



Department
for Education

Implementation evaluation of Slough Children's Services Trust

Final report

July 2018

Kantar Public

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Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). The research team at Kantar Public (formerly TNS BMRB) – Alice Coulter, Kelsey Beninger, Amy Busby, Ali Digby and Sheena Thakrar – would like to thank the team at the Department who have led this research and overseen the production of this report, especially Richard White, Rachel Jones and Sophie Hume-Wright. We would also like to thank those stakeholders at Slough Children’s Services Trust, Slough Borough Council and partner organisations who engaged consistently with the design and delivery of the evaluation, and provided the research team with access to Trust staff, especially Nicola Clemo and Sandra Davies. Our thanks also go to all of the staff and partners who gave up their time to take part in the evaluation.

Glossary of terms

Arvato	Provider of IT and HR services to Slough Borough Council and Slough Children's Services Trust
ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment: social workers who have progressed from the newly qualified social worker position
BSO	Business Support Officer
CAF	Common Assessment Framework: a process of gathering and recording information about a child in the form of a shared assessment, to ensure the child's needs are met
CAFCASS	Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service: promotes the welfare of children and families involved in a family court
Cambridge Education	An organisation which provides education support services to local authorities and others
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: NHS services for young people who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. CAMHS are multi-agency partners working closely with Early Help and children's social care services
CLA	Children Looked After is both a term referring to a child or young person who, for whatever reason, is cared for by a local authority, and a service in the Trust, responsible for children involved in fostering and adoption
CP	Child Protection
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation: the sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities
CSW	Consultant Social Worker
DCS	Director of Children's Services in Slough Borough Council
DfE	Department for Education
EH	Early Help
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation

HR	Human Resources
ICS	Integrated Children's System: the online management and reporting system used by Trust staff to record activities relating to children's social care practice
Innovation Projects	The Department for Education's children's social care innovation programme provides funding for social work agencies to explore ways of supporting children who need help from children's social care services
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officers are based in the Trust and monitor the wellbeing and plans for children in care
LA	Local authority
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children's Board is a statutory body which is independently chaired and consists of senior representatives of all the partner agencies and organisations working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Slough and other local authorities
LDD	Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Worker
SBC	Slough Borough Council
SCST	Slough Children's Services Trust
SEN(D)	Special Educational Needs (and Disability)
Signs of Safety	Signs of Safety is a strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection casework
SMT	Senior Management Team of the Trust
SW	Social Worker
TUPE	"Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006": protects employees' rights when the organisation or service they work for transfers to a new employer
Virtual school	Based in the Trust and gives educational support to all Slough children in care.
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Foreword by Slough Children's Services Trust

Achieving a learning culture has been a key part of the Trust's journey and we have found the evaluation process invaluable during the past two years. The evaluation team made significant efforts to capture the views of many and to listen to different voices. They have followed our journey from a time of difficult and challenging relationships with the Council to the present, where we work well together in children's best interests.

The trust model paved the way in driving our ambition to eradicate poor practice and poor performance with a clear vision set from the outset about what we wanted to achieve for children and families in Slough. The most exciting part of our journey has been the opportunity to be innovative and creative. A belief in the richness of partnerships with other agencies and voluntary organisations has seen exciting partnerships in the community and the development of multiagency and multidisciplinary teams.

The freedom to make swift decisions through our committee and board structure has seen such developments as the Innovation Hub, Pause and Mockingbird and the operating model of our social work delivery 'Safe, Secure and Successful'. Our clinical offer – with clinicians contributing to the decision-making process from the start – has proven hugely successful in helping the whole family improve its relationships and we have seen significant signs of improvement in our services. People now say children are safer in Slough as a result of the Trust.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our workforce, the commitment and strength shown by the leadership team and the passion and energy of Nicola Clemo who was chief executive of the Trust until April 2018.

There is, of course, much more work to be done and this evaluation has put into perspective just how long it realistically takes to embed a new model and deliver sustainable improvements while keeping the 'show on the road'. Most of all, our journey's upward path has been set by the dedication of our staff. We are grateful as well for the quality and the engagement of our partners who are travelling the improvement journey with us. The key lessons identified in the report are, and will be, helpful for the Trust, as I hope they will be helpful to others who are embarking on journeys to transform services.

The Trust is confident that our trajectory of improvement will continue and we look forward to becoming recognised as a model for change and as an example of how to successfully transform services.

Robert Tapsfield

Chair Slough Children's Services Trust

Executive summary

This summary provides an overview of findings from the implementation evaluation of Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST), conducted May 2016 to February 2018. This evaluation explored the journey of change of children's social care in Slough since the establishment of the Trust in October 2015 and provides early evidence of the added value and impact of the Trust's work. Further changes may have been made since the last point of data capture.

Introduction

Concerns were raised about children's services in Slough in 2011, when Ofsted judged Slough Borough Council (SBC) inadequate.¹ An improvement board was appointed and SBC was issued with an Improvement Notice. A peer review of safeguarding carried out in November 2012² and the Department for Education (DfE) reviewed progress in October 2013.³ However a second inadequate rating in 2013 demonstrated that children's services in Slough remained inadequate.⁴ DfE commissioned an independent review in July 2014 and found SBC had not made the necessary improvements required to deliver a safe and high quality service.⁵ In October 2014, the Secretary of State issued a Direction to transfer children's services from SBC to a newly established independent Trust. The Trust went live on 1st October 2015. The Trust represents an innovative approach to delivering children's services and joins only a handful of other authorities who have undertaken a similar transformation. The Trust is still in the early days of operation in Slough.

Methodology

Following the launch, DfE commissioned Kantar Public (formerly TNS BMRB) to carry out an evaluation of the implementation of the Trust model in Slough. The evaluation sought to learn lessons from the implementation of the Trust model, to inform future policy and practice in Slough and elsewhere. The primary aim was to assess:

¹ Ofsted Inspection, April 2011: SBC was judged inadequate for safeguarding arrangements and adequate for looked after children.

² Ibid. p.8.

³ Ibid. p.8.

⁴ A third Ofsted report, published five months after the launch of the Trust in February 2016, also judged delivery inadequate.

⁵ Ofsted Inspection, Feb 2016, p.33.

1. The added value the Trust model provides to children's services in Slough and the implementation of the model. During the latter stages of the evaluation, the emphasis shifted away from the process of implementing a Trust in Slough and focused on two additional research questions:
2. Staff perceptions of the impact of the Trust model on the organisation, management and delivery of children's services; and
3. The impact of the model on outcomes for children's services, as far as possible in the current timescale.⁶

The evaluation involved a longitudinal, mixed method approach, consisting of three data collection phases: 1) a scoping stage (April–May 2016); 2) a first stage of qualitative interviews, confidential online survey and document analysis (May–November 2016); and 3) a second stage repeating the first stage approach (September–December 2017) and including analysis of 44 key performance indicators. In total 112 interviews with the Trust and various stakeholders were achieved and 175 staff completed the wave 1 survey and 193 staff completed the wave 2 survey this (represents a 49% and 54% response respectively). To provide context, we note that while, according to Ofsted, there have been signs of improved outcomes, more time is needed to assess the full impact of the transition to the Trust on outcomes for children and families in Slough (see chapter 1 for more detail about the methodology).

Key findings

These findings are predominately based on the views and perceptions of staff and partner organisations in Slough, and are discussed in the same order as they appear in the remaining sections of this report. They are based on data collected at two time points: July-August 2016 and October-November 2017. It is likely that further progress in each of the areas has been made since.

Design and set up of the new Trust

Further information about all of these findings can be found in chapter 2.

- Since its launch, the Trust has **established a clear vision** for children's services. They have developed a change programme based on four key improvement areas: quality of practice, learning, workforce, and information. The vision for children to be 'safe, secure and successful' was widely recognised by Trust staff and partners (*85% of Trust staff claimed to have a good understanding of the*

⁶ The secondary aims can be found in chapter 1 and the Technical Appendix.

Trust's vision and goals in 2016, and it remained at that level in 2017), although there was less clarity about the Trust's roadmap and how it planned to achieve its vision. Clearer communication may improve staff and partner buy-in. There was a common perception among these staff and partners that the continuous introduction of new initiatives (for example, associated with the leadership's response to Ofsted monitoring visits) could slow progress on achieving the vision and challenge rather than support the effective management and delivery of services.

- SBC and Trust staff and partners described an **early hostile climate and fractured relationship between the Trust and SBC** following the establishment of the Trust. This initially undermined the Trust's progress and smooth transition from SBC. Specific challenges included communication difficulties between the two organisations and lack of access to finance, performance and HR data. However, work on both sides has seen this relationship mature, with the two organisations now sharing a focus on outcomes for children in Slough.
- Trust and SBC staff ascribed some of the initial challenges to their working relationship to **different interpretations of the contract management arrangements**. Disagreements about who was ultimately accountable for the Trust – the Trust, SBC DCS, or DfE – and therefore responsible for failings in the Trust, and who should attend meetings and have access to monitoring information, created inefficiencies and raised questions about the Trust's level of independence from SBC. There have been improvements to governance and the relationship between the Trust and SBC by streamlining governance boards to improve efficiency and working with the new leadership in SBC to reduce tensions in and optimise the commissioner–provider relationship.
- The early experience in Slough provides **lessons for transitions** to trusts more generally, highlighting the importance of: a collaborative relationship between the Trust and LA; the Trust having access to up-to-date HR, budget, and case management data before the transfer; and the Trust having access to business acumen to establish the new organisation (e.g. legal, financial, HR and data management expertise). Having time as a shadow Trust or Board was also thought to be important by senior Trust staff.

Organisation, leadership and culture

Further information about these findings can be found in chapter 3.

- In its first two years, the Trust has made **substantial changes to service organisation, leadership and culture** in order to improve practice. The Trust has strengthened the organisation of services – by introducing a hub model to provide more consistent service and wider professional input into cases. The

reorganisation of services into a hub model and introduction of systemic practice (described in chapter 3 and see Appendix B) were viewed positively at all staff levels in the Trust and were seen to have contributed to a better service; for example, 72% reported improvement to *'direct work with families'* in 2017, compared with 47% in 2016. Staff cited further benefits of the hub model, including: a greater range of professional expertise available to cases, improved team spirit and a more supportive work environment (76% thought specialist staff were available to assist when needed in 2017 compared with 51% in 2016; 83% felt supported in their role in 2017 compared with 79% in 2016). Some challenges associated with the hub model were also reported by staff, including concerns about case transfers, siloed working, caseloads, and variation in roles and practices. Concern was raised about poor handovers when staff left and when cases were transferred between hubs. The Trust should ensure staff are supported to deliver effective handovers, and do these in face to face meetings, where possible. This suggests that continuing ongoing review of the hub model (as the Trust has been doing) is required to support consistently high-quality practice in Slough.

- The Trust has made further improvements and **strengthened the front door**, by improving the assessment and referral process and strengthening staffing of the First Contact service and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Changes to staffing and training in First Contact have improved practice, according to senior Trust staff. Information sharing agreements have been put in place for the MASH. The Trust has improved its timeliness of responding to referrals from 83% to 96%⁷ (Appendix C).
- The Trust has had a **flatter management structure and a new senior management team** (SMT) since its launch – the dynamism and dedication of which were widely admired by staff and partners (67% in 2017 thought *senior strategic leadership* had improved). The Trust has seen a **reduction in strategic bureaucracy** – as the flatter management structure has enabled faster workforce and programme funding decision making.
- Senior Trust staff have championed culture change to a more **open, inclusive and innovative culture** with children at the heart (65% thought *'work culture'* had improved in 2017, compared with 53% in 2016). This new culture is more open to suggestions from all staff, to address what senior staff saw as a hierarchical, bureaucratic, and closed-door culture in SBC. There was a mixed response to this new approach across the service areas, reflecting how long the hubs had been

⁷ Proportion of referrals received in a month where the decision was made and authorised within one working day.

established and the extent to which staff had bought into these ideas, with those in more established hubs being more positive about the changes. The Trust could do more to ensure staff across the organisation understand the ingredients important for supporting buy-in to culture change and that managers are listening and acting upon staff suggestions where relevant, to support culture change.

- Overall, **quality of practice was perceived to vary**, with Trust staff able to identify examples of better practice and areas needing further improvement – suggesting more time and work is needed for these changes to bed in as the Trust continues its journey of improvement. These were also identified in the indicators (Appendix C) and Ofsted Monitoring visit report (Jan 2018).

Developing the workforce in Slough

Further information about these findings can be found in chapter 4.

