior level that did not anticipate or deal with these issues well enough.

These factors seem to be largely accurate, with the exception of the last point; there is evidence to demonstrate that issues were raised on several occasions with the Chief Executive but that the structural and practice failings were not sufficiently addressed in an appropriate timescale.

Our approach: To reach our conclusions, our approach covered both the review of the current plans and performing primary research into the root causes. This was dynamic, as changes were proposed and made, the impact of this was subsequently analysed. From this work, we have developed a hypothesis document that includes an analysis of the main problems as we understand them, the evidence that leads to that analysis and proposed, prioritised, actions for improvement. This has been built with the support of both DfE officials and the input we have received from the council's elected leaders, senior officers and staff at all levels.

Introduction

Between 3 and 25 June 2014, Ofsted inspected Buckinghamshire County Council, including services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and the effectiveness of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). The final report was published on 8 August 2014.

There were two main findings and six sub-findings:

1. The overall judgement was that children's services were **inadequate**;
 - a. Children who need care and protection – **inadequate**;
 - b. Children looked after and achieving permanence – **inadequate**;
 - i. Adoption performance – **requires improvement**;
 - ii. Experience and progress of care leavers – **requires improvement**;
 - c. Leadership, management and governance – **inadequate**.
2. The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) was **inadequate**;
 - The LSCB is not demonstrating that it has effective arrangements or the required skills to discharge its statutory duties.

During the inspection, Ofsted identified 33 improvement actions for the council and 10 improvement actions for the BSCB.

As a result of the poor inspection outcome, the Department for Education (DfE) took the decision that external intervention was required to ensure that children's services in Buckinghamshire were improved to the required standard. This standard, defined by Ofsted, requires that, '*as a minimum, all children and young people receive good help, care and protection*'.¹ Officials at the DfE consider that the 'inadequate' judgement, particularly in respect of child protection, is at the more serious end of the spectrum of failure.

RedQuadrant was appointed in November 2014 to lead the improvement work with the specified scope including:

1. A review to consider both Buckinghamshire's analysis of the problems underpinning the Ofsted judgements and the plans for improvement which follow that analysis – particularly those concerning core child protection functions – to be completed by 27 February 2015.
2. The second phase of the work – challenge and support, to be completed by end of May 2016 – will see RedQuadrant overseeing a number of themes, which may include:
 - Structure and organisation of children's services;
 - Political and corporate leadership;
 - Governance and scrutiny arrangements;
 - Resource, capacity and capability;
 - Robust data to inform self-assessment;
 - Risk management and contingencies;
 - The work and contribution of partners; and
 - The individual/organisation will need to ensure that the scope and direction of improvement plans, the pace of implementation and the engagement of the council and partners are sufficient.

This document presents the work undertaken in the first phase of work – the review – and our findings.

¹ Quoted on the front page of all Ofsted's reports of inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

Approach

Our approach to the first phase of the work comprised three interlocking strands:

1. Review of current plans: review of the effectiveness of the current improvement plans against the Ofsted report and the council's own analysis of the issues
2. Root cause analysis: application of our seven ways to improve approach to ensure the service and operating model are fit for purpose, and ensure opportunities for improvement are built into current improvement plans
3. Root cause analysis: application of our VeCIT™ model to complete a gap analysis of improvement interventions, and determine how effectiveness can be measured.

We have used the Ofsted framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers² to gauge the effectiveness of the council's improvement plan in moving the council and the BSCB from 'inadequate' to 'good'. The framework sets out in detail the standards required to be considered 'good', for example:

Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously. Steps are taken to protect children and young people and the management of allegations is robust and effective. (p.16)

Using this as our frame of reference, we have undertaken the following activities to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data available to us:

- Reviewed council data and documentation (Appendix 1)
- Audited the improvement plan against the Ofsted inspection report
- Interviewed the responsible officers for each of the improvement plan workstreams (Appendix 2)
- Annotated a copy of the improvement plan with comments and questions for the council to use in its development of further iterations (provided separately)
- Interviewed key members, officers and partners (Appendix 2) – some on several occasions
- Facilitated workshops and focus groups with members, officers and partners (Appendix 2)

With this analysis, we have developed a set of improvement hypotheses based on a range of evidence that identifies priority actions for improvement (Appendix 3). This hypothesis document has been synthesised from all the work we have undertaken – data and document review, interviews, workshops and focus groups. It includes an analysis of the main problems as we understand them, the evidence that lead to that analysis, and proposed actions for improvement.

One of our first activities was a large workshop involving frontline staff and managers from across the whole service to map the journey of the child through her contact with the council. This included Early Help engagement, initial contact with the council (First Response), assessment following reaching the required threshold (MASH), safeguarding and support intervention (CiN), and admission to care and into permanence (CiC, Fostering and Adoption, After Care).

We supplemented this with interviews and workshops with members, officers and partners. We

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-framework>

convened a large feedback workshop on 7 January 2014 to which everyone who had attended the initial workshop or had been interviewed was invited. We presented our developing hypotheses and received feedback on accuracy, missing issues and further lines of enquiry.

As we outline later, we had developed concerns about the lack of urgency in implementing the improvement plan. As a result we held an improvement workshop immediately after the feedback workshop with children's services managers, corporate managers and key Members. We modelled an approach to prioritising actions.

Our resultant findings for the first stage of work are presented in this document in the following subsections:

- Buckinghamshire's analysis of the problems underpinning the critical Ofsted report, particularly in the area of child protection;
- The effectiveness of the current plans for improvement; and
- The capacity and capability of the council and its partners to implement the plans for improvement.

Buckinghamshire's analysis of the problems underpinning the critical Ofsted report

1. Events leading up to the inspection

In April 2013, the council introduced a new model for delivering children's social care – Systemic Practice – often labelled the 'Hackney model'. Frontline staff were organised into small units comprising a consultant social worker manager (CSWM), two or three social workers, a family worker and a business support worker. The intention was to improve social work practice by having more skilled oversight of all cases (through the CSWMs), working knowledge of all the unit's cases by all team members to improve continuity of care, and closer links between units and local partners in new geographical patches to maximise multi-agency working practices.

In January 2014, there is evidence to demonstrate awareness within children's services of the scale of the problems; the then director of children's services (DCS) wrote to the chief executive officer (Chief Executive) stating that she believed the council was then running an unacceptably high level of risk in terms of:

- the safeguarding of children in Buckinghamshire; and
- in carrying out its responsibility of duty of care for some of its employees.

She argued that the new model was not the cause of these risks but that they arose 'from a combination of factors conspiring against us during the implementation phase'. She listed these factors as:

- 'a significantly higher number of referrals;
- 'a significantly higher number of children in our care;
- 'an on-going recruitment issue... a general unavailability of social workers [willing to work in Buckinghamshire]... an over-reliance, in some areas, on newly-qualified social workers... some of our newly-qualified workers are being given much larger caseloads than they should have... managers, in turn, are stretched in coping with pressures of high caseloads and managing vacancies, sickness, leave or extended periods of time spent in court;
- 'insufficient overall capacity to see us through these implementation challenges and to take account of the increased volume of work since the planning stage... this has led to significant pressure in the numbers of cases we are asking workers to deal with and to deal with as safely as possible;
- 'insufficient flexibility in the system to give managers and front-line workers access to training required to make the model work; and
- 'employee resilience and capacity to cope...we are pushing some people to patterns and volumes of work which are counter-productive and, paradoxically, might result in a worsening of the very thing they are seeking to avoid, that is, an increased risk to the children.'

She summarised the impact of these challenges on Buckinghamshire's young people:

- 'we have had, and still are at risk of, unallocated cases;
- 'looked after young people experience a number of changes of social worker;
- 'high workloads and staffing issues in some areas lead to a crisis management approach which, in turn, means care planning and actions from children's reviews drift – this contributes to the position of maintaining more children in the system, rather than moving them on appropriately; and
- 'a reduction in the quality and timeliness of assessments and different types of plans.'

The DCS acknowledged that the council had put in place some additional capacity two months previously but warned of the potential need for further short-term additional capacity. She also acknowledged the Chief Executive's, the Cabinet Member's and the Head of Finance's concerns about their ability to fund this additional capacity, given the then state of the budget. She pointed out her statutory responsibility to alert the Chief Executive and Members to the degree of risk they were carrying in relation to vulnerable children and young people.

The DCS outlined some longer-term plans for improvement that had been agreed, some of which were to be overseen by a Member task and finish group. But she identified two 'limiting factors' on their capacity to move quickly and effectively on the change agenda:

- managers having to deal with the immediate and the urgent, thus limiting time to reflect on, plan and develop new approaches and models; and
- the capability of some of those managers who should be taking a strategic lead in moving the service forward.

In respect of a possible inspection of children's services, she added:

'[A]s I have said before, I would anticipate that, at best, a judgement of 'requires improvement' would be a good outcome for us. If, however, we are unable to address the issues being raised by employees about their concerns over the safety of children in Buckinghamshire to the point that they feel supported and confident that we are doing our best to create the right conditions for them to do their job to minimise these risks, to the best of their ability, then I believe the outcome of any inspection will be significantly worse for the authority.'

As a result of the budget overspend in children's services a Member led task and finish group was set up in February 2014 'to look at measures being put in place to meet the council's statutory obligations'.³ This was based on:

- between 2012/13 and 2013/14 there was a 70% increase in referrals to children's social care and an increase in the number of looked after children by 14%; and
- continuing difficulties in recruiting permanent and temporary social workers resulting in a high contingent of agency social workers.

The impact of these factors 'combined with the financial context of the authority' was:

- very high workloads;
- discontinuity arising from churn in the workforce;
- a lack of sufficient social work capacity; and
- a considerable strain on available financial resources.

The task and finish group had not completed its review when the inspection took place. The group then also considered the inspection findings before reaching its conclusions.

It is clear that there was some recognition within the council that children's services was not coping with demand, placing children at increased risk. As a result, there had been some corporate action taken to counter this: the provision of short-term increases in resources in the form of a team of social workers from Skylakes, an external agency, to provide additional capacity, a new Finance Director was appointed to assist Children's Services in its financial management, additional training was provided by the Director of Legal Services for social workers preparing cases for consideration at the Family Court and the setting up of the task and finish group to determine whether resourcing of children's services was at the necessary level.

³ Report to Cabinet: Children's Services – Outcome of Member led Task and Finish Group into Resources in Children's Services and Ofsted Inspection Outcomes. Buckinghamshire County Council, 08 September 2014.

2. Impact of the inspection

The immediate political attention focused on the particular criticism within the inspection report that the council had not prioritised children's safeguarding. This led to an exchange of correspondence between the council, the DfE and Ofsted.

This distraction meant that the council missed the opportunity both to accept responsibility publicly for the inadequacies outlined in the report, and to spell out its commitment to improving services for Buckinghamshire children and families. In our view, the main motivation at this stage among some key politicians to deliver the improvement plan successfully, was the tarnished reputation of the council rather than safeguarding Buckinghamshire children.

The task and finish group published its report a month after the Inspection report. It highlighted increases in demand that had outstripped funding, despite a series of preventative measures designed to improve efficiency and reduce demand. It recommended that the cabinet:

- Give added importance to safeguarding children as one of the council's top priorities;
- Increase the children's services budget by £4.8million for 2014/15 to address the underlying financial pressures;
- Approve £1million from contingency to fund the improvement plan;
- Review children's services funding in the medium term Plan to provide necessary funding to maintain appropriate levels of funding.

At this time, the then DCS left the service. The council has been clear that this was not a reaction to the inspection findings, but had been planned anyway. The director of adult services acted as Interim DCS from this point until November 2014. The cabinet member for children's social care resigned for personal reasons; again not as a reaction to the inspection findings. David Johnston, who had been acting as an interim service director to help the council prepare for the inspection, was appointed as permanent DCS from December 2014. Lin Hazel, who had held the post in the past, was appointed cabinet member.

Working groups were quickly established to develop the improvement plan and all staff were involved in half-day workshops to contribute to this purpose. In November 2014, partners took part in a similar workshop to comment on and develop the draft plan. The improvement plan is clearly structured to respond to the criticisms and recommendations in the Ofsted report and to address the underlying problems that led to the poor outcome from the inspection.

We have seen no evidence of a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the problems that was documented in a single place, other than the task and finish report, which focused on financial resources. From our interviews, we are clear that there is a consensus view in the authority that the circumstances that led to the Ofsted judgement of inadequate was caused by a number of factors that came together to create a 'perfect storm':

- The introduction of the systemic way of working that included re-organising staff into small units
 - the focus became the new way of working rather than safeguarding children
 - turnover of staff disproportionately affected the smaller units
- The loss of experienced staff who chose not to work in this way
 - led to increased use of agency staff and greater pressures on newly qualified staff
- The promotion of a number of social workers into consultant social work managers (CSWM)s removing some practice expertise away from direct casework
 - While the model expects CSWMs to have direct knowledge of all cases and to work on some, their focus had shifted to managerial tasks

- The impact of salami slicing cuts in previous years when demand was steady
- A view held corporately that children’s services did not control spending sufficiently well, requiring repeated one-off funding to bridge budget gaps
 - This placed barriers in the way of responding flexibly and positively when service demand increased
- A significant rise in the number of referrals to the authority for which there was insufficient capacity
 - Related to the last point and highlighting both the inability to respond flexibly in crisis but also the inability to predict and respond to seasonal demand
- Ineffective management at a senior level that did not anticipate or deal with these issues well enough.

In our view, this description of events seems largely accurate; however, we take issue with the last point. The previous DCS had certainly recognised the difficulties facing the service and had repeatedly raised these with the Chief Executive. There was a corporate view that children’s services was profligate and out of control of its budget and, as a result, this view contributed to warnings being largely ignored. While the previous service head left the service and temporary appointments were made prior to the inspection, the structural and practice failings were not sufficiently addressed in an appropriate timescale.

3. The effectiveness of the current plans for improvement

In order to assess the effectiveness of the current plans, we reviewed each part of the plan against two fundamental questions: is the plan sufficiently ‘fit for purpose’ and does the council have the capacity and capability necessary to deliver on it.

3.1 Is the improvement plan fit for purpose?

Within this context, the components of ‘fit for purpose’ include:

- Are the current plans and actions in place robust enough to tackle the issues highlighted by the Ofsted report and enable the move from ‘inadequate’ to ‘good’?
- How well do the current plans address the problems, based on the council’s own analysis of the problems?
- How well do the plans secure the future safety of vulnerable children and their families?

3.1.1 General observations

There is broad coherence between the actions identified and the Ofsted recommendations. Most of the actions in the plan, if implemented, are likely to contribute to improved outcomes for children. However, the connection between actions and impact on children is not clear.

The improvement plan is process focused, listing a series of actions for the council to complete. The actions have deadlines and progress towards completion of the actions is RAG rated.⁴ Each workstream has a set of success measures that, originally, lacked SMART targets.⁵ They comprise a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that are collected by the council and are useful in indicating progress or are proxies for progress in many areas of the plan. Improving outcomes for children was

⁴ RAG – Red, amber green to indicate likelihood of completion within timescales

⁵ SMART – Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound.

not the major feature, with little indication of how the processes are affecting outcomes for children.

The council has developed a children’s scorecard to provide the required success measures, targets and current progress. For example, this table shows how the two can align actions and data.

Improvement Plan action	RAG status	Children’s Scorecard data	Data currently available	RAG status
2.4.1 Ensure assessments clearly record the child’s wishes and feelings and show evidence that this has been taken into account in the analysis and care plan, irrespective of the age of the child.	Green	% children seen during assessment	Yes – 93% in Dec 14 and rising	Amber
		% case audits that evidence that children's wishes and feelings are clearly recorded and acted upon, including non-verbal children	No – Dec 14 audits being analysed	Not assessed

When considered together, the improvement plan and the children’s scorecard should provide a fuller picture of progress against identified actions, and the associated impact on the lives of children and families. The children’s scorecard is populated by 72% of the ‘success measures’ identified in the improvement plan. It contains comparisons with statistical neighbours and all England.

Some of the data from the children’s scorecard is now included in the updated Improvement Plan giving a more complete picture. There remains a discrepancy between the RAG status of the improvement plan actions and children’s scorecard data. The improvement plan shows most actions as ‘green’ or ‘amber’ on the basis that those actions are mostly on track to be completed on time. However, the impact of those actions on the available outcome data is limited with most in the children’s scorecard data being ‘red’. This illustrates a concerning picture both at the ‘front end’ of the service and later in the child’s journey through the system. The improvement actions have not yet had a great enough impact on quality of practice and speed of processing to improve these key performance indicators.

The number of unallocated cases, a key indicator of children’s safeguarding, has only recently been made readily available to managers. It is now provided twice weekly by extracting the data from the electronic systems and collating it separately. It is clear that managers are acting swiftly in response to any report of unallocated cases. It is worrying that the council has not yet developed an electronic system for easily and instantly providing this crucial information that is a strong barometer of how well the service ensures the safety of children. While this is planned, it will not be available until the next update to the electronic system is implemented, which is due in April 2015.

Recommendation 1

Implement new functionality to enable real time information about unallocated cases at the next system upgrade.

Use a staff representative group to test the usefulness of this new functionality and adjust as necessary

The original plan submitted to the DfE systematically addresses the 43 Ofsted report recommendations with one major flaw (discussed below in workstream 1) and two minor exceptions (discussed below in workstream 5). It contains over 180 actions divided into six workstreams.

The division into six workstreams is mostly appropriate with the recommendations suitably allocated to a specific workstream apart from the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) action plan which is a sub-set of workstream 1: improving leadership, governance and partnerships. It then appears as an appendix to the improvement plan. We consider this should be presented as a separate, equal, seventh workstream commensurate with its significance.

Recommendation 2

Assign the BSCB Development and Improvement Plan to a separate workstream commensurate with its significance

Workstream leads meet fortnightly with staff responsible for progressing the actions. A group of project managers for the workstreams has recently been appointed. There is evidence of their impact and a greater sense of urgency in completing actions than was noted at the commencement of our work. The project managers have developed project plans alongside the workstream leads and project teams which, in most cases, break down the actions into sub-actions with deadlines. Project plans are being updated frequently.

The Improvement Plan has now been updated to reflect overall progress and to act as a live document that will continue to be updated to reflect progress and revisions to plans.

3.1.2 Workstream 1: improving leadership, governance and partnerships

This workstream deals appropriately with most governance and leadership issues. Work has been completed on reviewing the budget, clarifying the priority of children's services and corporate parenting training.

In the earlier version of the Improvement Plan, there was a major gap in respect of partnership working. The inspection report severely criticised partnership working and one might reasonably expect this aspect to feature prominently within the improvement plan. Almost all the actions relating to improving partnership working were in the BSCB action plan, with very little in the other six workstreams.

Our observations about the gap in improving partnership working have been noted and, as a result, there are two additional objectives in workstream 1:

- Partners work together to ensure the best outcomes for children and families; and
- There are clear and consistently applied thresholds across all agencies so that children receive the help or protection needed in a timely manner.

Previously these had been part of the BSCB Action Plan, but have now been included as mainstream improvement activities for the council and its partners.

In our interviews and workshops we have identified this as an area that needs significant input from the council and its partners. Relationships appear to be poor and perceptions vary widely. For example, the council and partners developed a new threshold document in a workshop attended by officers and partners in November 2014. Council officers consider that the document was jointly developed and agreed. Some partners describe the document having been imposed and one that they find it difficult to work with as they do not agree with it. Partners described to us not knowing the composition of the early help offer. Council officers describe a multi-agency offer that is well described on the family information service website. These different perceptions are, in themselves, worrying and indicative of the substantial work that needs to be undertaken.

We and the council have come to the same conclusion: the council and its partners need help in devising appropriate actions to improve partnership working. We have facilitated the identification and prioritisation of actions through meetings with two of the key partners; health and the police.

At these meetings we raised the issues and asked for progress on items that were either owned by or should be supported by partners. We also facilitated discussions on progressing these issues swiftly.

This exercise highlighted that partners, who expressed a great willingness to contribute, had practically not done enough to support the improvements with sufficient pace and urgency. Therefore, the Ofsted evaluation that “partners have been too slow to take on full responsibility for their roles in promoting children’s welfare”, still stands.

Some specific examples of this inactivity include insufficient attendance at child case conferences and that the initial health assessments of children entering care are completed in 50 days (down from 62 days in July 2014 as highlighted by Ofsted), while the standard is 26 days.

Another important indication showing the lack of partner ownership is the lack of clear processes and organisation to co-ordinate improvements (oversight, work definition and issue escalation to higher levels) within partner organisations.

In February, actions have been put in place to make swift improvement in a number of areas, particularly at a strategic level. But we are not aware that this has been translated into better partnership working at an operational level e.g. health partners making progress in attending case conferences, and improving the MASH (including on-site presence). There is good progress being made with the integration of partnership deliverables into the wider programme. We have not yet seen, however, an effective joint organisation to ensure co-ordinated improvement with clear project/programme management.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that all partners engaged in the promotion of the wellbeing of children are aware of their individual and collective responsibilities and are jointly held to account

3.1.3 The BSCB action plan

The BSCB action plan was the least well developed part of the plan. In part this was due to the process of securing a new independent chair of the BSCB and the BSCB business manager post being vacant at the same time. However, this has meant that the action plan was not suitable and there was no-one in place to drive it forward. It has also meant that the critical issue of partnership working has not been adequately addressed following the inspection. Although the council was acting to appoint a suitable independent chair, it had not recognised nor acted upon the clear shortcomings of the BSCB action plan.

The new BSCB Improvement and Development plan is a significant improvement on the original. It sets out the vision, values and a statement of intent for the BSCB: ‘that everyone is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children’. It includes the five priorities agreed by the new board:

1. Early Help, Front Door and Thresholds
2. Child Sexual Exploitation
3. The Child’s Voice and Journey
4. Tackling Neglect
5. Increasing the Effectiveness and Impact of the LSCB

All the recommendations in the Ofsted inspection report are incorporated with detailed sub-actions, responsible officers, timeframes and success measures, albeit some of them imprecise. The plan is still a work in progress but it is a document that usefully outlines the current and future work of the board.

Recommendation 4

Complete the BSCB Development and Improvement Plan to include timeframes and SMART performance indicators

3.1.4 Workstream 2: improving quality of social work practice

The actions in this workstream appropriately reflect the recommendations in the Ofsted report. Progress is being made in completing actions in the Improvement Plan but this is not having the required impact on the quality of social work practice. Actions include the development of social work standards, good practice workshops, a review of transition points and the development of an audit tool and framework. Some have been completed ahead of deadline: for example, '2.2.1 Review all unallocated cases that were closed in the last 6 months without the child being seen'. However, '2.1.3 Ensure that child protection strategy meetings, discussions and conferences consider the views of all relevant agencies and professionals when determining how to proceed in possible child protection cases', with a deadline of 30 November 2014, has not been completed. This is another example of poor partnership working that is affecting individual children and families because not all partners are contributing their views or their information in crucial safeguarding decisions.

A feature of the workstream is that many of the actions can only be tested by regular and systematic auditing, for example '2.3.3 Undertake an audit of live supervision to assess the quality and reflectiveness of the supervision provided by front line managers'. Case audits were undertaken in December 2014 and January 2015. The latter audits have been analysed and the findings presented to the Improvement Board. The new process involves auditors using six thematic audit tools developed in line with the journey of the child and grading the case files as they are audited. The tools are:

- Contact and Referral
- Assessment
- S47 Enquiries
- Children Subject to Child Protection Plans
- Child in Need
- Child in Care

The audits show that there is much to be done to improve frontline practice. Just over half of the 87 cases covering the six tools showed practice reaching the required standard, with only half reaching the standard for the quality of assessment. Management oversight and ensuring the voice of the child is heard were more evident but below the council's targets. Most worrying is the disproportionately poor performance in First Response. Here 79% of assessments were below standard with 50% being inadequate. The First Response team is staffed by a high proportion of agency social workers with significant turnover. While this makes improvement more challenging, recruiting managers should be confident that agency staff are both experienced and capable enough to handle the demands of the service. There is clearly a need for intensive managerial oversight of practice. If the First Response assessments continue to be haphazard in quality, intense pressure on the rest of the system will ensue, slowing down potential improvement.

Recommendation 5

Ensure that there is an increased focus on individual practice and professional accountability for the quality of social work intervention

Ensure that there is well modelled managerial oversight of all tiers of staff

Ensure the longer term stability of staff teams by increasing the proportion of social worker and manager posts that are permanently employed

3.1.5 Workstream 3: improving the strength and capacity of the workforce

This workstream is aimed at meeting only one, but a crucial, recommendation to ensure that there are enough suitably qualified and skilled social workers and first-line managers to provide services that are safe, responsive and effective. The actions are appropriate but the implementation of some, as we outline below, has been hampered, until very recently, by lack of corporate support in the vital area of staff recruitment and retention.

It had been known for at least six months that there were issues with the time it takes from identified vacancy to someone appropriately (permanent or agency) filling the vacancy with a further delay before someone was effective in the job. However, this delay was not measured, although there were many concerns raised by managers in children's services and HR identifying individual problems, errors, and long completion times. Specific issues were reported by staff that, for example, to be able to recruit one person over 50 forms would need to be completed.