- The Trust **inherited legacy issues regarding workforce quality**, detailed in the Ofsted reports and acknowledged by senior Trust and SBC staff and partners. Issues included high use of agency staff, high staff turnover, low staff satisfaction and poor performance.
- The Trust has committed substantial resources to **developing its workforce**, in line with the Ofsted improvement plan. It has worked to improve the stability of the workforce, including measures around recruitment (working towards greater permanence and proactively seeking high-quality staff) and retention (working to ‘grow their own’ and develop staff for internal promotions). The vacancy rate of social workers (SWs) has fallen from 45% in 2016 to 30% in 2017, this remains higher than the national rate (17%) and higher than the majority of Slough’s statistical neighbours. The SW turnover rate has fallen from 29% in 2016 to 16% in 2017, this is much closer to the national rate (14%) and ranks around half way compared to Slough’s statistical neighbours. The agency worker rate has fallen from 52% in 2016 to 32% in 2017, this remains higher than the national rate (16%) and higher than the majority of Slough’s statistical neighbours⁸.
- The Trust has also worked to improve staff satisfaction (including greater rewards, recognition and welfare) and the survey showed 59% thought ‘*satisfaction at work*’ had improved in 2017 compared with 43% in 2016. Whilst this shows improvement, the figures indicate further work is required to further improve staff satisfaction to contribute to stability.

⁸ See also SCST – National Indicators 2018.

- The Trust has implemented a suite of **initiatives to improve staff performance**, including increasing the rate of performance management reviews and driving a zero tolerance of poor performance culture, and introducing a range of support initiatives, such as improved supervision, appraisals, and training. The survey showed that 64% thought *'poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Trust'* in 2017 compared with 45% in 2016. Staff suggested that the Trust still has more work to do regarding making time for training, providing management training, and improving the induction process and access to policies and procedures (for example, only 54% had enough time to do training in 2017, although this is an increase from 47% in 2016). Staff generally felt more supported in the Trust than in SBC, but satisfaction was mixed across the services suggesting there is more work to be done to contribute to improving satisfaction and retention.
- Middle management and frontline Trust **staff responded broadly positively** to many of the support initiatives, suggesting ways in which their practice had improved as a result. However, they also suggested progress has been uneven across the organisation, with more time and attention to staff development required in hubs which were established later.

Monitoring and measuring service performance in the Trust

Further information about these findings can be found in chapter 5.

- The Trust started from a **low base regarding performance data**, with Trust staff raising concerns about the availability and reliability of performance data at the point of transfer of services. For example, senior staff reported that some statutory data had not been made available and that poor staff practice and supervision meant that data on recorded activities was often unreliable. None of the staff who had responsibility for performance data were transferred across from SBC, so the Trust had to recruit a new team over a six-month period.
- The Trust has strengthened **performance monitoring and quality assurance** – by improving the collection, analysis and communication of performance data. The Trust employed a data manager and improved data collection processes and quality (for example, the percentage of care leavers with a current Pathway Plan has risen from 56% to 77% between 2015 and 2017⁹). Data sharing has also improved, with a weekly data report going out across the organisation and clearer data provided regularly to monitoring boards. In 2017, 65% thought *'the provision*

⁹ Proportion of care leavers (excluding qualifying) whose Pathway Plan was reviewed within the last six months at month end.

of performance management data to help you do your job' had improved compared with 48% in 2016.

- The Trust has also improved its **quality assurance processes** by establishing a quality assurance framework and case audit programme and improving the independent review process. The Trust has introduced new measures to capture the voice of service users, such as care forums and surveys, although there is more work to do here.
- The Trust has improved the **mechanisms available to listen to the voice of the child** – good work has been initiated in 2017 but this still falls behind some middle managers' expectations, who wanted to see processes embedded (e.g. surveys with children) and SBC's Youth Services leveraged (e.g. the Youth Parliament).
- Senior Trust staff and partners felt that, although more work remains to be done, the Trust was now in a position to use higher-quality performance data to effectively and efficiently drive longer-term strategic and operational decisions.

Working in partnership in Slough

Further information about these findings can be found in chapter 6.

- Partnership working in Slough was widely reported to be **poor under SBC**, undermined by high staff turnover and lack of proactive engagement with agencies and organisations. There was a low level of confidence in the LSCB when the Trust launched, according to senior Trust staff and partners.
- The Trust has improved **strategic partnership working** – through greater visibility and openness from senior Trust staff with partners. The Trust has undertaken numerous initiatives to improve partner relationships and joint working with partner agencies (e.g. improving attendance at strategic meetings). Commitment to strategic partnership working is felt to have improved; 71% said that partnerships had improved in 2017, compared to 50% in 2016. Improvement was linked to improved inter-personal relationships, proactivity and responsiveness, financial commitments to improve partnership working, and a more effective LSCB.
- However, improvements in **partnership working at the frontline** were less evident than at the strategic level, with partners feeling that frontline partnership working could still be improved. Partners felt that staff turnover, although improved, continued to undermine relationship building, as well as variable case notes and handovers, and variation in the quality of communication with SWs. The Trust could improve lines of communication at the operational level (e.g. access to phone numbers) and the quality of case information shared with partners.

Conclusions

Further information about these conclusions can be found in chapter 7.

- Since 2015, the Trust has been on a **journey of improvement** to move service quality forward from a low base. The scope and scale of work needed was substantial, and while significant progress has been made, more work remains to be done. Considerable work has been initiated by the Trust, working with SBC and partner organisations, to strengthen children's services and put the necessary infrastructure, systems, processes, skills, and relationships in place to achieve this – whilst simultaneously continuing to provide children's services in Slough. The leadership of the Trust is also more reflective than SBC about their performance and the challenges the Trust faces and aware that change needs to be implemented - and are widely admired for this by staff and partners.
- Overall, the **implementation journey** to date was described by senior Trust and SBC staff as challenging, but these staff and partners remain optimistic about and committed to bringing about positive change for children in Slough. More time is now needed to assess the full impact of the Trust on longer-term outcomes for children in Slough.
- The Trust has made **strides from a low base** and children are safer than they were as a result of the changes that have been made, according to senior Trust staff. However, overall, quality of social work practice remains inconsistent and the Trust now needs time to bed in the substantial changes it has made and to focus on achieving greater consistency (see Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report, Jan 2018).
- The **Trust model itself was seen to add value** in Slough by providing: a catalyst for change and a break from the past; strong leadership of children's services; and independence and a single focus on children. It was widely believed that these changes would not have been possible under SBC.

Lessons for Trust implementation

- The implementation journey of the Trust in Slough highlights a number of **key lessons for successful implementation** and operation of the Trust model more generally:
 - **Strong organisational leadership** is similarly important, and Trust senior managers should be committed to change, innovation and children's services;
 - **A good relationship between the Trust and LA** staff is essential. The goal should be to engender constructive and collaborative relationships wherever possible and as quickly as possible;
 - **Business infrastructure and acumen** should be in place as early as possible to minimise disruption to service management;

- The Trust, DfE and the LA should work together to establish **realistic expectations** about the pace of change to achieve high-quality practice and avoid creating distraction, excessive pressure, or demotivating staff; and,
- Clear, timely and purposeful **communication with staff and partners** is an important factor to ensure everyone is clear on the vision and what is needed to achieve this.

Chapter 1: Introduction and method

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Kantar Public (formerly TNS BMRB) to undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the Slough Children's Services Trust (the Trust) to ensure that lessons are learned to inform future policy and practice in Slough and elsewhere. This report documents the journey of change of children's services in Slough since the establishment of the Trust on 1st October 2015, and provides early evidence of the impact and added value of the Trust's work with respect to the organisation, management and delivery of services.

Evaluation methodology

Objectives

The **primary objective** of the research was to assess:

- The added value the Trust model provides to children's services in Slough (compared with services at the point of transfer to the Trust);

The **secondary objectives** were to explore:

- factors that have facilitated or hindered implementation, and the response to these
- how services are managed and organised under the Trust
- whether and how the Trust model delivers higher-quality services for children, young people and families
- how the Trust's business support and infrastructure sustains the delivery of high-quality services
- how, if at all, the Trust model facilitates innovative practice
- whether and how the Trust model influences staff morale/satisfaction and recruitment/retention, and whether it helps develop a higher-quality workforce
- whether and how the Trust model develops stronger partner relationships
- lessons learned for the future implementation of Trust arrangements and delivery.

During the latter stages of the evaluation, the emphasis shifted away from the process of implementing a Trust in Slough, and towards providing evidence on perceptions of the added value of the Trust model. For the final phase of fieldwork, the evaluation focused on two additional objectives:

- Staff perceptions of the impact of the transition to the Trust model on the organisation, management and delivery of children's services in Slough;

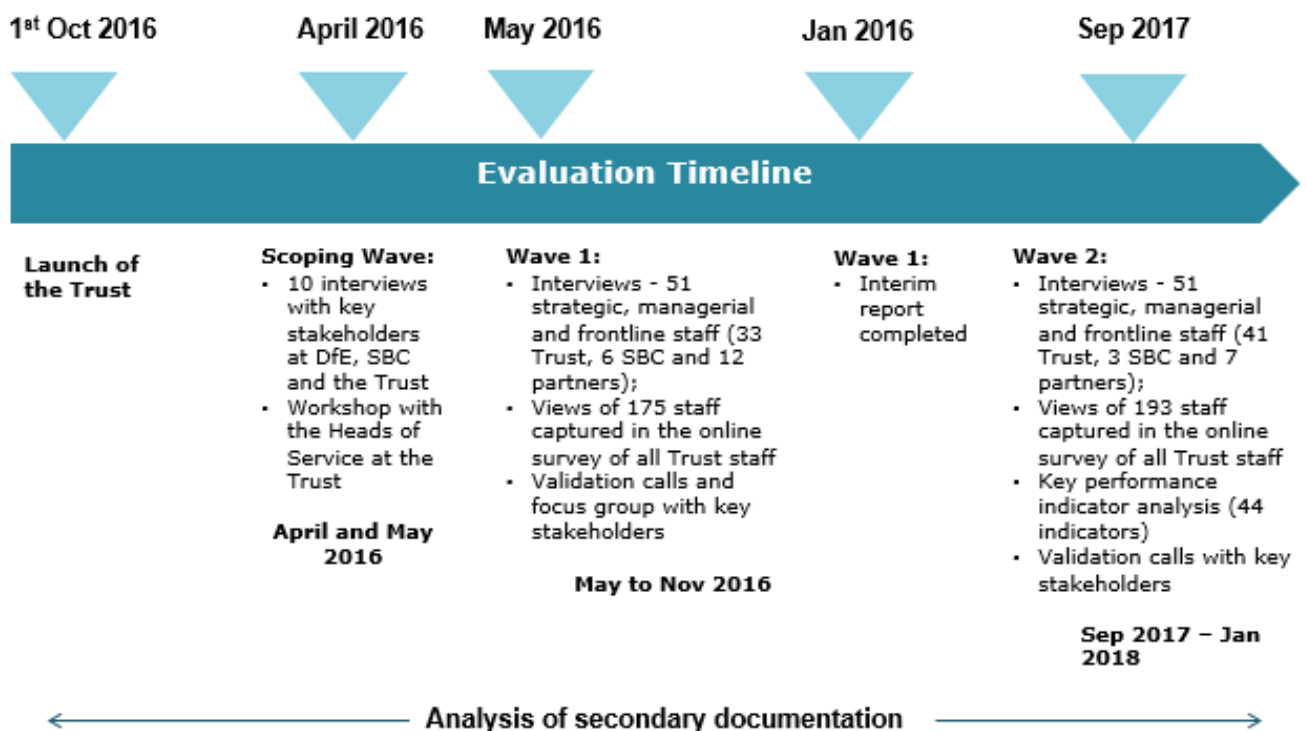
- How the transition to the Trust influenced outcomes for children’s services, as far as possible.

Methodology

An iterative, phased evaluation approach was undertaken in order to support the Trust’s development at regular intervals. Following an initial scoping stage, two waves of fieldwork were conducted between May 2016 and November 2017 in order to capture key developments in practice over time. A combination of methods was used to evaluate the Trust, reflecting the developing needs of the organisation and the aims of the evaluation. The evaluation involved interviews with stakeholders, a range of staff and partners; online staff surveys; desk research; and analysis of key performance indicators. In agreement with the Trust and DfE, qualitative fieldwork focused primarily on Child Protection and Children Looked After (CLA) services. These services were selected to reflect the challenges and shortcomings identified in the previous model of service delivery, as well as the areas in which the Trust anticipates making changes to practice.

Figure 1.1 (below) summarises the key timings, methods and achieved sample for the evaluation.

Figure 1.1 Evaluation approach overview



Qualitative interviews

Between April 2016 and December 2017, Kantar Public conducted a total of 112 interviews with DfE stakeholders, SBC and Trust senior and middle management, and frontline staff and partners. Interviews were conducted individually, in pairs and in small groups of three to five people.