Our conclusion was that these issues were not recognised as critical to children's services because there were not adequately or addressed in a timely fashion; for example, data recently collected shows that in December 2014 the average time taken to appoint an agency social worker was 26 calendar days. In comparison, other organisations are able to gain an agency worker within just 2-3 days. Good people in the agency market don't wait 26 days, and the council will have potentially missed out on gaining high performing agency staff.

There has been a lack of urgency to this workstream and this has been recognised by the council as a result of our intervention. Although five practice improvement managers (PIMs) have been appointed to relieve heads of service from operational work, some actions have missed deadlines, such as a number in 3.3.2 'Develop and implement a recruitment and retention strategy that will attract appropriately experienced and qualified staff'. This was only addressed in January following RedQuadrant's robust messages about the need to act swiftly and, as a result, the council changed the project lead for this workstream to one of the service directors to ensure the necessary changes are driven through at an appropriate pace.

From the second half of January, after escalation of these issues, more progress has been made in addressing recruitment and retention.

At the February Improvement Board, an update was provided, which showed increased progress overall and, crucially, in:

- Permanent recruitment
 - Policy changes – retention package approved and soon to be in place
 - Recruitment activities – including from abroad
- Agency recruitment
 - Contracting with additional recruitment sources
 - Faster recruitment and selection (the competition seems to have improved the performance of the existing provider too). The target of recruiting eight agency staff in January was achieved.
- Administrative support
 - In February, decisions were implemented to assign dedicated specialised admin workers to support children's services (instead of being part of a generic pool)
- Overall:
 - process changes to enable better and faster recruitment and selection

- Only 12 vacancies (empty seats – not filled by agency)

This progress is promising and needs to be sustained through ongoing recruitment campaigns, effective contract management with agency suppliers and more improved (faster and better) end-to-end processes from vacancy to staff starting. This should enable the council to quickly respond to changing demands, so that it can more effectively deal with a ‘bulge’ of work without it destabilising the whole system.

Recommendation 6

Deliver ongoing recruitment campaigns, effective contract management with agency suppliers and more improved (faster and better) end-to-end processes from vacancy to staff starting

3.1.6 Workstream 4: improving Early Help and the front door

The two components of this workstream have been progressed very differently. The actions aimed at improving the front door i.e. the council’s response to contacts and referrals, are broadly on track. However, this is still hampered by the continuing issues identified in the previous section. It needed the personal intervention of the Chief Executive to give permission for interim staff to be appointed outside the usual contracted agency arrangements to fill six social worker vacancies in the First Response team in January 2014. While those posts were vacant, there 60 unallocated cases in First Response. By swiftly filling those posts, the result is no unallocated cases in First Response, demonstrating the capabilities of the service when its needs are recognised and met in good time.

While First Response has been restructured and is, most of the time, fully staffed, the latest available data is for January 2015 is still concerning. It suggests that in First Response, despite a large drop in the number of referrals and a halving of s47 investigations, new contacts are being handled too slowly, the time taken to decide how to respond to referrals is too lengthy and the number of assessments completed within timescale is too low. Having filled all vacancies, the council anticipated this data would improve. It hasn’t done so and the council will need to remain vigilant and be prepared to act if this continues not to be the case or if the pace of improvement is too slow.

Recommendation 7

Monitor closely to determine if the recent appointment of agency staff improves performance in KPIs, notably processing timescales and timely completion of assessments; and take appropriate remedial action

The development of ‘a multi-agency Early Help offer that is understood and coherent’ depends on clearly understood protocols on thresholds and widely understood information on the Early Help offer. We have already discussed the differing views among the council and its partners about these and related issues. There is a further issue relating to the expectation that responsibility for delivery has been situated with the BSCB. The chair of the BSCB is of the view that responsibility for delivering improved Early Help lies with the council and its partners and the BSCB role should be promoting, overseeing and holding to account. At this time it is unclear what the views of key partners are in respect of where the lead responsibility should lie. These differences need to be resolved and clearly reflected in the improvement plan and the BSCB action plan.

However, the council and its partners have been developing a proposal to improve the coordination of Early Help, which is a very welcome development. This proposal was taken to the February Improvement Board. It set out plans for a single front door for any Early Help referrals. While this was broadly welcomed, there were concerns about governance, the detail of the proposal including

the role of MASH and step-up and step-down procedures. The group was asked to bring back more developed proposals to the March Improvement Board.

Recommendation 8

Ensure that there is a clearly and mutually understood mechanism at a strategic level for co-ordinating all Early Help efforts for children

3.1.7 Workstream 5: improving services for children on the edge of care, in care and permanence planning

This workstream has made more progress than any of the others. For example, the independent reviewing officer complement has been increased, foster carer recruitment appears initially highly successful, and risk assessments are completed prior to a child's return home from care. But pathway planning for young people in care has not improved sufficiently with only 67% having a pathway plan in place.

In addition, there is one recommendation in the Ofsted report that has not yet been fully addressed:

- 'undertake timely statutory visits to all looked after children and record on the children's case files whether they are spoken to alone'. Action 2.2.9: 'Ensure that children and young people are visited regularly, seen alone by their social workers' covers part of the recommendation but does not address *timely* visiting to all looked after children.

Recommendation 9

Ensure that all young people over 16 years of age have a suitable pathway plan in place

Amend the action plan to ensure that all Looked After children are visited in the required timescales

3.1.8 Workstream 6: improving tools

The actions identified, if completed, would undoubtedly support the delivery of efficient, good quality services. However, progress in this workstream is variable.

We have been impressed with the speed of development and quality of the children's scorecard. But there is a distinct lack of urgency in other areas including the improvement of the electronic recording systems, provision of timely business support to frontline teams and development of tools for social workers to use when recording the views of children.

This reflects the similar lack of urgency in workstream 3 in the area of recruitment and retention of staff – both mainly within the remit of corporate colleagues in the council who appear not to be taking the initiative to lead the change.

Recommendation 10

Ensure that current upgrade of ICS is delivered in a timely fashion

3.1.9 Conclusion

The updated improvement plan accompanied by the children's scorecard is now fit for purpose. The new BSCB Development and Improvement Plan, while not quite complete, is also fit for purpose. If

they are implemented fully and individual actions are completed to the agreed timescales, they are likely to have a significant impact on improving children's safeguarding in Buckinghamshire.

3.2 Does the council have the capacity and capability to implement the plan successfully?

3.2.1 Political commitment and capacity to deliver

The political balance of the council is currently 36 Conservatives, 6 UKIP, 4 Liberal Democrats, 1 Labour, 1 independent and 1 East Wycombe Independent. The leader of the council, Martin Tett, appoints the lead members of service and heads of select committees (known in other authorities as scrutiny).

The leader of the council's commitment is well articulated: "Our aim is not to just get out of being judged inadequate but more importantly to ensure that children and families have positive life chances and are well protected". This demonstrates that the immediate aim is to rectify urgent faults; the longer-term strategy, however, clearly aims to enable the service to become good or outstanding. This view demonstrates a shift in key politicians' understanding of responsibilities towards Buckinghamshire children.

The leader has regular meetings with a cross section of staff representatives on a quarterly basis. In informal discussion with one of the representatives the point was made that while the leader was able to articulate his and the council's commitment to children's services, and that the staff representative recognised this when meeting the leader in person, this depth of commitment is not felt by staff who have not personally met with the leader. This constitutes a large section of the workforce who may therefore be unaware of the council's stated priorities and the level of commitment to these.

At the time of the inspection the lead member was Angela MacPherson. Ms MacPherson stood down from that role in the summer of 2014 for personal reasons. Ms MacPherson was in her first term of being an elected member when she took on the role of lead member for children.

She was replaced by Lin Hazell in November 2014. Ms Hazell has held the role of lead member for children previously from 2005-2011. She was described by the leader as being a "tough and gritty politician who already has an understanding of the service and previously established relationships with staff". Ms Hazell had already identified budget challenges to the delivery of service in 2011 but felt that the Ofsted judgement of paucity of service had come as a total surprise to the Conservative group, and that this had served as a wake-up call in relation to underspending on a key service.

In discussion with staff groups, Ms Hazell is well known and, anecdotally, had a presence within children's services that was welcomed.

She has demonstrated her commitment to ensuring adequate financing of the service during the current budget-setting round, which is held both on the council's internet recording and reports in the local press.

The appointment of Lin Hazell as lead member has been welcomed on a cross-party basis as acknowledging the need for a strong, politically knowledgeable individual during this period of transformation. Both the leader of the opposition, Avril Davies, and Paul Irwin, a UKIP member, commented positively on her appointment.

There is a very clear commitment to ensuring that services to all children and young people improve; this has been evidenced by the allocation of additional finances to children's services. In discussion with cross-party representatives it is clear that the enormity of the judgement made in the Ofsted inspection has been accepted across the authority and political groupings.

The commitment to change and recognition by the political leaders was made clear at a recent feedback session to the council by RedQuadrant on the 7 January 2015 followed by a “catch up” meeting on 15 January 2015. The council, both officers and elected members, received robust feedback about the pace at which key failings from the Ofsted inspection had been addressed. The leader and lead member were clearly affected by the messages they received. At the follow up meeting it was clear that the elected members have taken this on board and given robust direction, and are focussed on change.

Whilst this was a positive response, concern remains that it was reactive in nature, which must raise questions as to the rigorousness of the “scrutiny” process in its broadest sense. This has been reflected upon by the DCS who describes the member/officer relationship as being too “polite”.

There remains at both a member and officer level a concern that the processes of scrutiny are not as well defined as might be necessary. This is not a reflection of the individuals but rather a question about the scrutiny process as a mechanism of improving performance. This would appear to be an historic problem and there has been some attempts to strengthen member engagement through, for instance, the task and finish group that the interim finance manager referred to when discussing the issues around budget shortfalls in the past. This was again a reactive intervention rather than an anticipatory move made on the basis of effective scrutiny.

We feel it would be of value for elected members in Buckinghamshire to have an in depth dialogue with elected members from another authority who have been through the improvement journey, and to consider in that dialogue the use of scrutiny as a tool to drive and maintain performance. It is critical to success that elected members hold officers to account and that they ensure pace and focus on the recovery agenda.

Recommendation 11

Ensure input from another local authority that has improved its scrutiny processes in order to more robustly challenge members and officers.

There is a continuing view among key politicians that the council’s priorities were misunderstood by inspectors and misrepresented in the report. This does not detract from the acceptance of the findings in the report or lessen the commitment to making the necessary improvements. There is now a wider acceptance of the findings of the inspection and the priority and pace applied has started to accelerate. However, it is too early to judge whether this will be sustained.

3.2.2 The Improvement Board

There have been two meetings of the Improvement Board; January and February 2015. They were chaired by the Chief Executive. Some members were not present at the first meeting. For some this may have been due to unavoidable other commitments e.g. the chair of the BSCB and the director of local delivery from Essex County Council (an invited external advisor). However we would have expected the police to have been present even if through deputising arrangements. All partners were represented at the second meeting.

The first meeting agreed the terms of reference, risk register and future programme. Standing items on the agenda include programme updates from the council and the BSCB, data showing the council’s current performance, feedback from partners, and a deeper examination of two of the six improvement plan workstreams. At the February meeting this included proposals for developing the coordination of Early Help in workstream 4 and staff recruitment and retention activities in workstream 3.

It was not clear in the January meeting where the boundaries were between an oversight role, an advisory role and a challenge role for the whole board or individual members of it. When the council

was challenged, there was a defensive reaction rather than the required openness that would enable progress. The February meeting was much better chaired but the issue of holding to account all relevant members and officers of the council, including the Chief Executive, lacks transparency while the meeting is chaired by the Chief Executive. The appointment of an independent chair of the board would enable the function of holding to account all board members, including Members and the Chief Executive of the council and other partners, with no real or perceived conflict in role.

Recommendation 12

That the Improvement Board be chaired by a person independent of the local authority and other partner agencies

3.2.3 Children's services management

Within children's services, we are satisfied that some of the most significant personnel are capable of providing the necessary strategic management and leadership to implement the necessary improvements. The director of children's services (DCS) who started on a permanent basis from 1 December 2014 is a sound appointment, enjoying the expressed confidence of both the leader of the council and the lead member for children. He is ably supported by the interim service director for children and families. Both enjoy the confidence of members and other stakeholders.

Staff who provide services understandably remain uncertain as to the ability and capacity of the leadership team to deliver significant and sustainable change. There is a concern about the number of senior management posts that are held by interim managers although the appointment of the new DCS has been welcomed. The service director and four of the six heads of service are currently interim posts, some promoted from within the service and some appointed from outside. We understand that the council's expectation is that appointments to these posts will be made by March 2015.