Scoping stage interviews captured the views of senior DfE, SBC and Trust stakeholders about: the decision to create a Trust and the context for the transition; early plans for the Trust; and, expectations of key changes, challenges and facilitators. Wave 1 interviews explored: SBC and Trust staff and partners' experiences of the transition to the Trust; the management and organisation of staff and services under the Trust as compared to SBC; perceptions of early impacts of the Trust and/or expectations of impacts; lessons learned for future implementation; and, expectations of the Trust moving forward. Wave 2 interviews explored key changes to service delivery since Wave 1, including changes to organisational structure, culture, practice, partnership working and, ultimately, the quality of service delivered to children, young people and families.

A breakdown of the achieved qualitative sample for Wave 1 and Wave 2 can be found in the technical report, Appendix 3.

Quantitative surveys

As part of the evaluation, a confidential online survey of Trust staff was conducted in June 2016 (Wave 1) and another was conducted in September 2017 (Wave 2). 175 staff completed the Wave 1 survey and 193 staff completed the Wave 2 survey, with 49% and 54% response rates for each wave respectively.

To ensure the representativeness of the research findings, weights were applied to the Wave 1 and Wave 2 survey data. The weights were designed to ensure that the structure of the responding sample reflected the structure of the actual population of interest. The scheme was designed to (a) up-weight participants with a relatively weaker representation within the participant sample, while (b) down-weighting participants with a relatively stronger representation within the participant sample.

Further details on the analytical approach to the qualitative and quantitative elements of the research can be found in the technical report, Appendix 1.

Indicator analysis

In addition to findings from the qualitative and quantitative elements, the evaluation also drew on key performance indicators identified in collaboration with DfE and the Trust following Wave 1 of the evaluation. The analysis focused on 43 measures relating to seven key areas of practice: contacts, referrals and early intervention; early intervention

and children in need; safeguarding and child protection; CLA; fostering, adoption and permanence; care leavers; workforce and caseload.

Due to issues with data quality and availability, there was limited ability to consistently evidence change pre- and post-Trust, and as a result different time points within and across measures were used. See Appendix C for further information.

Desk Research

Analysis of key documentation was carried out throughout the course of the evaluation. The desk research involved analysis of over 40 documents. These included Ofsted reports, contract-related documents and due diligence reports, Trust and SBC organisational charts, Trust finance reports, audit reports, minutes from key Trust meetings, Trust data reports, and others.

The purpose of the desk research element was to triangulate findings from the qualitative, quantitative and indicator analysis elements of the evaluation, ensuring the findings were robust and grounded on multiple evidence sources.

Ongoing internal reporting

Key learnings from each stage of research activities, the implications of these on how the Trust works, and the wider implications of the Trust's journey for DfE to consider in its work with other local authorities considering the Trust model, were shared with the Trust, SBC and DfE at each stage of fieldwork:

- Summary reports drafted and shared, and revised for accuracy following discussions with stakeholders, from both organisations;
- Early findings presentations delivered, and discussions facilitated about the implications of findings for the design and operation of children's services; and
- Reflection calls with Trust, SBC and DfE stakeholders following the Wave 2 summary of findings and before the drafting of this report, to ensure all perspectives were considered in the development of this report.

Reading this report

This report is intended to provide readers with a sense of the overall implementation journey of the Trust in its first two years of operation. It presents a snapshot in time and predominately captures staff and partner perceptions. The findings presented here are not exhaustive: further, time-bound findings and lessons learned were captured in internal interim reports at each wave of the evaluation and served to aid the Trust and SBC in refining their approach to strengthening services.

The report includes quotes from interview participants. The quotes were chosen to illustrate key points in the text, either because they reflect key findings or because they highlight a particular point. The quotes should not be understood to represent average views. Data quality and availability about service performance under SBC limit our ability to robustly evidence change pre- and post-Trust. The evaluation timescales shape our ability to demonstrate impacts for children and families: many outcomes are expected to take longer than the two years the evaluation ran, especially given the previous long-term and systemic failure to support children.

Comparison of this evaluation with the evaluation of Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST) should be avoided.¹⁰ The evaluation for DCST used a different methodology, where three waves of research were carried out over two and a half years, compared to the two waves conducted in Slough over a period of less than two years. Therefore the opportunity to embed all of the changes made in Slough has not yet been fully realised and the ability to demonstrate impacts is somewhat limited.

Background

History of children's services in Slough

Concerns about the quality of children's services in Slough were raised in 2011, when Ofsted judged SBC's delivery of children's services as inadequate.¹¹ An improvement board was appointed in June 2011¹² and in September 2011 SBC was issued with an Improvement Notice. A peer review of safeguarding carried out in November 2012 found that SBC needed to focus improvement work on social work practice, in particular on its early help pathway and partnership working.¹³ A DfE review of progress in October 2013 identified the main issues affecting the quality of social work practice in Slough as problems with staff recruitment and retention, and working relationships with partner agencies.¹⁴

¹⁰ http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/29558/1/Implementation_evaluation_of_Doncaster_Children_s_Services_Trust.pdf

¹¹ Ofsted Inspection, April 2011: SBC was judged inadequate for safeguarding arrangements and adequate for looked after children.

¹² Membership included an independent chair, leadership from SBC, key partners and DfE. But membership of the board was not stable and changed over time, with some loss of children's services expertise in particular. See Slough Children's Social Care Services: Report to Department for Education, June 2014, pp. 7–8.

¹³ Ibid. p.8.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.8.

A second inadequate rating in 2013 demonstrated that children's services in Slough remained weak.¹⁵ The inspection found that child protection and CLA services were inadequate, SBC's adoption performance and care leavers service required improvement, and leadership, management and governance were also inadequate. Finally, the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) was also deemed inadequate.¹⁶

Following the inspection, DfE commissioned an independent review in July 2014 and found SBC had not made the necessary improvements required to deliver a safe and high quality service.¹⁷ In October 2014, the Secretary of State issued a Direction to transfer children's services from SBC into a newly established independent Trust, and a Commissioner was appointed.¹⁸ The Commissioner's responsibility was twofold: to oversee the establishment of a new organisation to deliver children's services on behalf of SBC, and to oversee improvement to services until that organisation was fully operational.¹⁹

By contracting with the Trust it was understood that SBC would retain legal obligation for statutory duties relating to children's social care. However, it was recognised within the contract that SBC would have 'limited control over how children's social care functions are delivered'.²⁰ As such, it was understood that DfE would have a 'direct relationship' with the Trust to ensure the terms of the contract were met.²¹

In accordance with DfE's Direction, the Trust went live on 1st October 2015. Like other social care providers, the Trust has faced a number of challenges, including high demand on social care, difficulties recruiting and retaining social workers, and the need to ensure financial sustainability of services in times of reduced budgets. In addition, as a proportion of the total population, the number of children aged 0 to 9 living in Slough is higher than the national average. Slough was also found to be one of the most ethnically

¹⁵ A third Ofsted report, published five months after the launch of the Trust in February 2016, also judged delivery inadequate.

¹⁶ Ofsted Inspection, Feb 2013.

¹⁷ Ofsted Inspection, Feb 2016, p.33.

¹⁸ Through the 1st Direction, the Secretary of State directed that a separate organisation should be set up to carry out what will be most of SBC's children's social care services functions; the 2nd Direction required SBC to enter into a legally binding contract for services with the Trust, for the Trust to deliver children's social care functions. Transfer of children's social care services to the Trust – Governance arrangements (SBC Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12/11/15), p3.

¹⁹ Recommendations from Cabinet: Children's Services Contract Appendices A–C.

²⁰ Transfer of children's social care services to the Trust – Governance arrangements (SBC Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12/11/15).

²¹ Recommendations from Cabinet: Children's Services Contract Appendices A–C. p.3.

diverse local authority areas in the UK outside of London, with trends showing a steady rise in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population.²²

Launch of the Trust

The Trust is an independent, not-for-profit company led by a Chair supported by a Chief Executive and Board of local and professional people with relevant professional expertise within the borough. The Board, as a distinct legal entity, is responsible for the sustainability and legality of the Trust. The Trust Board Chair is accountable to and is appointed by the Secretary of State while SBC acts as the local commissioner of the services the Trust delivers with the responsibility of contract management.

The Trust was established to deliver a better service for children and families, with an ambition for future Ofsted inspections to be 'Good' within three years (2018)²³ and 'Outstanding' within five years (2020).²⁴

As of 1st October 2015 the Trust became responsible for²⁵:

- 123 permanent staff
- 101 agency staff
- 1,500 social care cases
- nearly 1,000 Special Educational Needs (SEN) cases (see Appendix E for a full list of services that transferred to the Trust)

Discussions were held between senior Trust and SBC staff over the summer of 2016 about the transfer of additional services to the Trust – in particular those provided by the education support organisation, Cambridge Education.²⁶ After summer 2016, it was decided that these additional services would not be transferred to the Trust. It was also decided at this time that SEND would return to SBC given the broader remit of this function beyond children's social care.

²² 'The Slough Story', SBC, March 2016

²³ September 2018, though given expected timings of Ofsted Single Inspection Framework this is anticipated to be in July.

²⁴ September 2020

²⁵ See Appendix E for more detail on the services which transferred.

²⁶ SBC appointed Cambridge Education to provide education support services, initially for three years commencing on 30th September 2013. These services included the monitoring of and challenge to schools and some academies and intervention in maintained schools. They also included running Slough's 10 children's centres which provide child care and family services, among other responsibilities.

Chapter 2: Design and set up of the new Trust

Contractual management

The Trust's formal standards and monitoring arrangements were outlined in its service contract with SBC. This included expectations for monitoring the contract between SBC and the Trust, with agreed regular performance reports for key measures;²⁷ although specific KPI measures were not agreed until after the Trust went live (and indeed the Trust Board was established after the go-live date). The contract specified four objectives for the governance of the Trust: accountability to SBC through performance monitoring; partnership working with other relevant bodies; joint working on functions retained by SBC; and special joint working with Cambridge Education²⁸ to provide seamless delivery of services. The accountability arrangements to meet these objectives were laid out in Schedule 15 of the contract.²⁹

A key challenge for the Trust and SBC was different interpretations of the contract management arrangements. Differing views about which bodies were involved in the Trust's governance arrangements prompted questions around which of the bodies should take precedence, resulting in a lack of clarity about ultimate accountability and responsibility. The service delivery contract outlines the three elements listed in the previous section as constituting the Trust's governance arrangements. However, when participants were asked to give an overview of the Trust's governance arrangements they also tended to include a range of additional bodies.³⁰

Contrary and sometimes conflicting views were expressed about who was, and should be, monitoring the progress of the Trust and who was accountable for success and any failures in the Trust. This led to distraction from progress on the Trust's strategic priorities. Interpretations differed regarding who was ultimately accountable (for example, if a child goes missing or dies). Accountability was seen by different participants to lie with the Trust's Board, SBC and the Director of Children's Services (DCS), SBC lead

²⁷ There were 44 KPIs listed in the contract which related to the following practice areas: safeguarding and child in need; CLA; Fostering; Care leavers; Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) and SEN; Workforce (See Appendix G for a complete list of contractual KPIs).

²⁸ Cambridge Education provides technical support and project management to implement and improve education at school, regional and national level. Their work ranges from education evaluation to school, local authority, and central government transformation.

²⁹ These included the following processes and newly established bodies: (1) Strategic Monitoring Board; (2) Partnership Board; and (3) Trust participation in SBC's democratic processes by; attending the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and SBC Council meeting, for accountability purposes.

³⁰ These included the Trust's Board (and subcommittees including quality and innovation), Corporate Parenting Panel, LSCB, Ofsted (through monitoring of the Improvement Plan) and DfE (with the power to intervene).

member for Children's Services, Ofsted, and the Secretary of State and DfE as they gave the direction for the Trust and appointed the Children's Services Commissioner. Questions were also raised about the difference between accountability and responsibility in the Trust model, and which bodies were accountable as well as responsible.

The different interpretations of governance arrangements resulted in a number of issues. Partners questioned who from the Trust or SBC was the most appropriate person to attend various contract management and governance meetings, particularly SBC's scrutiny committee. The DCS was seen by some as the most appropriate person to attend (because the contract is with SBC), whilst others viewed the most appropriate person to be the Trust's Chief Executive (who would be more able to answer questions). These discussions raised questions about the role of the DCS in a Trust model and their role in relation to a Trust Chief Executive.

*"While there's a model that's being imposed by the Secretary of State, which says the statutory duty will remain with the Council ... and when the Council doesn't have the levers to monitor some of that, I think the model itself is problematic."
(SBC, Strategic, Wave 1)*

*"When I've been trying to request that data [on KPIs], there is a view that I shouldn't even be asking for that information."
(SBC, Strategic, Wave 1)*

A perceived complexity and lack of clarity regarding the contractual arrangements also led to inefficiencies in the use of staff time: for example, multiple reports being prepared by partners and Trust staff for different audiences (such as for the Trust Board and SBC Scrutiny Committee). Partners were also unsure which organisation – SBC or the Trust – was responsible for different children's services and who to contact with queries. As a result, children's services were seen by some strategic partners as complex, and the Trust as a 'multi-headed' organisation.

The independence afforded to the Trust as a separate organisation from SBC was seen as an advantage and able to provide an opportunity to break from previous systemic failings. Yet, the accountability arrangements raised questions about the extent of its independence in the first year of the Trust's existence. For example, in the summer of 2016, a Trust middle manager said the Trust's 'ability to call its own shots' was limited by the need to report, in high levels of detail, on contractual KPI's. Senior Trust managers also raised questions about how truly independent the Trust is from DfE. However by autumn of 2017, senior leadership in both the Trust and SBC acknowledged the initial contract was established in a 'hostile climate' and that it was no longer fit for purpose following the maturing relationship between the organisations. The contract management was described as 'informal' by senior leaders in autumn 2017, and was viewed to be

working because of a positive working relationship rather than due to the relevance or clarity of the contract. It was under review at the time of reporting, with the support of a technical advisor provided by DfE. Both organisations expected the revised contract to better reflect the state of play between SBC and the Trust.

Developing a Commissioner–Provider relationship

Challenges to the relationship between SBC and the Trust – which was widely described as tense, and by some senior Trust staff as ‘dysfunctional’ – undermined the Trust’s establishment and smooth transition. These included: tensions driven by lack of communication in the relationship with the contractor (who conducted a due diligence exercise) during the establishment of the Trust; a tense relationship and challenging communication between SBC and the Trust during the establishment and transition; lack of reliable information from SBC about current performance, service budgets and staff numbers to be transferred during the establishment and transition; limited ongoing support after the establishment of the Trust with the legal and financial aspects of setting up a new ‘start-up’ business; and difficulties with inherited business infrastructure and physical space (there was not enough space for desks for the transferred staff) during the transition.

The relationship between SBC and the Trust has since strengthened and become more collaborative following a change in SBC leadership – notably after the appointment of a new strategic director of children, learning and skills in spring 2017 – and with input from interim senior SBC staff. By autumn 2017, senior Trust staff reported that the SBC leadership showed a ‘genuine’ commitment to children and appreciated their efforts. This was reportedly evidenced by SBC’s attendance at meetings (e.g. Joint Parenting Board meetings), active participation in strategic and improvement boards, an increase in individual financial contributions to the Trust’s budget (rather than the baseline budget), and the more professional tone of discussions from spring 2017 between SBC’s strategic director of children, learning and skills and the Trust’s Chief Executive.

"Relationship with SBC and [the] Trust is more effective than when it was an internal Children's Services – which operated in a silo." (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 1)

Staff understanding of the Trust’s strategic priorities

Soon after its launch, the Trust established a vision for the future of children’s services in Slough: ‘Ensuring children in Slough are safe, secure and successful’.³¹ In order to

³¹ SCST Vision ‘Ensuring children in Slough are safe, secure and successful’

achieve this aim, the Trust developed a programme of change based on four key improvement areas: improving quality of practice, improving learning, improving workforce, and improving information.

The Trust undertook a wide range of activities across these four improvement areas in its first year in operation³². These and other activities were outlined in the Trust's 2016 Annual Report.³³ The Trust's leadership is now looking ahead to support the financial and operational sustainability of the Trust beyond 2020.³⁴

In the Trust's first year, a high proportion of Trust staff (85%) claimed that they *have a good understanding of the vision and goals of the Trust*. Middle management and frontline staff were generally aware of the vision statement and able to report it to researchers. During interviews with frontline and middle management staff, this clarity of purpose was associated with stronger optimism about delivering a better service than had been the case under SBC.

"[The] senior management team has a clearer vision; individuals at that level are more accessible and make clearer decisions." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

"You know exactly what the expectation of service delivery is, we know exactly what our priority is." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

The same level of understanding was reflected in the autumn 2017 survey findings, where 85% of Trust staff claimed to have *a good understanding of the Trust's vision and goals*. Additionally, in 2017, senior Trust staff and partners reported that the Trust's single focus on children was an important part of the model's added value, by encouraging staff to focus on children's services and the vision, rather than being distracted by other policy issues. Frontline and middle management staff, particularly in Child Protection (CP), reported a team spirit and a sense of unified purpose within the Trust. This was reflected in increased staff willingness to pick up additional work from colleagues.³⁵

³² Including: conducting a baseline audit of service delivery in the first three weeks to identify areas for improvement; introducing a long-term Quality Assurance Framework (QAF); implementing the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); introducing a new social work model based on systemic practice (the 'Hub' model); appointing a 'complaints' manager and revising and relaunching complaints procedures; and developing a Behaviour Framework to set clear expectations of staff behaviour.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ SCST Annual Report Summary 2015–2016.

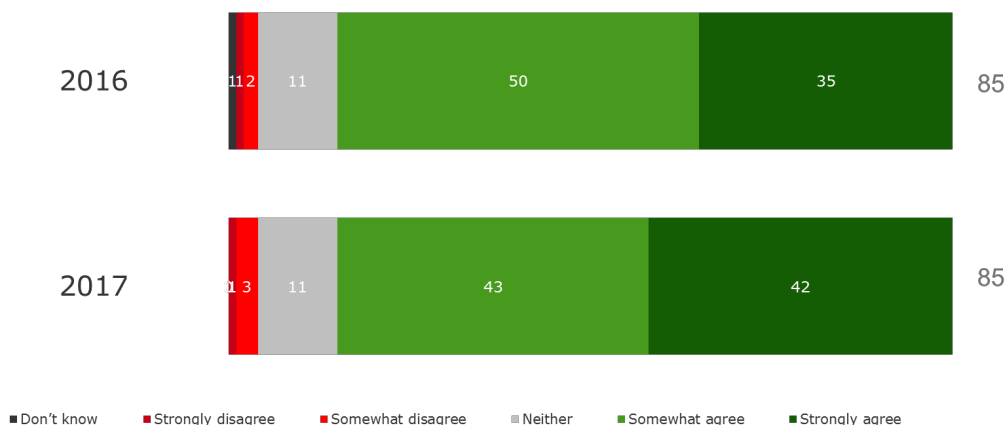
³⁵ High levels of team spirit reported by frontline staff in CP relative to other areas may be attributed in part to the fact that the CP's hubs were the first to be established in the Trust and therefore CP staff have been afforded the time to become familiar with ways of working within their teams.

Figure 2.1 Vision and goals of the Trust

Communication and involvement in decision making

I have a good understanding of the vision and goals of the Trust

Net agree



Q009: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I have a good understanding of the vision and goals of the Trust

Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

While the Trust’s vision was widely recognised throughout the evaluation, some operational staff and partners were less clear about how the Trust would achieve that vision (at both evaluation time points – in summer 2016 and autumn 2017). The perception among these staff and partners was that the continuous introduction of new initiatives, seen as in the leadership’s response to Ofsted monitoring visits, could slow the process of existing initiatives ‘bedding in’ and tended to challenge rather than support the effective management and delivery of services. Analysis of the feedback from staff across the Trust suggests that the organisation would benefit from focusing on achieving its vision, rather than making further changes reactively to arising operational challenges and Ofsted reports. Staff from across the Trust, and particularly senior Trust staff, reported that they felt that there had been a high level of inspection and scrutiny of the service since the establishment of the Trust and that preparation for, participation in, and reflection on these exercises (including by Ofsted) was a distraction from focusing on driving improvement in Slough. Senior Trust staff also reported that the organisation faces extra layers of regulation and inspection, due to its status as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) and use of these alternative delivery models, which other inadequate children’s services do not face, and that this has placed further burden on the organisation.

Lessons learned from establishing a Trust in Slough

The journey of establishing a Trust in Slough was described by senior Trust and SBC staff as ‘challenging’. Substantial changes were made affecting infrastructure, systems and processes with the aim of strengthening children’s services. Trust and SBC staff and

partners broadly agreed that substantial change was necessary, given the entrenched poor performance of children's services under SBC.

"On reflection a lot has changed that needed to change." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

With hindsight, staff at the Trust highlighted a number of issues which were believed to have negatively affected the transition to the Trust in its early months. These issues meant that the transition was not as smooth as it could have been and, for some, felt 'frantic' and 'chaotic'.

The Trust and SBC relationship

A positive and constructive relationship is key to a smooth transition. The transition took place within a complicated and politicised context. Senior Trust and SBC staff, as well as some LSCB partners, worked hard to move the transition forward and establish the necessary foundations from which improvements to service delivery could emerge. However, senior staff in the Trust and SBC (as well as partners) also reported tensions between the two organisations during the establishment and transition to the Trust. This was, on reflection, thought to have slowed progress in establishing the Trust and moving forward on priorities. The 'us-versus-them' mentality reported by some was also described by Trust staff as having contributed to divisions within the existing Trust workforce.

"I still feel there's a lot of negativity that went on before and we still are those SWs that were there before." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

"Even with the good relationship I have with the Trust, there's still an 'us and them' when people want there to be." (SBC, Middle management, Wave 1)

Access to information and data

Access to financial, HR and performance data before the transition helps to ensure a smoother process. The effective transfer of accurate service budgets, staffing numbers, and performance data from SBC, would have enabled the Trust to make quicker progress in establishing financial, staffing and performance decisions and plans early on. Senior Trust staff reported that some of this information was not available and questioned the accuracy of what had been provided. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

"I was completely shocked and overwhelmed by the lack of information and the challenge that posed for us to try and robustly understand what we were inheriting." (Trust, Strategic, Wave 1)

Access to business acumen

The lack of necessary business, financial and legal support and advice to set up a 'start-up' style business distracted senior staff from other priorities early on. Senior staff commented that they lacked sufficient support and capacity in terms of business, legal and financial resource after the establishment of the Trust. They commented that while lawyers were engaged during transition, and financial advice was available, these resources were not present following the launch of the Trust. A senior manager at the Trust, for example, commented that the Trust would have benefitted from infrastructure such as consistent financial expertise to establish transparent budgets, and to manage these more effectively after the launch. This suggests greater support on these areas may be required from DfE or via funding directly to the organisations in the future.

"The Trust did not have the infrastructure to deal with those [budget holding] responsibilities." (Trust, Strategic, Wave 1)

Set up of business infrastructure

Clarity is also required about infrastructure and premises to ensure a smooth transition. The Trust faced a number of challenges relating to physical and IT infrastructure during the transition. The contract stipulated that the Trust would inherit SBC's long-term contract with Arvato, an IT solutions provider, yet staff claimed that this service did not meet the needs of the organisation at go-live. In summer 2016, under half (49%) of staff agreed that the *IT systems and software support me to do my job*. Senior and middle management staff reported instances where IT was insufficient to meet their needs and prohibited progress on objectives (e.g. submitting statutory data to DfE on schedule).

"IT systems need to better support workers to do their jobs. The office space is not fit for purpose – we need a bigger space that can accommodate more workers and have more toilets, printers, etc." (Staff survey, Open Q14, Wave 1)

However by the autumn 2017 more staff (63%) agreed that the IT systems and software support me to do my job. Similarly, in the autumn 2017 68% of staff agreed that the physical environment in my offices is appropriate for the work I do (compared to under half (49%) in summer 2016) and across the survey waves more staff agreed that I have the right tools and resources to effectively do my job (53% in summer 2016 and 67% in autumn 2017).

Communication

Clear and regular communication with staff during the transition is important for a smooth transition. Despite the challenges faced, the change management approach adopted by the Trust's senior management team, including internal communication and staff engagement events prior to transition, was generally valued by staff and seen to be informative, inclusive and to support the transition. In particular, staff spoke positively

about engagement workshops in which the Trust's Chief Executive offered staff the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about the transition, and provided information about the changes coming.

"[The Trust] invited staff to be part of that experience ... it was very inclusive of staff at all levels." (Trust, Middle management, Wave 1)

Key Findings

- Since its launch, the Trust has established a clear vision for children's services which was widely recognised by Trust staff and partners, although there was less clarity about the Trust's roadmap and how it planned to achieve its vision. Clearer communication may improve staff and partner buy-in.
- SBC and Trust staff and partners described a dysfunctional relationship between the Trust and SBC following the establishment of the Trust. These relationship challenges initially undermined the Trust's progress and smooth transition from SBC. However, work on both sides has seen this relationship mature, with the two organisations now sharing a focus on outcomes for children in Slough.
- The Trust's formal monitoring arrangements were outlined in its service contract with SBC and its accountability arrangements meet the objectives laid out in the contract. Trust and SBC staff described initial challenges to their working relationship due to different interpretations of the contract management arrangements regarding who was ultimately accountable for the Trust.
- Lessons about how to ensure a smooth transition to a Trust model include the importance of: a collaborative relationship between the Trust and LA; the Trust having access to up-to-date HR, budget, and case management data and relevant personnel before the transfer; and the Trust having access to business acumen to establish the new organisation (e.g. legal, financial, HR and data management expertise).