We have concerns about the heads of service management layer immediately below the service director. The interim or temporary nature of a significant proportion of this group leads to uncertainty about the future. We have seen examples of sound management in this group, but capacity to manage strategically is limited. Some managers were necessarily focused on operational management as, until November 2014, they were directly managing large numbers of first line managers. There is an opportunity to strengthen this group through permanent appointments, some of which will need to be from outside the authority. Advertisements for the service director and three of the heads of service posts have been published.

There may also be an over concentration on the number of posts that are held by interim staff in the front line and by first line managers. This may result in distracting attention from managers who have full term contracts that are recognised by senior managers as underperforming. Interim posts can lead to increased turnover of staff with consequent instability and its impact on children. However, many local authorities are dependent on a broad range of interim arrangements but still provide services that safeguard children and young people adequately and address issues of capability in a timely manner. The fact that the authority has a current dependency on interim staff should not become an excuse for failure to focus on the improvement agenda.

The DCS has brought in Ann Goldsmith as an independent expert whose focus has been on improving practice by working directly with frontline staff and managers. The appointment of five practice improvement managers (PIMs) in November 2014 has provided some much needed additional managerial capacity between heads of service and the social work teams or units. These appointments should provide expert management of the units and enable heads of service to focus on more strategic matters. It is too early to see the impact.

Whilst the undoubted capability and skills of the DCS and service director are contributing to the implementation of improvements, they are effectively taking the main responsibility for driving the improvement agenda. The other member of the senior team manages education services and commissioning. He is project sponsor for workstream 5 and leads on the development of the children's scorecard. But the drive for improvement lies primarily with the DCS and service director for children and families. The improvement agenda remains an enormous task alongside the continuing responsibilities for delivering the service as usual. It would be an advantage if the senior team was expanded either short term or (preferably) permanently to ensure sufficient capacity to deliver change in a timely fashion. We are pleased that the council has decided to appoint another interim Service Director to concentrate on the operational activities in social care. This will free up the DCS and the present Service Director to focus primarily on implementing the necessary improvements.

Recommendation 13

The Senior Children's Management Team should be expanded to ensure sufficient capacity to deliver change in a timely fashion

Ensure the strengthening of the children's management group by significantly reducing reliance on interim staff and ensuring strategic capability among those appointed

3.2.4 Corporate management

There has been, at times, either a denial or a lack of comprehension of the situation by members of the corporate team and some senior and middle tier managers, which was then reflected in a lack of urgency in effecting necessary change. This inertia is reflected by staff, who are unclear about effective pace in relation to changes in practice that would address Ofsted's key concern about the council failing children.

Following the publication of the Ofsted inspection report, the council responded by implementing a number of measures:

- Meetings with the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss the level of referrals made by the Police,
- Meetings with senior officials of the Buckinghamshire health economy to discuss the Ofsted report and the dissemination of the threshold document,
- Staff workshops to develop the improvement plan,
- Task and Finish Group recommendations considered by the Cabinet,
- Draft Improvement Plan considered by the Cabinet.
- Draft Improvement Plan considered by the Select Committee with recommendations to the Cabinet,
- Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Select Committee and agreed the revised Improvement Plan together with additional funding totalling £12m,
- Replacement of the former Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board and the appointment of a new Chair,
- Appointment of a new DCS, and
- Additional senior staff recruited on an interim basis to provide additional capacity.

While this activity to put in place the personnel and structures to support improvement was necessary, there was not the immediate and clear focus on improving outcomes for children from the moment services were judged to be inadequate. Following the publication of the report, there was no corporate public statement accepting the inspection findings, acknowledging the

shortcomings and setting out plans for immediate improvement. Instead, there was an absence of leadership at this point and a period where the focus was on challenging some aspects of the report. We recognise that it takes time to develop an effective improvement plan, but many actions were needed immediately to improve practice, and could not wait six months. Examples of issues that were not addressed quickly enough are:

- staffing in First Response was too low to meet demand with large numbers of unallocated cases,
- audits of practice were not put in place until January 2015 which meant that managers did not have a full picture of the quality of work being undertaken,
- tackling urgently the serious issues regarding recruitment leading to unacceptable response times in appointing social workers (permanent and interim) to vacant posts,
- IT and accommodation improvements not being prioritised,
- project officers in place to support improvements in service (even if initially as interim),
- support to first line managers in work quality and decision-making,
- acceptance that normal council process and procedures were adequate to deal with a major failing when greater urgency could have accelerated decision-making,
- detailed work with partners to progress improvements at operational and strategic levels,
- sufficient performance data (children's scorecard) and progress of the actions in the improvement plan used to inform and prioritise improvements, used by all on regular basis (not just in preparation for Improvement Board), and
- improvement board in place and overseeing developments through the Autumn and Winter.

The structural work did not have any impact on outcome data – the indicators of the impact on children's lives.

The process for appointing staff is too lengthy and bureaucratic; we understand there are 54 forms to complete in the recruitment and appointment of a new member of staff. The credible use of agency/interim staff has been compromised by the fact that what was meant to be a quick solution to an immediate problem of staffing vacancies was taking an average of 26 days from identification of a vacancy to the placement of an agency worker. We would expect this to take as little as two or three days.

In part this was due to ineffective contracts with HR internally and Pertemps, their external recruitment partner. Staff in HR and Pertemps have not recognised the difficulties faced by children's services or that they could contribute to the solution by working differently. This is a longstanding problem that had not been addressed effectively by the corporate centre and, even worse, the contract with Pertemps has been recently renewed without consultation with the DCS. The Chief Executive has now acknowledged this lack of support. The involvement of the leader and Chief Executive, to allow use of agencies outside the current contract and make swifter appointments, is welcome. But it has been a well-documented issue and was only addressed following our intervention. Agency appointments are now being made swiftly and the council has engaged an external agent to review its recruitment processes to shorten them. There now seems to be sufficient oversight from the Chief Executive to prevent this issue from deteriorating again.

Administrative support to social work teams and child protection conferences has been variable. Managers of the support function did not recognise the importance of support staff with specific skills and training for this work. Support staff were moved, replacements were slow to be arranged and often did not have the required skills. This placed increased burdens on social work managers who were undertaking some of the administrative tasks by default, and providing on the job training and oversight for a series of staff. Corporate managers have acknowledged the need to change the way teams are supported and discussions are taking place about support staff being managed within social work teams rather than through the administrative management structure.

Plans to improve terms and conditions for social work staff in order to improve retention have been accelerated following our intervention. An attractive package for staff is to be implemented from April 2015.

Recommendation 14

Ensure that the review of end to end recruitment processes is completed and its outcomes effectively implemented

Ensure that the quality of service delivery to children is supported by adequate and sufficient administrative support

There are similar issues with ICT support. Electronic recording systems do not support tasks or staff well and different systems in use are not integrated. Improvements have been identified but the pace required to implement improvements has not been evident from the ICT section. Senior managers in children's services are spending large amounts of time formulating and chasing improvements that should have been accepted and swiftly progressed by their corporate colleagues.

The lack of pace or urgency is reflected more widely. The improvement board held its first meeting in January 2015, some five months after the publication of the inspection report. The improvement plan identifies over 180 actions, each of which requires breaking down into a number of individual sub-actions numbered in the thousands. Other than a deadline for each of the 180+ actions, there is no prioritisation in the improvement plan. As outlined earlier, we modelled how the council can prioritise its activities at an improvement workshop and a second workshop with improvement plan project officers and project leads. At the improvement workshop on 7 January 2014, managers agreed 17 actions to be completed within one week and a further two actions to be completed within two weeks. After one week, 15 of the 17 actions had been completed. A week later, the two outstanding actions from the previous week and the two actions due to be completed were achieved. The workshop with the project officers and project leads were trained in the same techniques so that they could use them in their weekly update meetings. There had not previously been corporate management oversight of improvement plan progress. The weekly update meetings for each of the workstreams are supplemented with twice weekly overview meetings attended by all workstream leads and project officers to check overall progress. At our suggestion, these are now attended by the Chief Executive once per week both to hold to account the workstream leads, including the DCS, and to remove any blockages to progress that are beyond the range of the DCS.

Processes that are intended to support professional tasks often do the opposite. The service uses electronic records – Integrated Children's System (ICS) provided by Liquid Logic. The system is time consuming and staff widely report that much of their time is spent in entering information several times to work through the system. Staff working in Early Help do not have access to ICS and record their activity on another system, EIS, and after care staff use a third system, SWIFT. The lack of integration means that staff at different stages of a child's journey do not have access to all the information that the department holds. Performance information has to be extracted from these systems and then collated. In one significant area, none of these systems can produce the required data. Unallocated case information is collected from ICS which is unable to present the data in the required management information format. It is then manipulated to produce the latest picture.

Clearly the council has demonstrated it can respond quickly and with focus. Corporate managers are now seeing the need for their direct involvement in progressing improvements at a much greater pace. The Chief Executive will need to ensure that this focus is maintained and this will be an issue for the improvement advisor to keep under review.

3.2.5 Governance within the organisation

When reviewing corporate management within an authority, we would usually expect to find the following activities:

- Setting clear objectives as to required progress (at staggered points in time)
- Reviewing progress against these objectives to ensure it continues at pace by:
 - Ensuring clear accountability lines
 - Providing regular review and challenge: has delivery matched expectation; what impact have the different activities had on service performance (review of headline performance data)
 - Offering support to prioritise what needs to be done
 - Anticipating blockages and acting appropriately to remove them
- Delegating responsibility to people with the authority both to make swift decisions cross-directorates and to firmly hold people accountable.

Different authorities organise this in different ways. When the Chief Executive, for example, owns these activities, we have seen a weekly meeting taking place in which the above activities are done. In such a situation, this sends a clear message that the authority is taking corporate ownership and holding everyone to account. This approach would be mobilised when any significant problems are found and would certainly be expected to commence as soon as an Ofsted report provides a negative rating.

In BCC, the Chief Executive does chair the Improvement Board, but this was not initiated until January 2015, despite the publication of the Ofsted report some five months previously.

We have found no evidence that the activities stated above have been undertaken on a regular basis from a corporate perspective. We have instead identified several areas where corporate ownership has been seriously lacking:

- a) When the Chief Executive was presented with clear data as to the lack of progress on the improvement plan, especially in cross-department areas, such as in recruitment and IT support, he was surprised and emphasised that as he had provided initial instruction, he had therefore assumed it was done or progressing well (6 January).
- b) The Chief Executive had not reviewed any performance data from children's services until we discussed December's data with him in early January. He said that he would expect to gain this before the Improvement Board (held on 15 January).
- c) In the governance structure, regular progress reviews from an overarching corporate level were not evident. Workstreams have been implemented and the leads from these meet regularly but would only provide peer challenge.

We would suggest these issues comprise a large part of the reason for insufficient progress and the council-wide lack of urgency from August 2014 to the start of January 2015.

In early January, as part of our DfE advisor role, we made a substantial intervention by outlining issues found, emphasising where pace should be increased and suggesting ways to clear blockages (such as recruitment). We held the different parties to account and emphasised the need for review on a weekly basis. In order to model this approach, we facilitated the first review a week after setting the pace and gaining concrete commitment to specific actions to be undertaken within this time.

Clear progress was made between the initial meeting and the review. However, during a workshop on 22 January, a council forum with the remit to hold the different workstreams accountable on a

weekly basis was still identified as ineffective. This was put in place as a result of our intervention, but is driven by children's services without clear corporate oversight.

Whilst we, as DfE advisors, undertook the role of holding the different parties accountable across the council in early January, this role must be subsumed internally by the council. The Chief Executive assumed the role of overseeing the improvement progress at a weekly meeting only after we had spelled out the accountability deficit. True commitment to improvement from the whole council should not be driven by a response to external drivers, such as Ofsted or DfE advisors, but by seizing the initiative to own and drive the change.

Recommendation 15

Maintain focus and holding to account of all staff by the Senior Management Team.

Ensure leaders model a culture of urgency

Ensure that the Chief Executive maintains his weekly intense focus on actions and outcomes being taken to safeguard children

There is a tendency for partner agencies to demand action from the authority whilst claiming any direction is imposition rather than true partnership working. It is clear that there is a long history of poor communication between parties responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Buckinghamshire. Whilst there has been a robust dialogue both at a political and senior officer level around partnership working this has not fully put to bed long held perceptions of each agency by another.

It is worth noting that after the initial improvement board meeting that the Chief Executive has taken a clear leadership role in driving forward improvements in partnership service delivery and demonstrated clear community leadership. However, this entrenched historical impasse of misperception may impede his ability to both be the champion of change in the council and hold the council to account to a broader stakeholder membership.