Chapter 3: Organisation, leadership and culture

Organisational changes

The hub model and systemic working

In 2015, 19 services moved from SBC to the Trust (Appendix E). The Trust has made significant changes to its organisational structure (diagrams for these can be found in Appendix B). The structural change is outlined in chapter 1.

Progress and improvements

The Trust introduced the hub model and systemic working in Slough (see Appendix B).³⁶ The aim was to improve practice and deliver a more consistent, family-centred and higher-quality service to children, according to senior Trust staff.³⁷ At the time of writing, the hubs were all live and groupings have evolved iteratively since 2016 and throughout 2017 (Appendix B).³⁸ All levels of staff reported that these changes would help to improve practice. They identified areas of improved practice and suggested areas for further improvement, indicating that quality of practice across the organisation remains patchy. The January 2018 Ofsted report also found ‘variability in practice’ and the indicator analysis also presents a mixed picture (Appendix C): for example timeliness of responding to referrals has improved from 83% to 96% between 2015 and 2017³⁹ but repeat referrals have increased from 17% to 19% 2015 to 2017 (although this could be due to legacy issues).⁴⁰

“We are seeing some really good pockets of practice, and again, certainly through the audit programme, I see a lot of good work. But, I think that’s going to be tempered somewhat by the fact that there are some areas that still aren’t doing as well as they could be.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

The change to the hub model and systemic approach was generally viewed as a positive development by frontline and middle management staff. The indicators show some

³⁶ See <http://www.scstrust.co.uk/what-we-do/our-social-work-model> and organigrams in Appendix B.

³⁷ The Trust’s 2nd year summary provides an overview of its work to improve the quality of children’s service (SCST Our Second Year: A summary of our achievements: October 2016 – October 2017).

³⁸ SCST Our Second Year: A summary of our achievements: October 2016 – October 2017.

³⁹ Proportion of referrals received in month where the decision was made and authorised within one working day.

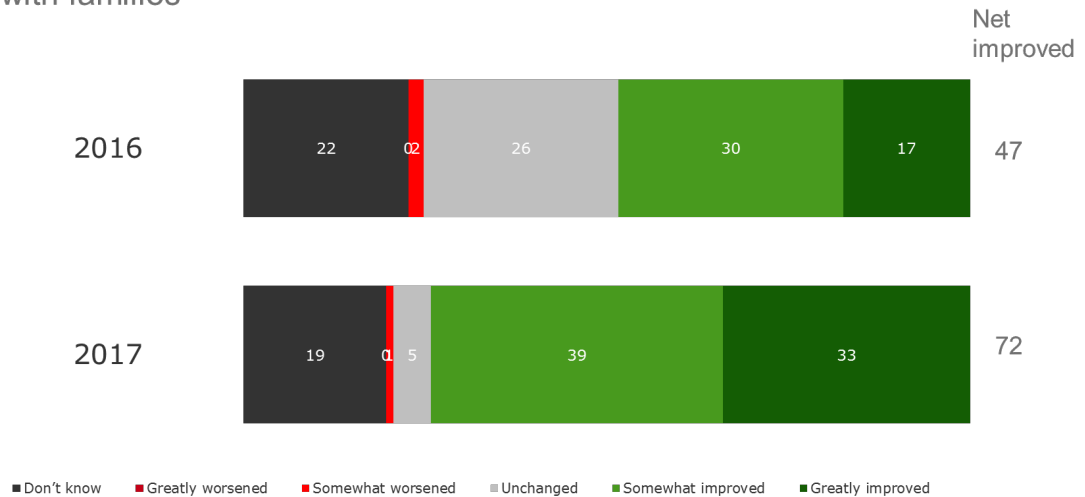
⁴⁰ Proportion of referrals in month that were repeat referrals (within 12 months of previous referral).

improvements such as a reduction in the number of children subject to a child in need plan for over 12 months from 154 to 144 between 2015 and 2017⁴¹ (Appendix C).

Figure 3.1 Direct work with families

Reflection on the establishment of the Trust

Direct work with families



Q012: Since the establishment of the Trust, what change have you seen in each of the following areas? Direct work with families

Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base All staff members (193)

These changes were seen to contribute to improved direct work with families: 72% reported improvement to ‘direct work with families’ in 2017, compared with 47% in 2016 (see Figure 3.1 below). The hub model was seen to provide a more consistent service to families because shared accountability and increased case information sharing in the weekly hub meetings enabled SWs to cover each other’s cases (e.g. when a SW is busy, travelling or on holiday). The hub model also meant there was greater availability of support to families and partners, because they can contact any SW or the hub coordinators who are able to provide some case information. The hub coordinators were positive about their ability to help address queries with knowledge gained in the hub meetings, and build relationships with families as a consistently available point of contact. Partners also reported receiving a better service from the hubs when contacting the Trust about cases.

“It has really positive impacts for families, because it means that if a worker’s in court or unwell or something, we’re able to pick up something or support them, as we already know their cases.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

⁴¹ Number of children subject to a child in need plan at month end where that plan had been ongoing for 12 months or more.

“[Before the hub model], we just didn’t know who to go to, we couldn’t get hold of the allocated SW for a case. My team really didn’t know who to speak to about the issue, it was a real struggle to get information.” (Partner, Wave 2)

The hub model was also reported to be improving direct work with families by increasing the amount of contact time with them. The Business Support Officers (BSOs) and hub coordinators have taken over some administrative tasks from SWs (e.g. booking meetings, rooms, travel, interpreters and fielding phone calls), freeing them up to focus on and spend more time with families. There is an aspiration within the Trust to improve this further: currently only 53% agree they ‘*have sufficient time to effectively do my job*’ (with no change from 52% in 2016) and this is lower, at 44%, among SWs – suggesting there is more work to be done.

“[Hub coordinators] are the ones that will deal with, for a lack of a better word, the menial, day-to-day tasks. When [SWs] are out, we are the home base; we are the mother-ship. Without us, you will see cracks.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

“Hub coordinators support which is very much needed due to the busy nature of our work and also when out in the community doing visits/review meetings, etc.” (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 2).

The hub model has enabled wider professional input into cases, through the weekly two/three hour hub meetings and introduction of clinicians. The weekly hub meetings were looked forward to and seen as an opportunity to share challenges and solutions, gain wider input into cases from a range of professionals, and to improve oversight of cases. SWs were seen to be less isolated in this model and this shared approach was understood to create a greater level of accountability for cases.

“One of the SWs, she had a case and she couldn’t wait to take it into the hub meeting so she’d get everybody’s views on it.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

“The way the hub model works is because we’re doing systemic practice, we’re all pretty much on the same page. We’re all very accountable for each other as well, and I think that’s really positive.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

The hub clinician role was seen to provide easier access to these professionals and supported SWs in accessing health and CAMHS services. More staff now think ‘*specialist staff are available to assist when I need them*’: 76% in 2017 compared with 51% in 2016.

“Without the clinician being part of that [joined up piece of work], I would have struggled. I would have carried on fighting but I would have struggled because I don’t know health and their processes like he did.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

The hub model, supported and complemented by systemic working, has resulted in a more holistic approach. The family is approached as a unit (e.g. through use of genograms) and SWs draw on a range of support and experience from colleagues in the hub, ensuring the family is at the centre of the work. The provision of systemic and Signs of Safety training, which has been crucial to the development of this approach, was regarded highly by frontline staff.

The hub model, along with the Trust's single focus on children, was seen to be creating a better team spirit and more supportive work environment within the Trust. Frontline staff said that the hubs were creating their own team spirits and that staff were willing to go the extra mile to pick up extra work from each other in a more agile manner than under SBC: 90% said they *'feel part of a team'* (a rise from 80% in 2016) and 83% feel *'supported in their role'* (79% in 2016).

Opportunities for further improvement

Some challenges associated with the hub model were reported by frontline and middle management staff.

Transferring cases between hubs during the child's journey, resulting in children experiencing a greater number of SWs, was raised as a concern by frontline staff and middle managers. This could lead to case drift and loss of trust of the child, particularly if the problem was exacerbated by poor record keeping. This suggests that further clarity is required regarding the case transfer process and how this challenge will be addressed.

Concern was expressed that the hub model could contribute to an increase in siloed working by frontline staff (e.g. lack of knowledge about cases and practice in other hubs and the case transfer process) which could affect quality of practice when cases transfer. In 2017, 40% thought *'different teams within the organisation do not share information well'* – suggesting there is considerable room for improvement (although this had fallen from 51% in 2016). Greater management consistency and information sharing between hub managers may help to address this issue and improve handovers.

"I don't feel the LAC works in perfect synergy with the CP hubs. I'll hold my hands up; I don't even speak to their hub coordinators." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

Uneven case distribution between the hubs was raised as a concern by middle managers, particularly regarding the new Enhanced CP hubs. This suggested the Trust should review the distribution of caseloads or increase appointments to particular hubs. Since data collection, the Trust has reviewed caseloads and provided further data suggesting caseloads have become more even (Appendix F). However, this risk was also raised in the January 2018 Ofsted report which found disparities and a small number of

SWs holding 30+ caseloads.⁴² The indicators show that the average number of cases per qualified SW at year end had risen from 8.5 to 13.2 between 2015 and 2017 (Appendix C).

Some concerns were raised in the qualitative interviews about variation in practice and roles across the different hubs. Frontline and middle management staff identified variation in the quality of weekly hub meetings. In some meetings there was a lack of note-taking and action points being derived, which suggests further guidance about the structure and expectations for these meetings would help to maximise their effectiveness. Managers in particular may require further support regarding how to run these meetings. Follow-up discussions with senior managers suggested this is an area the Trust has sought to improve by providing further guidance.

“I haven’t seen a plan coming out of the hub meeting.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

“So, I’ve been to three hub meetings, and there was no structure to any of them; it’s just a free-for-all chinwag.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

Lack of clarity regarding the difference between the BSO and hub coordinator roles was identified as leading to confusion and duplication, suggesting greater clarity around these roles is required to support efficiencies. However, these staff and senior Trust staff reported that they were working together to develop the scope and remit of these new roles in an iterative manner.

“We’re yet to properly define the role of the hub coordinator, and I think that’s a specialist role that hasn’t yet been properly defined, because it sits somewhere between a SW and a very capable administrator.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

The hub model was also seen as placing high dependency on consultant social workers (CSWs), which may present risks regarding the number of cases they are expected to oversee and the knowledge and skill gap created when these key staff leave the organisation. This is an area which the Trust will need to risk manage – particularly with regards to caseloads per hub, recruitment strategies for these roles, and cover for CSWs during periods of leave – to ensure consistently high-quality management oversight is provided.

This suggests that continuing ongoing review of the implementation of the model is required to support consistently high-quality practice and that time is needed for the new model to bed in. For example, the indicators show that the rate of children subject to a

⁴² Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report (Jan 2018).

CP Plan visited in the last 2 weeks has fallen from 90% to 83% 2015 to 2017.⁴³ Senior Trust staff reported that the model is regularly reviewed.

Other noteworthy structural changes

Two further organisational changes stood out from the qualitative interviews as having had a notable impact on service delivery improve the safety of the front door: changes to First Contact and MASH.⁴⁴ Senior Trust staff also reported ongoing concern about universal and preventative services in SBC and that slow development and lack of progress with these was having a negative impact on demand management and the Trust and its ability to provide high quality children's services, due to an unnecessarily high level of referrals into statutory social care. This places particular burden on the Trust's front door. The indicator analysis shows that the number of referrals in the year ending March 31 has increased from 2,282 to 5,688 between 2015 and 2017⁴⁵ and that the rate of referrals per 10,000 children aged under 18 in the year ending March 31 has increased from 572 to 1,373 between 2015 and 2017 (see Appendix C).

The way in which cases are assessed in the Trust was reported to have improved due to changes made to improve the safety of the front door, according to senior and middle management Trust staff and partners. The Indicator Analysis found that the proportion of referrals received in a month where a decision was made and authorised within 1 working day, improved from 83% to 96%, 2015–2017 (Appendix C). This was an area which was identified to be a high risk at the point of transfer, and senior Trust staff acted quickly to address the danger presented. Issues identified by Ofsted and the Trust's baseline exercise included a lack of clarity around threshold criteria and poor application in referrals, poor quality assessments, and a lack of and confusion about the MASH. The implications were that the Trust was seen to have inherited a 'dangerous' front door (according to a senior Trust manager) and unnecessarily high referrals into statutory social care.

“The front door in my opinion and my experience was dangerous, the Trust senior managers knew that and had had a diagnostic completed and knew things needed to change.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 1)

⁴³ Child protection plans, active for two weeks or more at month end, where child was visited and seen in last 10 working days of month.

⁴⁴ First Contact is where cases are initially assessed and MASH is the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub where agencies come together to work in partnership on individual cases.

⁴⁵ This year Slough included all contacts the Trust received in the year irrespective of whether or not they led to a referral being opened. This has significantly increased their number of referrals.

The Trust took immediate action in 2015 after its review which included: employing a change manager; moving staff to the Trust building; clarifying the purposes of and difference between First Contact and the MASH; reviewing the use of the threshold guidance; assessing staff and making redundancies where required; and providing training on thresholds and Signs of Safety. The indicators show that timeliness of responding to referrals has improved from 83% to 96% between 2015 and 2017⁴⁶ (Appendix C).

Whilst good progress has been made in First Contact, the qualitative interviews found that there was a lack of understanding among other frontline staff and partners as to how cases are assessed and assigned to different hubs. These staff are less able therefore to challenge allocation decisions. This suggests there is a need for improved communication about processes used in First Contact to partners and staff in the other hubs.

Development of the MASH is in its early stages in Slough and, because of this, it has a less prominent role compared to other LAs: 44 contacts were converted to MASH in January 2018, a rise from 24 in December 2017 but still a small proportion of cases. It is also a hybrid model due to wider trends regarding the MASH in Berkshire where discussions about how MASH's should operate are on-going. Health, probation, the police, health visiting and adult safeguarding are reported to be playing a major role.⁴⁷

A lack of clarity about the role and functioning of the MASH among frontline staff in the Trust emerged in 2017 and partners wanted more information about improvement plans. There was a view among senior Trust staff and partners that the MASH should be located in the Trust rather than the police station. It may be helpful for senior Trust staff to provide more information to staff and partners about the role and operation of the MASH and future plans for this structure.⁴⁸

"I would like to see the MASH progress further with more agencies sitting in MASH and more structured case discussions between partner agencies." (Staff survey, Open Q16, Wave 2)

"I'm not confident – and this has been reflected as well on sort of comments that our Police and Crime Commissioner has provided on visits – that we have complete buy-in from the Trust for the MASH in Slough." (Partner, Wave 2)

⁴⁶ Proportion of referrals received in a month where the decision was made and authorised within one working day.

⁴⁷ See Slough MASH Performance Report (January 2018).

⁴⁸ The current communication approach is outlined in the Trust's *Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub: Communication strategy and plan*.

There were some signs of improved partner working in 2016 after early improvements to the MASH were made: the Trust employed a change manager who successfully oversaw gaining involvement of partners in MASH meetings and putting in place information sharing agreements. Conversations are now ongoing about Slough joining with other local MASHs in the area and Senior Trust staff expressed a desire for there to be more joint case working with partners rather than single agency investigations.

Leadership and culture change

Leadership

Leadership of children's services in SBC was generally regarded as 'hierarchical' and 'inaccessible' by Trust staff and partners. Strong, focused, and effective senior leadership in the Trust was seen to be an improvement from the leadership experienced in SBC, according to some Trust staff with experience of working in SBC.

A new SMT and leadership structure was put in place when the Trust was established in 2015 (Appendix B). The SMT was widely viewed by staff at all levels and by partners to be assertive, dynamic, and driving change to improve the quality of practice and service delivery to children and families. Strong leadership – committed to (structural, cultural and practice) change and innovation and dedicated solely to the improvement of children's services – emerged as a key factor in driving effective change in this new model for children's services. This reflects findings from other evaluations in the sector.⁴⁹

The Trust's SMT was widely respected by Trust staff at all levels and partners and perceived to be providing a clear vision: 67% think '*senior strategic leadership*' has improved; 74% think '*strategic vision of children's services*' has improved⁵⁰; and 85% have a *good understanding of the vision and goals of the Trust* (see chapter 2). Trust staff also valued steps taken by the SMT to consult them on developments during the transition, reporting that they felt their voice had been listened to.

"Senior management did listen to the views of the workers when they were discussing merging two different parts of our service together. It was a pleasant surprise (from the old SBC attitude) to hear that our views had both been considered and recognised." (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 1)

"The change in way I carry out my role has been very positive. I feel more engaged and clear about the purpose of my role and indeed more supported. I am

⁴⁹ http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/29558/1/Implementation_evaluation_of_Doncaster_Children_s_Services_Trust.pdf

⁵⁰ However these measures have both fallen from 69% to 67% and 79% to 74% between 2016 and 2017 which may be an area for review by the Trust.

happier about coming into work and this has been the first time I have felt this way since starting over two years ago.” (Staff survey, Open Q12, Wave 1)

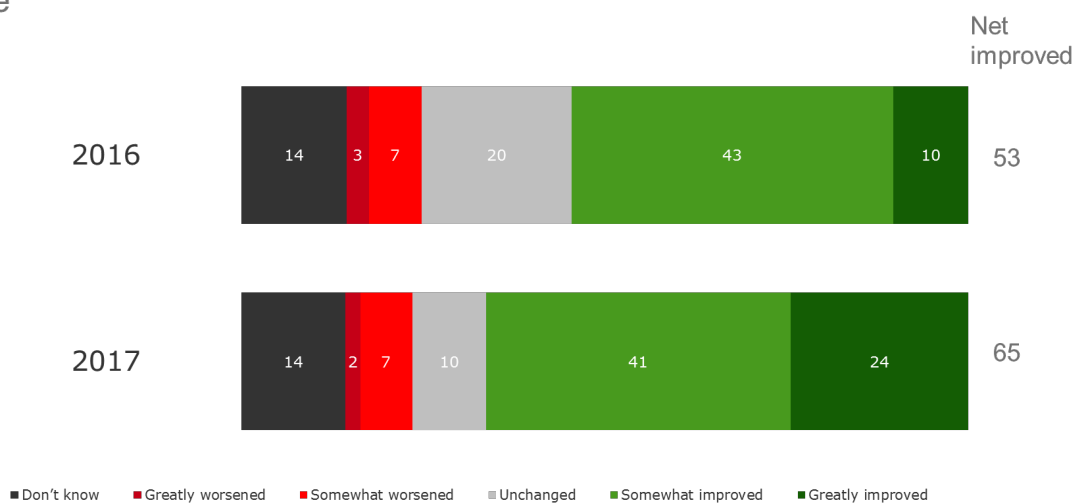
Culture change

Prior to the launch of the Trust, staff morale and the working culture in children’s services was described as low and poor by some staff we spoke to. The SMT has worked to bring the values in the Trust’s Behaviour Framework to life: professional, resourceful, respectful and reflective.⁵¹

Figure 3.2: Culture change

Reflection on the establishment of the Trust

Work culture



Q012: Since the establishment of the Trust, what change have you seen in each of the following areas?
Work Culture
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

Flatter and less hierarchical

Culture change in the Trust has been driven by the creation of a flatter management structure (see Appendix B). The SMT was seeking to address what they saw as a hierarchical and bureaucratic culture in SBC which lacked responsiveness and proactivity (also widely acknowledged by frontline Trust staff). Senior Trust staff reported that their approach – also including the establishment of the small Executive Leadership Team – has increased agility by reducing organisational bureaucracy and enabling faster decision making (e.g. when hiring, dismissing, promoting, and performance managing staff; funding initiatives; and the frequency of board meetings and number of committees). An example of this agility was the speed with which the Trust was able to change and

⁵¹ Slough Children’s Services Trust Behaviour Framework: ‘Bringing our Values to Life’.

stagger staff working patterns in order to provide a more flexible service to families outside normal office hours.

"We have a committee structure where the board, finance and resources committees and the quality and innovations committee meet monthly, the workforce development committee meets every other month... I made the proposal to the board [to reduce the frequency of the various meetings], and by the end of the month it was agreed. We're now moving to a quarterly meeting structure." (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

Whilst decision making has been made faster due to the reduction of organisational bureaucracy at the senior level, frontline staff did not report experiencing a similar story. Frontline staff were unable to provide evidence of a reduction in bureaucracy for their own practice: only 59% had seen improvements to 'bureaucracy in the delivery of children's services' and 53% thought they were 'required to spend too long on administrative tasks' (rising to 76% among SWs).

"There still seems to be a lot of bureaucracy within children services and an inordinate amount of time is sat in front a computer screen instead of being out in the community trying to help and support children and their families make positive changes." (Staff survey, Open Q14, Wave 2)

More visible, open and inclusive

Senior Trust staff have worked to be more visible in the organisation, to address what they saw as a closed door culture in SBC. Some frontline staff reported that they felt anxious about approaching some senior managers in SBC before the transfer, for example for sign off of documents (although this was less the case among middle managers). Senior Trust staff have also worked to create a more open and inclusive culture. Frontline and middle management Trust staff appreciated that senior managers sat on the same floor as them, walked the floor, interacted with staff and provided feedback more regularly. Frontline staff felt broadly comfortable to approach senior managers with ideas: 85% agreed 'if I have an idea or a concern I feel confident about raising it with managers'. They also agreed that senior managers are open to ideas to improve children's services: 69% agreed 'senior management is genuinely interested in employee opinions and ideas' (a rise from 62% in 2016). These changes have contributed to improvements in working environment and oversight.

"We can go to them as any level, from BSO up. If you've got a suggestion about something that you think isn't running right, you can go to the directors or which could have an impact on the service. If you've come up with an idea, they're more than happy to listen." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

"I feel I could go to and just speak to [him] without going through your manager, or this manager, to get to him. So yeah, personally I feel very supported." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

Overall, whilst predominantly positive, there was a mixed response across the Trust to the leadership and cultural changes described by frontline and middle management staff: 65% thought 'work culture' had improved which represents a significant rise from 53% in 2016, but suggests there remains room for improvement. Staff responses tended to depend on their own experiences of working in SBC and the extent to which they themselves had bought into these changes.

In the qualitative interviews, frontline staff in CP tended to be positive about the changes and feel there is greater oversight and advice available and feel more valued

"Senior management are much more involved and approachable. [She] is always around and approachable and encourages open discussions about practice which allows SWs to be more confident." (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 2).

Some frontline and middle management staff had not bought in to the changes to the same degree – particularly some staff in CLA and among some middle managers who had transferred from SBC.⁵² Some felt undervalued because training resources had focused elsewhere and felt that their experience and expertise gained in SBC was disregarded as they were not seen to be part of the new ways of working in the Trust.

"It felt that SWs were prioritised in this process and these were the only staff that were considered and other staff were left feeling undervalued and ignored. This is a feeling that is still present." (Staff survey, Open Q15, Wave 2)

Some CLA staff reported that they had not seen 'openness' from their managers or the SMT; particularly those who felt their suggestions to improve frontline working conditions had been ignored and those who felt senior attention and resources had been focused elsewhere. Some CLA staff felt less highly valued because they were viewed as not working as hard because they were less visible due to travelling more often. These staff could feel alienated and side-lined or that 'favouritism' was being exercised.

"Very little support to deliver the service required. The senior management team pick and choose those they want to support and take an interest in." (Staff survey, Open Q15, Wave 2)

⁵² Senior staff suggested that the fact this team transferred to the hub model at a later date may have been a factor, as staff had had less time to bed in to the new working culture at the time of data collection.

These learnings reinforce the importance of bedding in a new culture fully across a new organisation. In further discussions, senior Trust staff suggested that different views and experiences may have emerged from the CP and CLA services due to the CLA hubs coming online at a later point in time, meaning senior attention focused earlier on the CP hubs, training was provided earlier, and CP had had longer to experience and bed in the new culture. Senior staff expected to work to see improvements in this area in the future.

“Senior management need to come across more approachable towards everyone, not just workers they know or have regular dealings with.” (Staff survey, Open Q14, Wave 1)

More innovative

Senior Trust staff reported that they have worked to create a more innovative culture and that the Trust model has provided more opportunities for innovation than in SBC. Often this was explained by the flatter management structure described, enabling faster sign off of new programmes. Frontline and middle management staff reported that senior Trust managers encourage innovation and are open to new ways of doing things to improve children’s services: 88% ‘feel encouraged to develop better ways of doing things’ (83% in 2016). Examples of innovation provided by participants were limited to references to new programmes and initiatives mainly funded through DfE’s innovation programme,⁵³ including: PAUSE, Mockingbird, Inspiring Families, and the Innovation Hub.⁵⁴ Frontline staff were often excited by these programmes and saw them as an opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge and improve their practice with children and families. Senior staff felt the independence and agility of the Trust model enabled them to take up funding opportunities like the innovation programme. An area for further development by the Trust may be encouraging greater innovation in existing areas of practice and administration, for example to improve quality and efficiency.