We have already recommended that the improvement board be chaired independently rather than by the Chief Executive. This will allow an independent chair to hold both the council and other agencies to impartial accountability and responsibility for contributing to the welfare of children and young people in Buckinghamshire.

The appointment of an Independent Chair would, in some ways, address the concern that RedQuadrant has in terms of both capacity and concentration upon the push for change as it would greater focus on the role of the board in terms of holding parties to account for their actions and allow the Chief Executive to focus upon the pace of necessary change within the authority.

The effectiveness of any chair of the Improvement Board is based upon the accountability to which the Board is held. It is difficult to see the clear lines of accountability within Buckinghamshire at a strategic cross partnership level.

The above changes allow for greater confidence that the speed, direction and effort already demonstrated by all parties will be maintained and built upon.

3.2.6 Culture and leadership within the organisation

Apart from the 'technical' analysis on how the council is performing (processes) and the improvements required to these, the 'organisational dynamic' view, with an assessment on what in the organisational culture and behaviour would need to be addressed to ensure sustainable change, is being developed. The initial main findings to be discussed and verified with the council are that interventions would need to be planned and executed to ensure there is a belief that change is feasible. Without widespread confidence in the programme's ability to have the necessary impact,

fewer people will be willing to make the effort to engage with it and its failure will become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Vroom's expectancy theory). Because change initiatives in the past were felt to be unsuccessful, many people are unlikely to have a great belief that this time it will be successful.

There are strong indications of people perceiving BCC as being ineffective at making change happen. The council-wide employee survey shows that within children's and family services, only 40% of employees feel that "changes that affect my team are well planned before they are implemented". The external organisation responsible for the survey also highlighted that the response rate of 30% in children and family services was 20% lower than the whole council response rate of 50% and that "low response rates are often an indicator of low engagement or that employees have not seen any changed as a result of their feedback in the past, so do not feel motivated to complete it."

In our view there is a real risk of lack of belief that the changes are going to be effective, and a fuller, coherent plan would be needed. The council is aware of this and are putting an action plan in place. Further diagnostics on the 'people issues' are being undertaken, and this should feed into this plan. A number of promising interventions are being put in place such as a LGA-led intensive engagement and improvement week. In our view, any such interventions must be founded on the following premises:

a) Develop a more widely spread culture of ownership for service delivery and improvement

This should be clearly part of this above mentioned plan. Staff and managers have told us that in the past many actions in dealing with change were felt to be top down and in a 'command and control' style, without many people having real involvement in the change that impacted them.

In the employee survey for children's and family services, only 28% responded positively to the statement 'I believe there is sufficient opportunity to discuss proposed organisational changes that will directly impact my team or our work'.

Although in times of crisis, a more top down approach is effective, there is a risk that it becomes the default mode. If engagement with frontline staff is not achieved, ownership of the changes is unlikely to be sustainable. The senior managers in the service would not be able to sustain the level of operational involvement. They themselves recognise that ownership needs to be held by middle managers, as for more senior staff, 'there are not enough hours in the day'.

The 'change' plan would need to show comprehensively and in detail how the ownership and decision making can be spread out to lower levels (without increasing risks).

Recommendation 16

Incorporate within the change plan how ownership and decision making will be delegated at all levels

b) Break down the mistrust and credibility between children's services and corporate services

Although there is often a gap in understanding between corporate services and a division, within BCC this is particularly strong between the corporate centre and corporate services, and the children's services division. Managers in children's services is felt that the corporate centre does not regard improvement in children and family services as a joint effort.

In addition to this view being expressed in various forms through our workshops and interviews, the survey data also evidences this:

- Only 20% thinks that the Chief Executive and strategic directors fully understand the impact of their decisions; and
- 21% feel that the strategic and service directors are open and honest in sharing information.

Apart from our analysis, this split between the departments is also the conclusion of the central organisational development (OD) team. However, the OD team acknowledge that a clear and

conscious plan to tackle this is not yet in existence. In establishing effective joint working, actions speak louder than words. It is positive that the Chief Executive is now more closely involved in driving the improvement and the Strategic Director of Resources and Business Transformation is project sponsor for two of the improvement workstreams. However, much of the joint working at pace across the parts has been initiated or escalated because of our external intervention.

There is a risk that without the hard evaluation and requirements stemming from our DfE role, there will be a vacuum in which people will not be held accountable across BCC and, consequently, progress will not be reviewed, issues will remain unresolved and risks will not be mitigated on a regular basis, thereby impeding the momentum for change.

The Chief Executive has stepped up, in part, to fulfil this deficit, but he will need to remain focused on the pace of change and the impact on outcomes for children.

3.2.7 Frontline staff and managers

Morale is low among frontline staff. They report feeling undervalued, unsupported and disrespected, citing differential 'golden handcuff' payments to First Response and CiN staff and lack of payments to CiC and CWD. Poorer rates of pay than geographic neighbours, the removal of car allowances and office accommodation for some staff are also cited as contributory factors. Many of these issues have been improved with the new retention package.

Front line capacity and capability has suffered as a result of the loss of practitioners following the introduction of the systemic model, the churn of staff, slow replacement of vacant posts, the promotion of some social workers into manager posts and a drop in morale following the Ofsted inspection. In our relatively limited contact with social workers and consultant social work managers, we have been impressed with the understanding of and commitment to the social work task. However, there was little acceptance of individual responsibility for some of the poor practice identified in the Ofsted inspection; structural and support reasons were generally identified as the greatest contributory factors.

A major element of improving services to families and children is improved practice by staff. This should be overseen by first line managers in supervision and both practice and supervision audited on a regular basis. The new case file audit process was introduced in January 2015. This involves managers as auditors using six thematic audit tools developed in line with the journey of the child and grading the case files as they are audited. The results of the first audit were very disappointing and reinforce the need for improved practice. Of the 87 audits:

- 55% met the required standard for social work intervention;
- 64% met the required standard for ensuring the voice of the child was evident;
- 60% of the audits met the required standard for management oversight; and
- 50% of the audits met the required standard for the quality of analysis in the assessment.

It is particularly concerning that the poorest practice is in the First Response teams where 78% of assessments were below the required standard.

These findings are being fed back to all staff, not just those who were audited, through managers, newsletters and the recently started practice workshops.

Had the audits started sooner in the improvement journey, the baseline for improvement would have been known earlier. The first round of audits has set a benchmark from which there needs to be rapid and significant improvement. All managers now need to see this as the highest priority. This is another issue for the improvement advisor to keep under review.

3.2.8 Partnership working

Partnership working is underdeveloped, and council members and senior officers must take a strong leadership role in engaging with statutory partners and those in the private and voluntary sectors. Separate to the joint responsibilities undertaken with the BSCB, there has been a fundamental lack of strategic partnership-building by the authority. This applies to statutory partners and those in the private and voluntary sectors. The children and young person partnership arrangements are the vehicle for ensuring that the relevant representatives from the council and its partners are directly involved in working to improve services for Buckinghamshire children. Strategic and operational partnership working needs to be addressed, for example, thresholds will need to be re-visited, the development of providers in designing a credible Early Help support strategy, including early years, and to demonstrate more broadly that commissioning is much more than procurement.

Much of the attention has been focussed on processes of commissioning, in particular around key stage 3 or above services. As a result of this focus, services to children who are pre-school or foundation stage (e.g. children's centres) appear disjointed, with partners unable to articulate clear strategic drivers. The key voluntary sector leaders that attended a meeting with RedQuadrant on 18 December 2014 were unable to describe a coherent early years strategy or how they contribute or could contribute to the improvement agenda, evidencing the failure on the part of the council to engage with them meaningfully in order to plan and deliver services jointly. This was further evidenced at the meeting with Ofsted where the clear frustration at the lack of a coherent, targeted, early years support strategy was articulated by primary school heads.

Within this meeting, those present expressed confidence in the commissioning team and a lack of confidence in children's services. This in itself highlights an external perception of the council's commissioning function as being separate and discrete to children's services, rather than as a vehicle to achieve the strategic goals of children's services.

We have seen evidence of improvements in partnership working. Joint work around coordinating early help led by Health was reported to the Improvement Board on the 13 February. Whilst this is a proposal to prototype coordinating early help work in one area of Buckinghamshire, it remains difficult to see how it fits with an integrated early years strategy which should be owned by all partner agencies including private, voluntary and public sectors. There is no evidence that such a strategy has been considered or developed by the council and its partners, despite concerns around the integrity of support services to younger children as frequently expressed by primary school heads.

The development in partnership with other agencies of a strategy of this nature could well help address the disproportionately high number of referrals from schools; one primary school headteacher affirmed "I send all my concerns I have about individual children in to Social Services on the last day of term because I don't want to worry about those children having no support when the school is closed."

3.2.9 Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board

The recently appointed independent chair of the BSCB, Fran Gosling-Thomas, is a highly capable and credible appointment who has already made an effective start. She disbanded the existing BSCB at her first board meeting and reformed it with fewer partners from more relevant positions within their organisations. She commissioned expert external training to join her for the first meeting of the new board for a whole day in January 2015 at which the action plan for the BSCB was further revised. But the new Board is, as yet, untested.

There is an expressed willingness from a broad range of partners to be part of Buckinghamshire's journey of improvement but they are often left confused as to how they might best offer support and do not always fully understand their responsibilities.

This became apparent at the most recent 'away day' for the board partners. The chair had produced a fully costed and far from overly funded budget that demonstrated the necessary funding to have a functioning board. Despite being able clearly to identify comparable spend by geographic and statistical neighbouring authorities, some members of the board denied the necessity to increase their financial contribution. Subsequently all partners increased their contribution as requested.

It is an issue of some concern whether board members have sufficient seniority or understanding of their joint responsibility for what was assessed as a failing safeguarding board. The newly established sub-groups are well supported by partners and working together on the newly agreed priorities.

The new BSCB Development and Improvement Plan replaces the inadequate Action Plan and provides a sound template for future progress.

3.2.10 Conclusion

We are clear that there is a high level commitment to improving services for children at the top of the organisation. Members, the Chief Executive and senior managers in children's services have made this clear. We have seen a similar commitment to improving outcomes for children and families from front line staff and managers. The Chief Executive has recently become much more closely involved in progressing improvements and challenging lack of progress. This is a welcome development that has prompted a shift in the level of support from other corporate colleagues.

There are indications that partners are beginning improve their contributions to the improvements that are required, but the relationships between the council and some partners are still fragile and further work will need to be done to cement this start.

We have robustly challenged the sluggish start, the slow pace of change, and the need for prioritisation of actions. Whilst the response to this has been positive, it is regrettable that it required our intervention to prompt this change, particularly among corporate colleagues.

Overall conclusion and recommendations

In considering our conclusion we developed the following table as an aid to our thinking and serves as a visual summary of the current improvement status.

Table 1: Overview of the council's improvement performance

Critical performance elements	Current status	Direction	Comments
Practice (how well is the work done?)			
Quality of delivery - How good is the content of the work done? -			Not based on external case file audits (not RQ mandate, planned for Ofsted).
Process of delivery - How timely is the work done (speed)? -			
Capacity to deliver - Are there enough appropriate people to deliver? -			Most posts filled, but not certain if right people nor if enough.
Improvement (how is the work improving?)			
Plans, analysis and process of improvement - Are the right things tackled in an effective manner? -			Methods for quick analysis & delivery of improvement progress in place.
Improvement capacity - Are there enough skilled people to improve the work? -			More at senior level needed.
Improvement culture - Is the focus and pace made sustainable? -			Only able to make assessment at later time as pace accelerated in January.
Leadership and support (are the enabling elements in place?)			
Leadership and governance - Are the changes corporately effectively driven and supported? -			This has significantly improved, but only relatively recently.
Working in partnership - Is leadership effective in ensuring good partnership work? -			There is good recent progress, but real impact cannot be evaluated yet.
Support functions - Are the support functions (e.g. IT, HR, Admin) effective? -			Some main changes for are planned and not implemented yet (IT, HR)



Direction of travel – up for progress, down for deterioration – strength indicated by one to three arrows.

The updated improvement plan accompanied by the children’s scorecard is now fit for purpose. The new BSCB Development and Improvement Plan, while not quite complete, is also fit for purpose. We have identified a number of recommendations intended to ensure that the improvements remain on course and fully address all the issues identified in the Ofsted inspection report or in our work. In our view, there are several critical success factors which need continued attention and commitment to ensure speedy resolutions from the council.

Frontline practice is currently falling short and needs focused managerial attention to ensure that the improvement actions (process) are translated into improvements in the speed and manner in which intervention takes place.