“There is an ability within the Trust for change and innovation to be embraced, which is usually for the benefit of the Trust and always for the children of Slough.” (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 2)

⁵³ The Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme was launched by the DfE to test innovative ways of supporting vulnerable children and young people, with investment of up to £200m (2014 – 2020).

⁵⁴ PAUSE is a programme of intense support for women who have numerous short interval pregnancies that result in the removal of their children into care. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides respite care and peer support. The Inspiring Families Programme is an innovative intervention and assessment of families where domestic abuse is an identified component and the families have chosen to stay together. In March 2017 the Trust received £1.439m of innovation funding from DfE over two years, to introduce the Innovation Hub – a multiagency, more dynamic way of delivering early help and support to children in need (SCST Our Second Year: A summary of our achievements: October 2016 – October 2017).

"... the sense that the Trust never stands still; a clear ethos of continuous improvement that makes it easy for managers to model these behaviours and move things forward." (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 2)

Key findings

- In its first two years, the Trust has made substantial changes to service organisation, leadership and culture in order to improve practice, as a response to the inadequate Ofsted ratings.
- The Trust has implemented a system change to the hub model and systemic practice (described in chapter 3), as well as improvements to the First Contact and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) services. These improvements and the opportunities for the hub model and systemic practice to deliver a better and more consistent service to children were viewed positively across all Trust staff levels.
- The Trust has a new SMT and a flatter management structure – the dynamism and dedication of whom were widely admired by staff and partners.
- Senior staff have championed culture change to a more open, inclusive and innovative culture with children at the heart. There was a mixed response to this new approach across the service areas, reflecting how long the hubs had been established and the extent to which staff had bought into these ideas, with those in more established hubs being more positive.
- Overall, quality of practice was perceived to have improved but still varies, with Trust staff able to identify examples of improved practice and some areas for further improvement – suggesting more time and work is needed for these changes to bed in as the Trust continues its journey of improvement.

Chapter 4: Developing the workforce in Slough

Workforce stability

Permanence and recruitment

Improving workforce stability was an area of focus for the Trust. The Trust inherited an unstable workforce from SBC, with issues including high turnover and high use of agency staff.⁵⁵ A core part of the Trust's stability strategy has been to work to increase the number of permanent staff, to decrease dependency on agency workers and the higher cost and disruption associated with these. The agency worker rate has fallen from 52% in 2016 to 32% in 2017, this remains higher than the national rate (16%) and higher than the majority of Slough's statistical neighbours⁵⁶ and the Trust had 81% permanent staff in January 2018 compared with 72% in January 2017.⁵⁷ In October 2017, senior Trust staff said it had firm plans to further reduce the number of agency workers, and senior Trust staff said they have a target of less than 10.⁵⁸ The indicators show that the Trust had 291 permanent and fixed-term staff occupying establishment posts at month end in September 2017⁵⁹, which is an improvement as no establishment list existed when the Trust came into being, and HR records from that period are reportedly unreliable (Appendix C).

Recruiting new staff was another way senior Trust staff aimed to strengthen the workforce. In autumn 2017 there were 30 vacancies according to senior Trust staff, and Trust documents suggested there were 12 vacancies in January 2018.⁶⁰ The vacancy rate of social workers (SWs) has fallen from 45% in 2016 to 30% in 2017, this remains higher than the national rate (17%) and higher than the majority of Slough's statistical neighbours.⁶¹

Recruitment strategies have included Trust attendance at a jobs fair, recruiting from the 'Step Up to Social Work' programme, and taking placement students from the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQS) programme. The HR team was also considering a 'finder's fee' to assist recruitment and financially incentivise permanence, according to senior Trust staff. Some new frontline and middle management Trust staff said they were

⁵⁵ Ofsted Inspection (April 2011); Slough Children's Social Care Services: Report to DfE (June 2014).

⁵⁶ Internal Trust data and DfE "Statistics: Children's social work workforce."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childrens-social-care-workforce>.

⁵⁷ Ofsted Monitoring Visit (January 2018).

⁵⁸ SCST Our Second Year: A summary of our achievements: October 2016 – October 2017.

⁵⁹ Number of permanent and fixed-term staff occupying establishment posts at month end.

⁶⁰ Hub Structure w/c 8th January 2018.

⁶¹ DfE "Statistics: Children's social work workforce." <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-childrens-social-care-workforce>

attracted to the Trust by its use of systemic working and because they saw the model as a chance to do something different, suggesting that the Trust model may be attracting new permanent staff.

"We have more permanent staff who are passionate and driven about working with children, young people and their families." (Staff survey, Open Q13)

Frontline staff reported in the interviews and survey that they feel there is more stability in the Trust now than in the past. They found more permanent members of staff means there is less disruption and more commitment, because permanent staff bring a greater sense of ownership and dedication.

"One child had eight SWs within a year ... when I first met her she wouldn't talk to me for the first three visits ... she is angry ... I know there is a high turnover of staff in lots of organisations but even with the Trust it's still been difficult." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

It remains challenging for the Trust to recruit high quality permanent staff to an 'inadequate' service and when there is competition with London weighting posts nearby – only 61% agreed their 'salary/benefits are competitive with similar jobs I might find elsewhere' (58% in 2016) – as well as the challenges the sector faces more widely (e.g. the status with which the profession is regarded).

Retention and satisfaction

Staff morale and satisfaction were reported to be low in SBC before the Trust was established by senior Trust staff and some staff who had previously worked in SBC. The Trust has worked to improve staff retention and satisfaction. Senior Trust staff reported that they have implemented a strategy to 'grow their own', focusing on training, developing and promoting internal staff. Activities have included more training and support for ASYEs, which widely received positive feedback from frontline staff. The Trust has also promoted staff recognising their capacity to progress to greater responsibility. This in turn has boosted motivation and retention. Frontline staff cited examples of individuals they had seen promoted through the ranks, notably SWs to CSW positions, and that they found these examples inspiring. Yet, some concern from frontline and middle management staff emerged that some workers may be being promoted before they have the required skills for these posts, notably management skills.

"There has been a really good standard of ASYE and they are receiving a really good practice education/experience here in Slough ... Improved focus on training and getting 'back to basics.'" (Staff survey, Open Q13, Wave 2)

The Trust SMT has also used other mechanisms to make staff feel valued, including activities such as the STAR awards⁶², SMT members announcing successes in the organisation on the floor so that all staff can hear them, and provision of free tea and coffee – all of which were appreciated by frontline and middle management staff. The social worker turnover rate has fallen from 29% in 2016 to 16% in 2017, this is much closer to the national rate (14%) and ranks around half way compared to Slough's statistical neighbours.⁶³

Staff satisfaction was generally reported to be low in SBC by some Trust staff, often reportedly due to staff feeling unsupported (e.g. lack of supervision). Frontline and middle management Trust staff who took part in the qualitative interviews generally suggested they felt more supported in the Trust than in SBC and the survey results show 83% said they felt '*supported in ... [their] role*' in 2017 which was a rise from 79% in 2016. This was particularly the case among CP staff (whose hubs were established earlier), due to improved supervision, career development talks and opportunities, increased training, and senior staff being more visible and accessible. Some staff in CLA indicated they were less satisfied at the time of data collection due to feeling less supported (e.g. receiving less regular supervision), but this may be due to their hub being established later.

The staff survey found there was a mixed picture more widely, suggesting there is room for further work. although '*satisfaction at work*' improved from 43% in 2016 to 59% in 2017, (and was lower among business admin and frontline non-SWs than frontline SWs) this suggests there is room for improvement on this figure. The number of staff who '*enjoy coming to work most days*' has remained steady at 82%, but those who '*often feel stressed*' has risen from 47% in 2016 to 53% in 2017, and 70% of staff said they '*often work over ... [their] contracted hours to cope with ... [their] workload*' – which indicates suggested areas for attention.

Frontline and middle management staff felt positive about the Trust's efforts and measures to improve satisfaction. However, some were concerned by a perceived high level of turnover of frontline staff which was impacting upon the service to children and families.

"Many agency staff, not enough contract staff ... too many staff leaving who have had years of service with Slough, is this being addressed??? It's not all about money, so something must be wrong." (Staff survey, Open Q13)

⁶² A quarterly award given to staff for going 'above and beyond', including a certificate and £50 voucher.

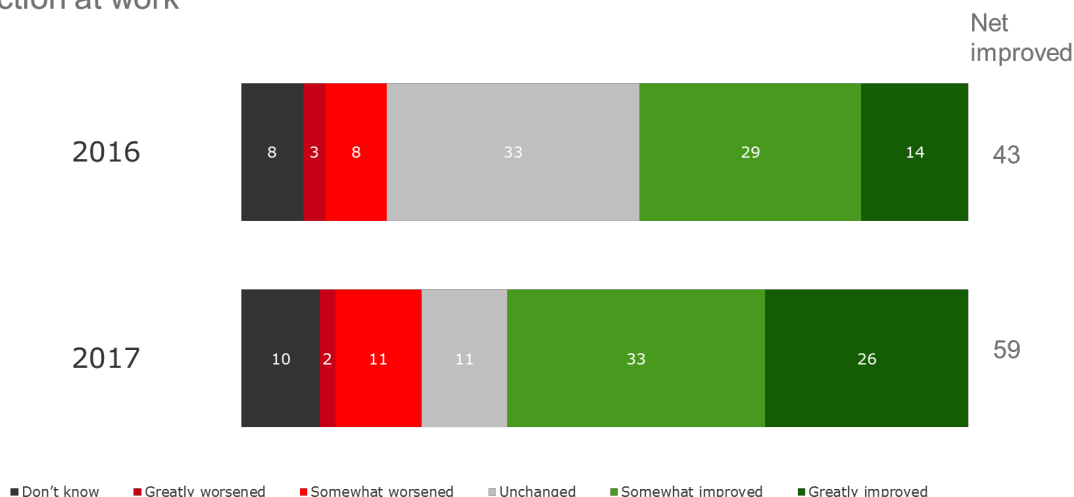
⁶³ DfE "Statistics: Children's social work workforce." 30 November 2017; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-work-workforce-2015>

This may suggest work remains to be done to increase staff satisfaction at work and to attract and retain good staff.

Figure 4.1 Your satisfaction at work

Reflection on the establishment of the Trust

Your satisfaction at work



Q012: Since the establishment of the Trust, what change have you seen in each of the following areas? Your satisfaction at work

Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

Managing and supporting performance

Performance management

Performance management has been part of the Trust’s workforce improvement strategy. Activities have included redundancies and performance management of Trust staff to raise standards to a normal distribution of quality, according to senior Trust staff.⁶⁴ Reasons for placing staff under performance management measures have included sickness, disciplinary proceedings, and capability issues. Senior Trust staff said they are working to resolve performance management cases in weeks rather than the 12–18 months that was reported to have been the case in SBC by senior Trust staff; although the overall implementation of performance management across the organisation may be inefficient and ongoing due to lack of HR resource to complete this process sooner.

Poor practice has also been targeted through the communication of a strong zero tolerance of poor performance policy. The SMT strive to drive a culture of non-

⁶⁴ The Trust was unable to provide data on the number of redundancies and performance management for the evaluation due to poor quality HR data.

acceptance of poor practice, according to frontline staff. The survey reflected this, finding a rise in the number of staff who agreed that 'people are held accountable for the quality of the work they produce' (77% in 2017 and 60% in 2016) and that 'poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Trust' (64% in 2017 and 45% in 2016). Poor standards of practice have also been targeted by other activities including: clarification of expectations of standards before staff re-applied for their posts during the transition and restructure; development of guidance to improve clarity of staff roles and responsibilities and on expectations of safe practice; and managers working closely with individual staff identified as underperforming.

"There's been an almost no tolerance of poor performance." (Trust, Strategic, Wave 1)

Figure 4.2 Performance management

Quality and accountability

Poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Trust



Q011: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Trust
 Wave 1 base: All staffmembers (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

According to senior Trust staff, efforts to improve staff performance have been facilitated by two factors. First, perceptions of faster decision-making processes in the Trust are viewed as making it is easier to implement HR processes around performance management than was possible in SBC. Second, the widespread acceptance among Trust staff at all levels (and partners) that action was required to address poor performance was seen to have facilitated measures. Whilst some frontline and middle management staff had initially found these processes disruptive, unnerving and in some cases upsetting during the transition period, they typically viewed the measures as necessary to improve the quality of children’s services in Slough. These experiences from staff indicate that it is important to communicate clearly with staff about processes and changes, particularly during the transition when anxiety about these issues is high.

Staff also expressed some concerns about the number of people on sick leave and the burden this was placing on those covering their work.