This must be supported by continued urgent work on recruitment and retention of staff and the reduction in dependency on interim or agency posts. The electronic support systems are due for upgrading and this must be introduced and tested with managers and front line staff.

Partnership working is improving but much work is needed before this can be considered fully effective. All partners need to engage with the improvement plan and be held to account for their contributions. The BSCB Development and Improvement Plan needs further honing and to be treated as a workstream separate from workstream 1. Further work is needed to clarify partners’ understanding of and operational engagement with the range of Early Help provision.

The improvement plan should be amended to include the visiting of all looked after children in required timescales and pathway planning for young people in care requires further improvement.

If the improvement plan and our recommendations are implemented fully and individual actions are completed to timescale, they are likely to have a significant impact on improving children’s safeguarding in Buckinghamshire.

The council has the capability to effect the necessary changes. It has demonstrated that it can effect change at pace and with the required sense of urgency, but it has needed prompting by external intervention. Moreover, due to the council not mobilising at an appropriate speed, evaluation of some critical areas, such as the quality of practice and staff recruitment and retention, is not possible except on a ‘wait and see’ basis. The improvement advisor’s external scrutiny will be vital in these critical areas of quality of intervention and corporate support and in maintaining a strong focus on the pace of change. We have identified further recommendations to improve the council’s ability to implement the improvement plan successfully.

It is vital to maintain the pace and sense of urgency. This is dependent on good leadership with modelling from members and senior managers. The recent weekly holding to account of project leads by the Chief Executive should continue with all managers holding their own staff to account. It is also important to clarify with staff how decision-making is delegated. The children’s services management group needs to be strengthened with an additional senior manager and a significant reduction in interim posts.

The holding to account of those responsible for change is important. We have argued that there should be an independent chair of the improvement board to provide transparency, given the Chief Executive’s direct involvement in the improvement plan. The member led scrutiny process would benefit from external input to enable it to become more robust.

The planned review of the end to end recruitment processes should be completed and changes implemented quickly. Similarly the work on improving business support to social work teams needs concluding quickly.

We have gathered all the recommendations from the report along with the associated key issues and barriers to implementation into the table below.

Table 2: Recommendations

Report reference	Key Issue	Recommendation	Barriers
3.1.1 General observations	Management information relating to unallocated cases not yet available electronically	1. Implement new functionality to enable real time information about unallocated cases at next system upgrade. Use a staff representative group to test the usefulness of this new functionality and adjust as necessary	New system upgrade not scheduled until April 2015
3.1.1 General observations	The Safeguarding Board and actions relating to it is currently bundled into workstream 1	2. Assign the BSCB Development and Improvement Plan to a separate workstream commensurate with its significance	
3.1.2 Workstream 1: improving leadership,	Partnership working is weak but with signs of recent improvement	3. Ensure that all partners engaged in the promotion of the wellbeing of children are aware of their individual and	Partners disengage from the improvement programme due to

governance and partnerships		collective responsibilities and are jointly held to account	other priorities, eg impending CQC inspection
3.1.3 BSCB action plan	The plan is still a work in progress with some imprecise timeframes and success measures	4. Complete the BSCB Development and Improvement Plan to include timeframes and SMART performance indicators	
3.1.4 Improving quality of social work practice	Front line practice remains below an acceptable level to ensure the safety of all children	5. Ensure that there is an increased focus on individual practice and professional accountability for the quality of social work intervention Ensure that there is well modelled managerial oversight of all tiers of staff Ensure the longer term stability of staff teams by increasing the proportion of social worker and manager posts that are permanently employed	Morale is low among front line staff which leads to increased turnover and higher levels of agency staff Continued training and supervisory needs of new cohorts of staff Uncontrolled spikes in demand
3.1.5 Improving strength and capacity of workforce	Progress made to date on improvements to recruitment and retention must be maintained	6. Deliver ongoing recruitment campaigns, effective contract management with agency suppliers and more improved (faster and better) end-to-end processes from vacancy to staff starting	
3.1.6 Improving Early Help and the front door	Length of time taken to process referrals by First Response team is too long and the number of assessments completed within timescale is too low	7. Monitor closely to determine if the recent appointment of agency staff improves performance in KPIs, notably processing timescales and timely completion of assessments; and take appropriate remedial action	
3.1.6 Improving Early Help and the front door	Responsibilities for developing and delivering the early help offer are unclear	8. Ensure that there is a clearly and mutually understood mechanism at a strategic level for co-ordinating all Early Help efforts for children	Strategic direction is interpreted as being imposition rather than an expression of partnership working Strategic agreement is not translated and embedded in operational practice
3.1.7	Pathway planning for young people in care	9. Ensure that all young people over 16 years of age	

Improving services for children on the edge of care	has not improved sufficiently Action plan does not address timely visiting of Looked After Children	have a suitable pathway plan in place Amend the action plan to ensure that all Looked After children are visited in the required timescales	
3.1.8 Improving tools	ICT system must be made fit for purpose swiftly	10. Ensure that current upgrade of ICS is delivered in a timely fashion	Financial restrictions limit the scope of the upgrade Insufficient regard to end user need
3.2.1 Political commitment and capacity to deliver	Scrutiny processes are weak and do not hold members and officers to account	11. Ensure input from another local authority that has improved its scrutiny processes in order to more robustly challenge members and officers.	Political uncertainties created by forthcoming elections
3.2.2 The Improvement Board	Chairing of the Improvement Board /Challenge	12. That the Board be chaired by a person independent of the local authority and other partner agencies	Finding an appropriate Independent person acceptable to all partners
3.2.3 Children's services management	Strategic capacity at service director level and capability at head of service level	13. The Senior Children's Management Team should be expanded to ensure sufficient capacity to deliver change in a timely fashion Ensure the strengthening of the children's management group by significantly reducing reliance on interim staff and ensuring strategic capability among those appointed	Sufficient funding to ensure the attraction of candidates of a sufficiently high quality
3.2.4 Corporate management	Pace of improvement in HR processes need to be maintained	14. Ensure that the review of end to end recruitment processes is completed and its outcomes effectively implemented Ensure that the quality of service delivery to children is supported by adequate and	Corporate focus is distracted. Churn of support staff due to demands in other parts of the council.

		sufficient administrative support	
3.2.5 Governance within the organisation	Sustainability of pace	<p>15. Maintain focus and holding to account of all staff by the Senior Management Team.</p> <p>Ensure leaders model a culture of urgency</p> <p>Ensure that the Chief Executive maintains his weekly intense focus on actions and outcomes being taken to safeguard children</p>	Distraction from the key issues by other apparently more pressing issues e.g. the “Fit for Future” programme
3.2.6 Culture and leadership within the organisation	Engagement with the wider service is crucial to develop understanding and gain buy-in	16. Incorporate within the change plan how ownership and decision making will be delegated at all levels	
3.2.7 Frontline staff and managers	As above at 3.1.4		
3.2.8 / 9 Partnership working / BSCB	As above at 3.1.2 and 3.1.6		

Appendix 1: Documents reviewed

Main report

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's Scorecard v2.1 December		January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's services – outcome of member led task and finish group into resources in children's services and Ofsted inspection outcomes	Report to Cabinet	8 September 2014
Ofsted	Buckinghamshire County Council: inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board. Inspection date: 3 June – 25 June 2014		8 August 2014
Ofsted	Framework and evaluation schedule - children in need of help and protection CLA and care leavers - Iscbs	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-framework	

Hypotheses document

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
Buckinghamshire County Council	Agency recruitment at Nov 2014 (latest available)	Recruitment data April to Dec 2014	As at 17 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Buckinghamshire children and young people's services improvement plan		13 November 2014 and full draft October 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's scorecard v2.1 December		As at 17 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Objectives and success measures v.05		As at 17 January 15

Buckinghamshire County Council	Update report to children's services Improvement board: risk update		15 January 2015
RedQuadrant	Interview and discussion notes	Meetings with individuals including heads of service, CiN and CiC, DCS, independent chair, improvement board, scorecard development lead	Various
RedQuadrant	Workshop and focus group notes	Various at listed in Appendix 2	Various
Ofsted	Buckinghamshire County Council: inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board. Inspection date: 3 June – 25 June 2014		8 August 2014

Accompanying documents

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
Buckinghamshire County Council	2013-14 annual		
Buckinghamshire County Council	Annual report of Buckinghamshire independent reviewing service April 2013 – March 2014		2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Buckinghamshire children's services improvement board terms of reference v0.5	Buckinghamshire children's services improvement programme	22 December 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Chief Executive outline response to Ofsted report - actions to date		13 November 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's Scorecard v2.1 December		Various. Most recently as at 17 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's services improvement programme initiation document v0.2 for programme number 5		6 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's social care benchmarking sector led improvement provisional annual report 2013-14 v1		
Buckinghamshire County Council	Children's social care quarterly benchmarking report 2014-15 Q1 v1: sector-led improvement quarterly report 2014-15 Q1		
Buckinghamshire County Council	COMT risk register	RMS Reporting	September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Contacts and referrals		October 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Contacts by age_01-10-2014_30-11-2014		December 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	CYPS SMT structure		December 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	C&F risk register	RMS Reporting	September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Data relating to attainment in KS4 and Ofsted action plan		January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Deprivation map		

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
Buckinghamshire County Council	Direction under section 497A(4B) of the Education Act 1996 to Buckinghamshire City Council		19 November 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Dispute resolution protocol for independent reviewing officers		November 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Draft CYP improvement plan Risks		As at 4 January 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Early help improvement plan		20 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Early help improvement plan		9 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Ethnicity open cases		26 November 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Evaluation overview		May 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	FRS_Contacts_2013-04-01_2014-03-31		May 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	FRS unit caseload		12 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Letter to Edward Timpson MP re Ofsted		8 September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Letter to Mr Ian Valvona, Head of intensive interventions unit (Doncaster, Birmingham and Slough)		23 September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	MD staff reference group notes	Meetings with service director	19 December 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Member led task and finish group children's services confidential report to LAG (final draft to LAG)		23 July 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Member led task and finish group: children's services confidential report to LAG version 1.0a		23 July 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Notes from children's services task and finish group	Workshops 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	17 February 2014; 5 March 2014; 20 March 2014; 7 April, 2014; 8 May 2014; 2 June 2014; 26

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
			June 2014; 3 July 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Objectives and success measures v05 (data report to improvement board)		14 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Ofsted improvement plan – HR action plan and next steps V5		9 September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Ofsted improvement plan – HR proposals V5		10 September 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Risk management framework		May 2013
Buckinghamshire County Council	Senior management structure		1 December 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Service level agreement for recruitment services to be supplied by resourcing team (human resources) to children and families service for 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015		December 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Sue Imbriano letter to Chris Williams. Unredacted and redacted versions		January 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council	Time to recruit data version 2		January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Unit caseloads 2014/15		12 January 2015
Buckinghamshire County Council	Workshop Feedback – 2-3 October 2014		October 2014
Cabinet Member for Children's Services	Report to cabinet: children's services outcome of member led task and finish group into resources in children's services and Ofsted inspection outcomes		8 September 2014
Cabinet Member for Children's Services	Report to Cabinet: Ofsted improvement plan for children's services		15 October 2014
Department for Education	Statutory direction for intervention	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/direction-issued-to-buckinghamshire-county-council	19 November 2014
Edward Timpson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children,	Letter to Martin Tett, leader of the council		19 November 2014

Author	Title / filename	Source (if applicable)	Date
Department for Education.			
Munro, Turnell & Murphy and Partnering Local Authorities	Transforming children's services with signs of safety practice at the centre: innovations programme proposal		27 August 2014
Paul Clarke - programme manager (local government support) Local Government Association on behalf of the peer challenge team	Letter regarding Buckinghamshire County Council - corporate peer challenge 31 March – 3 April 2014		May 2014
RedQuadrant	Meeting notes from interviews listed in appendix 2		Various: December 2014 and January 2015

Appendix 2: People interviewed, focus groups and workshops

Buckinghamshire County Council

Cllr. Martin Tett	Leader
Cllr. Mike Appleyard	Lead member for children's services
Cllr. Lin Hazell	Cabinet member children's services
Cllr. Val Letheren	Chair education, skills and children's services select committee
Cllr. Avril Davies	Liberal Democrat leader
Cllr. Paul Irwin	UKIP lead (now Conservative) on children's services
Chris Williams	Chief Executive
David Johnston	Managing director children's social care and learning (DCS)
Carol Douch	Service director children and family services
Ann Goldsmith	Independent expert
Sarah Harris	Head of service - children in need
Jo Howe	Performance analyst
Hannah Dell	Improvement programme manager
Frances Mills	Head of Organisational Development
Frances Gosling-Thomas	Buckinghamshire safeguarding children board chair
Kathy Forbes	Head of service - children's care management
Barry Kirwan	Head of quality standards and performance
Steve Tanner	Head of children's care services
Trevor Boyd	Strategic director for adults and family wellbeing
Chris Munday	Service director learning, skills and prevention
Chris Wilkins	Social care representative – employee forum
David Moran	Finance director
Lucy Pike	Youth service (participation lead)
Amanda O'Bone	Head of first response
Joy Shakespeare	Head of family resilience
Ben Thomas	Head of prevention and commissioning

Other organisations (interviews/meetings)

Steve Goodman	Director	Morning Lane Associates
David Hood	Head teacher	Cressex School
Alan Baldwin	Assistant Chief Constable	Neighbourhood Policing and Partnerships
Health partners	Various people	

Focus groups and workshops (average 8-20 participants)

Kick off meeting	Children's services management group
Mapping the system workshop	Children's services managers and frontline staff
Consultant social work managers focus group	

Social workers focus group	
Recruitment focus group	Children's services, corporate services inc. HR, Pertemps.
Stakeholder workshop	Children's services partners including health, police, youth offending, education partnership.
Feedback workshop	Open to all who had been interviewed, in focus groups and workshops
Prioritisation workshop	Children's services managers, key councillors, corporate managers
Improvement practice workshop	Workstream leads and project managers
Ofsted feedback workshop	Children's services managers, key councillors, children's services partners including health, police, school heads

Appendix 3: Hypothesis document at 30 January 2015

Presenting problem	Problem analysis	Improvement hypotheses	Evidence
General			
<p>The improvement plan is process focused listing a series of actions for the council to complete. Improving outcomes for children is not the major feature with little indication of how the processes are impacting on outcomes for children.</p> <p>The actions are not prioritised other than by individual action completion dates.</p>	<p>The plan has been written in response to the Ofsted report. It systematically addresses the recommendations but does not demonstrate a link between the identified actions and improved outcomes.</p> <p>Successful implementation is being measured by whether actions are on track to be completed within timescales rather than whether outcome KPIs are improving.</p> <p>The council has developed a performance management framework, the children's scorecard that provides some of the required success measures, targets and current progress.</p> <p>Scorecard only partially populated. Accuracy and timescale to complete data used</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate link between actions and outcomes by either incorporating outcome KPIs into the plan or producing the plan and the children's scorecard as joint live documents so that the successful implementation of actions can be clearly demonstrated. 2. Develop a prioritisation mechanism so that everyone is clear about what to focus on at any point in time. By focusing on a smaller number of actions at any one time, the likelihood of successful implementation is increased. 3. Continue progress towards developing the children's scorecard and its use throughout the service. To include ensuring consistent and timely update of the data used to populate the tool by staff and managers. 4. Ensure information within and populated in the scorecard matches the outcomes the council is striving to deliver. 	<p>The actions have deadlines and progress towards completion of the actions is RAG rated. Each workstream has a set of success measures but these mostly lack SMART targets. They comprise a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that are collected by the council and are useful in indicating progress or are proxies for progress in many areas of the plan.</p> <p>The original plan submitted to the DfE systematically addresses the 43 Ofsted report recommendations with two exceptions in Workstream 5: 'Improving services for children on the edge of care, in care and permanence planning';</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 'undertake timely statutory visits to all looked after children and record on the children's case files whether they are spoken to alone'. Action 2.2.9: 'Ensure that children and young people are visited regularly, seen alone by their social workers...' covers part of the recommendation but does not address timely visiting to all looked after children.

	to populate the tool varies with Workstream ⁶ .	5. Monthly reporting of success measures to the board as a standing agenda item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ‘improve the timeliness of initial health assessments for looked after children who live outside Buckinghamshire’. Action 5.7.1 ‘Review and amend the current process for completion of health assessments, including the speedy notification to health when a child is received into care/discharged from care with completed documentation of consent for health assessments’ does not directly address the issue of gaining compliance from health providers outside Buckinghamshire. <p>Some staff were not able to clearly explain the connection between actions and outcome measures and were not up to date with the latest performance measures that would indicate progress. (from interviews with Heads of Service, CiN and CiC)</p> <p>As at 23.01.15 the scorecard was populated with approximately 37% of the data included.⁷</p>
Improvement process			OD team has not engaged or been involved in the improvement process with us to date

⁶ Source: 07.01.15 Discussion with Jo Howe: Lead for development and rollout of Scorecard and associated measures

⁷ Source: Children’s Scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015. BCC internal

Workstream 1: Improving Leadership, Governance and Partnerships			
<p>Whilst there is commitment from members to the need to improve children's services, Cabinet members are not robustly challenged by other members.</p>	<p>The formal processes for challenge – Select Committee – does not hold Cabinet Members to account effectively.</p> <p>Without effective challenge, the same mistakes may be made leading to no improvement or deterioration of service.</p>	<p>Members of Select committee need some help with learning how to challenge robustly. LGA provides ample training opportunities and packages.</p>	<p>Interviews with:</p> <p>Martin Tett (Leader Of the Council/Conservative)</p> <p>Lin Hazel (Lead Member Children/Conservative)</p> <p>Mike Appleyard (Deputy Leader of the Council/Conservative)</p> <p>Valerie Letheren (Chair Select Committee/Conservative)</p> <p>Avril Davies (Leader of the Opposition/Liberal Democrat)</p> <p>Paul Irwin (Member of Children's Committee/ UKIP)</p> <p>Chris Williams (Chief Executive)</p> <p>David Johnstone (Director of Childrens Services)</p>
<p>Partnership working is poor strategically and variable operationally.</p>	<p>Improvements to partnership working are almost entirely left to the BSCB sections in the Improvement Plan. This reinforces the sense that the development of good</p>	<p>Immediate groundwork with partners needed by officers and members to develop better understanding and closer joint working. This could include an early</p>	<p>Ofsted report identifies partnership working as 'undeveloped and ineffective'⁸.</p> <p>Front line links with partners variable. CWD co-located with Health staff – very good joint</p>

⁸ Buckinghamshire County Council Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board; 8 August 2014 P29

	<p>partnership working has been delegated to the BSCB. [There is only one other reference to improving partnership working in Workstream 1: 1.1.5 Sustain the priority of Children’s Services across partnerships through embedding a culture of reflection and learning.</p> <p>This is not an action to improve partnership working from its very low base which will need a series of smaller actions in order to achieve real and sustainable change</p> <p>Instances of communication that does not support the aims the council is trying to achieve. For example we were informed in the Feedback workshop that partners reported at the BSCB inaugural meeting the assumption of the partners was that the threshold document was designed to ‘close the door’ on referrals whereas the council were of the opinion that this threshold was to provide clarity and enable more appropriate referrals.</p>	<p>workshop with partners to ascertain means of future engagement.</p> <p>Develop information from partners on their contribution to the council improvement plan and tangible, evidenced issues they would like to support in addressing.</p> <p>Safeguarding board to develop better partnership working within its new arrangements</p> <p>Ensure the communications between the Safeguarding board and partners is regular and appropriate. This could include liaison between partners’ communications teams on clear and consistent messaging.</p> <p>Ensure that the correct people within the organisation and amongst partners are holding the council to account. This needs to be dovetailed with other formal accountability and governance mechanisms already in place.</p>	<p>working. For other teams, lost links with known partners due to re-structure. Patch based units not working and so do not develop good local links. (Focus group with frontline workers)</p> <p>Lack of CAMHS only crisis and no early preventative involvement. (Focus Group Consultant Social Worker Managers CSWMs)</p> <p>Partners attending Partners workshop told us that the council imposes decisions rather than involves, such as new thresholds doc. This is disputed by council managers in the feedback workshop who say partners involved in developing. BUT a difference in perception.</p> <p>Partners reported in Partners workshop also not aware of Early Help offer from all agencies despite being on FIS website. Lead for FIS, in the feedback workshop has acknowledged partners not informed as well as could be.</p>
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<p>Safeguarding Board is newly constituted and untested</p>	<p>The BCSB Action Plan section of the Improvement Plan is the weakest part of the plan.</p> <p>While it has already been revised by the Chair, it needs to be further revised with direct links between actions and performance outcomes.</p> <p>The Chair plans started this work at the 13 January 2015 away day with the new Board.</p> <p>The Board Business Manager post is recently filled.</p> <p>There is a risk that the Chair will be left to sort out the improvement plan and the negotiations with new partner members without the necessary support or ownership from council leaders and managers.</p>	<p>Lack of clear, shared and mutual ownership of the BSCB. This would be resolved by clearly articulated governance arrangements.</p> <p>Bucks to agree with Chair, how the working relationships with partners can be developed and improved to enable the board to be effective.</p> <p>Ensure that the BSCB Action Plan is updated to include SMART targets which are adequately resourced with people and finance</p>	<p>Senior managers and Chair agreed Action Plan is not up to standard and required further work. (Interviews with DCS and independent Chair</p> <p>Audit of plan shows lack of performance outcome measures.</p> <p>Newly appointed board members met as a board for first time 13.01.15</p> <p>Report by Carol Douch to Improvement board identified that attendees at first new board meeting were not at the right level in partner agencies to be able to speak authoritatively and without reference back to partner agency.</p>
Workstream 2: Improving Quality of Social Work Practice			
<p>Transferring cases between teams is not smooth:</p> <p>1. quality of information contained in the file or work incomplete</p>	<p>Delays in transferring cases puts increased pressure on transferring out teams while those receiving transfers are protected.</p>	<p>Prioritise cases from FR and MASH so that referrals dealt with appropriately.</p>	<p>Cases transferred from FR and MASH without formal or recorded assessment of risk/urgency. (Evidenced from Working group held by Red Quadrant on 10th December “Mapping the System”)</p>

<p>2.resistance to transfer to protect receiving team</p>	<p>Lack of prioritisation of cases from FR and MASH – no assessment of risk or urgency.</p> <p>Unclear closure or transfer policies for CiN cases.</p> <p>CiC teams feel pressure from the activity associated with YP admitted as teenagers and the high proportion of out of county placements.</p> <p>There is no single point of transfer to CiC – depends on the type of case and the people involved</p>	<p>Automatically transfer cases to CiN team based on postcode without recourse to senior manager.</p> <p>Agree clear transfer and closure policy.</p> <p>Pressure in the CiC teams could be relieved by transferring some YP into the After Care team for all the work to be undertaken by staff who have the skills and desire to work with these young people. (see Workstream 5)</p> <p>This would relieve pressure on the CiC teams reducing the need to resist transfer of cases from other teams.</p> <p>Consider introduction of a single point of transfer to CiC</p>	<p>Referrals can sit in In-Tray for up to 7 days leading to action being taken on inappropriate cases because held for too long. (Evidenced from Working group held by Red Quadrant on 10th December “Mapping the System”)</p> <p>Senior Managers allocate to teams based on postcode but not automatically. (Evidenced from Working group held by Red Quadrant on 10th December “Mapping the System”)</p> <p>Can take up to 30 days between reception into system and allocation to CiN SW.(Evidenced from Working group held by Red Quadrant on 10th December “Mapping the System”)</p> <p>Lack of closure policy for CiN cases – some open for over 4 years. (Meeting with CWSM’s High Wycombe)</p> <p>Discussion with CSWMs spelled out smooth transfer processes between First Response and CiN, but slower transfers into CiC. (High Wycombe – different in Aylesbury?)</p> <p>CiC teams feeling increased pressure from approx. 56% LAC [laced out o county and increasing numbers of unsettled teenagers</p>
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			on caseloads. (Meeting with CWSM's High Wycombe)
Workstream 3: Improving the Strength and Capacity of the Workforce			
Recruitment is difficult for both agency and permanent social care practitioners and managers.	<p>Nationally the market for recruitment is difficult. If BCC is understaffed, improvements will be difficult to achieve, as delivering these would need time from people at different levels in the organisation.</p> <p>For instance, most people claim that the policies and procedures are not clear and unnecessarily lengthy. If understaffed they might not have time to learn about these and develop them more clearly.</p> <p>High number of agency social workers results in repeated changes of staff for children and young people.</p>	<p>1) The time it takes from identified vacancy to someone appropriately (permanent or agency) having fulfilled the vacancy and effective in job too long (more than 2-3 weeks) and has many errors.</p> <p>A shorter optimised end-to-end process would achieve:</p> <p>Removal of problems; In a buoyant job market, good people would often be snapped up by other organisations quickly. Also, the candidates might rate BCC as less professional and therefore be less interested. Because of an end-to-end starters process that has delays and errors, more effort from the people in organisation is required, while this effort could be better dedicated to core work.</p> <p>2) The Pertemps contract is not structured and/or managed appropriately, resulting in children's services not gaining a good service from HR. It By reviewing and identifying 1) possibilities for alternative</p>	<p>Communicated that study was done internally which showed that to recruit one person over 50 forms would need to be filled in.</p> <p>Percentage of people in First Response that are agency staff is 83%.The agency spend in FRT in November was 78.6% of total staffing spend⁹.</p> <p>Feedback from initial workshop that there are cases, where it takes a few weeks before new starters have infrastructure to work effectively.</p> <p>Almost all people in the same workshop stated that they have no clear policies and procedures to work to (in common/standard manner).</p> <p>Jobs for High Wycombe, advertised as Aylesbury, losing out on candidates who may</p>

⁹ Source: Objectives & Success Measures v.05 14.01.15 as at 17 Jan

		<p>agency 'off-contract' arrangements (as used in other local authorities),</p> <p>2) performance could be improved in the Pertemps contract including if overseeing Pertemps contract should be done by commissioning/procurement instead of HR, 3) how HR service to Children's is measured appropriately in SLA, and could be improved. This should be done by people with procurement/commissioning expertise.</p> <p>This would achieve faster recruitment, gaining more and better candidates - and potentially at lower total costs.</p>	<p>want to work in High Wycombe but not Aylesbury.</p> <p>In December the average time to appoint agency social workers was on average 26 calendar days through Pertemps¹⁰. For permanent staff the average time from vacancy to offer was 41 calendar days¹¹</p>
<p>Morale is low among front line staff</p>	<p>Staff feel undervalued, unsupported and disrespected.</p> <p>Potential higher rates of churn.</p> <p>Toxicity of reputation that leads to fewer applicants for posts in Bucks.</p>	<p>Staff repeatedly refer to lower rates of pay compared with geographic neighbours.</p> <p>Resolving this may be too expensive but lower cost measures would have an impact on staff morale:</p> <p>Car allowances</p> <p>Consideration of office space/layout in Aylesbury, particularly</p>	<p>Reports from focus groups and interviews with middle managers.</p> <p>The 'golden handcuff' payments to First Response and CiN staff are viewed as divisive. The differential rates and lack of payments to CiC and CWD were seen as valuing staff differentially. (Focus Group of Social Workers [18.12.14])</p>

¹⁰ Agency Recruitment at Nov 2014 (Latest Available) within Recruitment Data document; BCC internal

¹¹ Source: Objectives & Success Measures v.05 14.01.15 as at 17 Jan

	<p>Training has been reduced to systematic for financial reasons. Developmental support beyond this is difficult to access (also relates to recruitment above)¹².</p>		<p>The removal of car allowances from new staff while maintaining them for existing staff also seen as divisive. (Focus Group of Social Workers).</p> <p>Sickness rates are high: in FRS at 9.4% and in FRT at 5.9% (although the FRT rate is notably down from 24.6% in June). This also links to work stream 4.</p>
<p>The successful implementation of the plan may be jeopardised by</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the capacity and capability of senior and middle managers 2. the high number of interim senior and middle managers 3. lack of pace or urgency among this group 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity to manage strategically among the HoS group is limited, although some were necessarily focused on operational management as, until November 2014, they were directly managing large numbers of first line managers. Without a strategic view, managers are unlikely to lead their own service effectively or carry corporate responsibility for the whole service, leading to limited service development. 2. The interim or temporary nature of a significant 	<p>1and 2. There is an opportunity to strengthen this group through permanent appointments some of which will need to be from outside the authority. The process may be unsettling but is likely to take more than 6 months to complete. This will strengthen the management group by demonstrating a long term commitment and provide an opportunity to increase calibre and introduce fresh ideas.</p> <p>Need to develop a Bucks management leadership style (culture) that is cascaded through the service. This may be started by some joint training with the new cadre of managers.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In interviews some HoS demonstrated limited strategic thinking, lacked a sense of urgency, had little grasp of links between actions and improvement measures 2. There is a significant proportion of interim managers in the group outlined above, some promoted from within the service and some appointed from outside. [4 out of 6 HoS interim] <p>IROs described ‘making allowances’ for uncompleted tasks at LAC reviews due to</p>

¹² Source: feedback from workshop on 7 Jan 2014

	<p>proportion of this group leads to uncertainty about the future. It is less likely that staff will respond to managers who they doubt are committed to the long term development of the service.</p> <p>3. The lack of urgency means that allowances can be made for late completion or incomplete implementation of changes.</p> <p>4. There appears to be a culture of delegation that is not followed up with enforcement / checking on completion, even in areas of significant importance in the improvement plan.</p>	<p>3. The most senior managers (DCS and SD) are credible and competent but their nurturing and cooperative styles may be helped by having a 'tough' manager whose focus is to increase pace and drive improvements by holding other managers to account across all directorates. We understand that there have been previous instances of bullying that have created caution within the service and will form a barrier to this. We suggest it is possible to manage these aspects in tension with the correct development, support and a clear, reliable approach to bullying reporting and grievances.</p>	<p>sympathy for staff rather than focusing tightly on the child. (IRO focus Group)</p> <p>The process for appointing locums is slow and bureaucratic (There is evidence that it can take an average of 26 days between identification of a staffing gap to the appointment of an agency worker)</p>
Workstream 4: Improving Early Help and the Front Door			
<p>First response is unable to cope with the volume of work. This is / a significant contributor to delays from contact to referral and then to assessment. It also impacts the number of</p>	<p>There are various assumptions on why this has happened, but the numbers of contacts that have progressed into a referral have gone up significantly since September 2014 (average April</p>	<p>1) Ensure peak demand can be met by swift (maximum 2 days) access to agency workers, and do this now.</p> <p>2) More structurally, adopt a robust and regular workforce planning process, using information to identify trends and forecast demand or at least</p>	<p>In December 15 the % of contacts with NFA as the outcome was 26% against a Bucks target of 45%. This decreased from September 14 over a 4 month period of 56%, 41%, 32% and 26% respectively¹³.</p>

¹³ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

<p>unallocated cases.</p> <p>This leads to real risks for children.</p>	<p>– Aug = 28%, average Sept-Dec =37%).</p> <p>BCC has not been able to respond to this in a timely manner with more resources or introducing changes, leading to a bulge of work going through from referral to assessment with insufficient staffing levels, leading to insufficient response times.</p> <p>A forecasting and flexible staffing model is currently not in place.</p> <p>In reviewing the detail of the process and procedures it shows that these could be improved and be made more common practice.</p>	<p>enable early response when demand (i.e. number of referrals) is increasing.</p> <p>3) Develop understanding of comparative contact / referral / conversion rates with other councils to use as a measure for current performance.</p> <p>4) Streamline the practice, minimising delays, having right data there at start with clear processes and procedures – and ensure this is reviewed and improved in ongoing manner.</p>	<p>The response times haven't significantly improved over the last 9 months (e.g. April-Dec = 24% average- referrals where a decision was made within 24hrs), although there is a tentative trend of improvement¹⁴.</p> <p>The volume of contacts has gone down gradually from 1514 in September 14 to 1140 in December 14. In December 437 of these were from Police, other LAs 121 and Schools 133¹⁵. Of note however, there are several entry points for contacts so the number may be larger than currently being recorded¹⁶.</p> <p>In December 29% of 547 assessments were completed within 14 days rising from 16% in November 14 while 35% of referrals had a decision made in 24 hours, rising steadily from a low of just 15% in July¹⁷.</p> <p>In December 79% of assessments were completed in 45 days, with small improvement over since Augustus (82% average against 73%)¹⁸</p>
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¹⁴ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

¹⁵ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

¹⁶ Source: 07.01.15 Discussion with Jo Howe: Lead for development and roll-out of Scorecard and associated measures

¹⁷ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

¹⁸ Source: Objectives & Success Measures v.05 14.01.15 as at 17 Jan

			<p>There has also been a significant rise of % of contacts progressed to referral from 26% in July to 36% in December peaking at 40% in October¹⁹.</p> <p>The average time from contact to referral was 1.3 days in December with 10% 5 days+²⁰.</p> <p>The council reported 148 unallocated cases in December²¹ reduced to 0 in First Response and 6 in CiN by 23 Jan.</p> <p>In a staff workshop (30 plus people, when asked if they found the policies and procedures for the practice very clear, clear enough, very unclear the vast majority assessed it as unclear.</p> <p>The process flow as output from this workshops showed various practice problems in the way of speedier response times (including IT issues).</p>
Blockage in Early Help who are unable to take on more cases due to reaching limits on internal contract. Not	Early Help service puts a limit on the amount of work it undertakes. This is internally contracted with inflexible limits of caseload.	Volorgs are experienced and skilled at providing a wide range of early intervention. There is an opportunity to increase value for money and work with more families through a contracted out	<p>Evidence was gathered in interviews with managers.</p> <p>Five of worst performing CCs handed over to Barnardos.</p>

¹⁹ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

²⁰ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

²¹ Source: Objectives & Success Measures v.05 14.01.15 as at 17 Jan

<p>integrated with the Children's Centres. This limit has now (Jan 15) been rescinded.</p>	<p>There is preventative work with families that could be done that is likely to reduce the pressure on the front door.</p>	<p>service that could include all early help and children's centres. Consider outsourcing Early Help and Children's Centres into one arrangement through a Public Sector Partnership Arrangement.</p>	<p>The internal contract sets a minimum standard of work with 400 families but this is being treated as an upper limit.</p>
Workstream 5: Improving Services for Children on the Edge of Care, in Care & Permanence Planning			
<p>Blockage of transfer of cases from CiN to CiC.</p>	<p>CiC managers resist transfer of cases from CiN due to CiC SWs having full caseloads. Cases frequently do not transfer to the CiC team until point of court order or second placement review [7 Jan workshop].</p>	<p>16 and 17 year olds in care who are relatively settled could be managed entirely within the After Care team. These staff are better placed to support and relate well to these young people. This would free up CiC social workers which would, in turn ease pressure on the CiN teams.</p>	<p>Approximately 23% of CiC cases (101 out of 439) are 16 and 17 year olds²². Staff in CiC report that much of their time is spent in dealing with urgent issues arising from older young people diverting them from important issues with younger children, e.g. adoption work. They also report that they do not have the experience or skills to deal with these young people who are a recent addition to their caseloads. (Focus Group CSWMs) Smooth transfer of cases between FR and CiN but CiC managers resist transfer from CiN when caseloads are high.(Focus Group CSWMs)</p>

²² Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

Workstream 6: Improving Tools			
<p>Electronic recording systems do not support tasks or staff well and different systems in use are not integrated.</p> <p>This contributes to some staff being reluctant to engage with the technology available and subsequent time-lags in accurate information.</p>	<p>The lack of integration means that staff at different stages of a child's journey do not have access to all the information that the department holds. Decisions may be reached and actions taken that do not take into account significant, known information.</p> <p>Performance information has to be extracted from these systems and then collated; there is currently no automated system of linking data sets to the scorecard.</p> <p>In some areas there appears to be a reticence to engage with the data and use the outputs in service management and planning²³.</p>	<p>More user friendly ICS would improve efficient use of staff time and improve morale.</p> <p>A single recording system with appropriate access for different staff would reduce the risk of acting on incomplete information.</p> <p>In the short term, data extraction from the three systems needs to be collated so that all three contribute relevant data to the performance scorecard.</p> <p>Continue apace work underway with managers and staff on using the systems technology available and ensuing timely and accurate updating of information.</p> <p>Investigate less labour-intensive means of using data within performance management tools.</p>	<p>The service uses electronic records – Integrated Children's System (ICS) provided by Liquid Logic. The system is time consuming and staff widely report that much of their time is spent in entering repeated information several times to work through the system. Staff working in Early Help do not have access to ICS and record their activity on EIS and After Care staff use SWIFT.</p> <p>The referral for a placement request is made via a word doc which is not automatically populated from the child's electronic record [07 Jan workshop].</p> <p>Example: Unallocated cases.</p> <p>The scorecard has no information in the measure of unallocated cases²⁴. There is no way to recorded unallocated cases on ICS as it stands, these are allocated to managers with an assumption that managers will be aware of the position on these²⁵.</p>

²³ Source: 07.01.15 Discussion with Jo Howe: Lead for development and roll-out of Scorecard and associated measures

²⁴ Source: Children's scorecard v2.1 December as at 17 January 2015

²⁵ Source: 07.01.15 Discussion with Jo Howe: Lead for development and roll-out of Scorecard and associated measures

			There are technical blockages to updating electronic data on cases, for example if one step is not completed the next person cannot update on the system even if work has been done ²⁶ .
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²⁶ Source: feedback from workshop on 7 Jan 2014