"I have noticed a lot of staff leave over the last few months, especially since January 2017; and many staff on long-term sick leave which is very unhelpful when there is nobody covering their work. Then it is left to others to pick up the slack, and that in turn puts additional pressure on the remaining staff." (Staff survey, Open Q14, Wave 2)

Supportive initiatives

The Trust has introduced a range of initiatives to help develop staff and their practice. Staff indicated that there has been uneven experience of these initiatives across the hubs, with those established earlier gaining the benefits sooner, suggesting that time is now required for these initiatives to bed in across the organisation.

Supervision

A recurring view from some frontline staff in the Trust was that the provision of reflective supervision in SBC had been poor, with some staff (particularly in CLA) reporting they had not received this for over a year. There have been improvements to supervision in the Trust where staff receive guidance and feedback on their practice. Frontline staff generally reported receiving this regularly (every two to four weeks) and that it was prioritised by senior staff. They said that it reassures them about their practice and is an opportunity to reflect and learn from experienced colleagues. New technology, such as tablets, was seen to be supporting more efficient documentation of supervision. The survey found improvements across the organisation: between 2016 and 2017 'confidence in my direct line manager' rose from 78% to 84%; 'I am able to regularly reflect on my work with experienced colleagues' rose from 70% to 81%; and 'My line manager provides me with regular supervision and feedback which helps me to do my job better' rose from 70% to 79%. CSWs appreciated the extra support they were receiving through the focus groups being run by the performance development manager to help support and develop this new and key role.

"Timely supervision – regular case discussion – case direction is clear." (Staff survey, Open Q15, Wave 2)

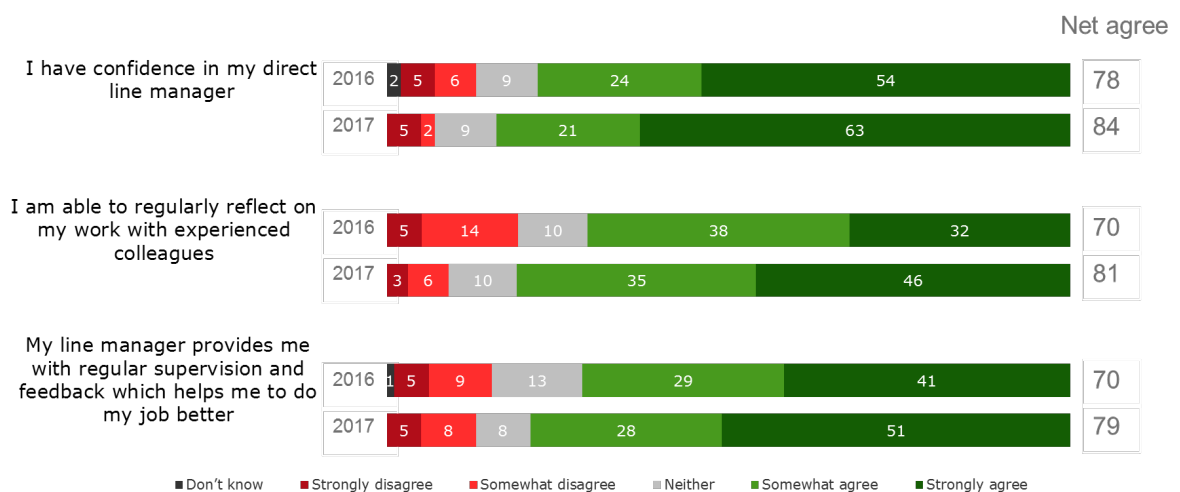
Whilst supervision was generally viewed to have improved, frontline and middle management staff reported that progress has been uneven across the organisation and greater improvement in supervision had been seen in hubs which were established

earlier (e.g. CP compared with CLA).⁶⁵ Staff also suggested that quality of supervision varies, with some lacking structure, which suggests some managers may require further training (including locums) to maximise the effectiveness of these sessions. In 2017 the Trust did not collect information on frequency or quality of supervision. However more recent reflection calls with senior Trust staff suggested that this is an area they are now working to improve and they now collect data on hub supervisions and weekly performance surgeries and feed this data into the performance board.

“I did not have proper supervision for many months, and it was about nine months before I got my first set of typed supervision notes, which is ridiculous ... But I appreciate it may be that some managers are not getting the support they need.”
(Staff survey, Open Q15, Wave 2)

Figure 4.3 Peer and management support

Peer and management support



Q004. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base All staff members (193)

Appraisals

Some frontline staff who worked for SBC reported not receiving appraisals for years in SBC. Career development meetings were held shortly after the transition with staff from across the Trust. Senior Trust staff said that these were important to help ensure staff were in the right roles and being upskilled appropriately. Frontline staff generally appreciated these meetings and the chance to discuss their career trajectories. Frontline

⁶⁵ This lack of consistency of supervision provision was also picked up in the Ofsted Monitoring Visit (January 2018).

staff expected to continue receiving appraisals which focused on their career development more regularly in the Trust than had been the case in SBC. Other improvements have included the creation of a new appraisals framework and process, including SMART objective setting and review against four behavioural themes. Whilst staff generally acknowledged improvements in this area, there was a desire for greater clarity about the link between appraisals and pay rises.

*“It’s really nice to see that they really care about our development and wellbeing.”
(Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)*

“Employee recognition needs to be a priority – there has been no increments to salaries since the Trust has taken over ... there are mixed messages on employees receiving increments based on appraisals.” (Staff survey, Open Q16, Wave 2)

Training

Participants reported that a training programme had existed in SBC but that staff lacked time to attend due to more pressing priorities, were not encouraged to attend by line managers, and felt they worked in a culture of acceptance of non-attendance of training. Improving training has been part of the Trust’s workforce development strategy and resource has been dedicated to this in the form of a training officer (who organises the schedule), and an increased budget.

“[Frontline staff] were in my view a very disheartened group of people who thought they weren’t supported. They thought they weren’t developed and didn’t have clear guidance ... I think they’re now enjoying [the training].” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 1)

Senior Trust staff have sought to raise the profile of training by, for example, making some sessions mandatory (e.g. systemic practice) and accounting for training in staff availability assumptions. Communications about training were set to move online to be more accessible in 2018. The Trust now offers staff 112 training options.⁶⁶ Frontline and middle management staff found some practical courses useful in addressing key skill gaps (e.g. sessions on assessments, thresholds and Signs of Safety). They gave positive feedback about the five-day systemic practice training which they said gave them a good grounding in the approach. They also reported finding specialist courses of high quality and useful for improving their confidence, particularly when there were tools to take away (e.g. the PAUSE, domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation, CSE, and unaccompanied asylum seekers training).

⁶⁶ See ‘SCST Our Second Year: A summary of our achievements: October 2016 – October 2017.

"I feel that the training here is quite good around [domestic abuse/violence], because it breaks the topic down into different areas, so we are better able to identify what we are seeing; rather than looking at it as a blanket term and missing things." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

"The workshop on working systemically was brilliant. Lots of more of things like this – giving an understanding of how the Trust IS different and therefore better for children and families." (Staff survey, Open Q14)

Frontline and middle management staff noted that there was initially too much training when the Trust first launched and that not all of this was of a high quality and useful. It is therefore important that the syllabus and quality of training should be reviewed regularly. Those in business support roles may particularly benefit from specific core skills training for their roles. Whilst staff appreciated the increase in the amount of training available, it will continue to be important that line managers ensure staff have time to attend training: only 54% 'have enough time to undertake learning and development' (a rise from 47% in 2016).

"I'm going to be honest; I haven't really attended many of the training sessions because I've been so busy." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

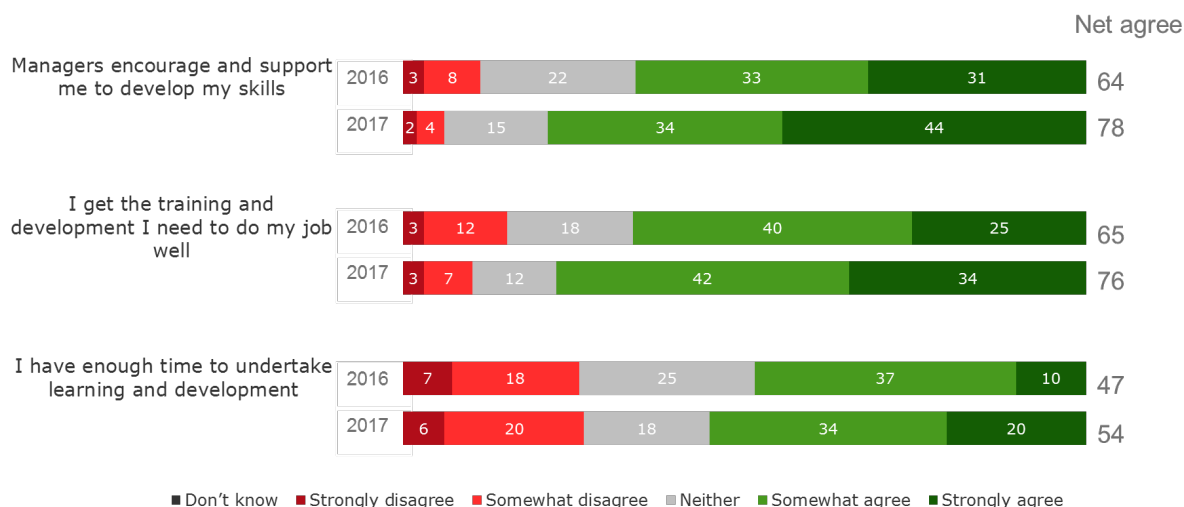
"There was a lot of training chucked at people before, and they didn't necessarily all think that it was the right training for them." (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

Staff widely reported an improvement in training in the Trust compared with SBC: 76% said 'I get the training and development I need to do my job well' (65% in 2016) and 78% said 'managers encourage and support me to develop my skills' (64% in 2016).

"My managers have put me forward for professional development which enables me to work with a wider range of people/families." (Staff survey, Open Q15)

Figure 4.4 Learning and development

Learning and development



Q008. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base All staff members (193)

Core skills training – management and data management

There is a need for the training programme to focus on core skills as well as specialist courses to help bed in good quality practice consistently across the organisation. There is a particular need for training on management and data entry to boost practice in these areas. Some frontline and middle management staff were concerned that some middle managers required further management training, particularly those who have recently been promoted (e.g. CSWs and group managers). Effective management oversight was an area of practice highlighted for attention by the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit (January 2018).⁶⁷ Senior Trust managers also said staff may require further training in data management systems in order to improve data collection and management (e.g. how to record data in the ICS system).

“I just picked up and got on with it, I've learned from observing and doing it ... straight away I had to do a management performance thing and I had no idea how so I had to look up policies ... it was hard going because it just leaves you in a position that you do feel like you know what you are doing.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

⁶⁷ Although the inspectors noted that “leaders have recently taken action to re-focus the Trust’s improvement plan, with increased emphasis on strengthening management oversight and accountability.” Ofsted Monitoring Visit (January 2018).

Induction

Good induction processes are important to help new staff hit the ground running and to minimise disruption to children and families. Some frontline staff who had recently joined reported that the Trust's induction process and HR set up were poor: for example, they did not receive information soon enough regarding structures, processes, and policies; their IT equipment was delayed; and they faced issues with HR (e.g. contract and salary arrangements) which were not resolved in a timely manner. The induction process could be improved to ensure smoother transitions for new staff to the Trust.

"Having been with the Trust for the last four weeks I still do not have a mobile phone; no office phone and not even a locker to keep my stuff." (Staff survey, Open Q16)

"I got offered the job ... The letter came with everything wrong, the wrong salary, the wrong terms and conditions ... Between me and HR, before my start date, there were 28 emails confirming logistics ... I haven't had a contract and I've been here nearly eight weeks." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

Policies and procedures

Accessible policy and procedure documents help to ensure consistency of practice and can give staff confidence in their practice decisions. Frontline and middle management staff suggested that there remains some lack of access to policies and procedures detailing what 'good' looks like in the Trust (e.g. threshold documents, details about how cases are assigned to hubs and escalation processes). The Trust has seen some improvement in this area: 69% agree '*my organisation's policies and procedures are clear and helpful*' which has risen from 60% in 2016. Further improvements to access to policies and procedures could help to ensure greater consistency of practice across the organisation. Some frontline staff reported that they do not need these documents because they 'know how to do their job', which may be contributing to a lack of consistency across the Trust. Senior Trust staff reported that there is currently work being done to create a 'knowledge hub' and centralised guidance on the intranet to support easy access and so that consistent information is provided across the organisation. It will be important to communicate this to staff when ready.

Key findings

- The Trust inherited legacy issues regarding workforce quality, detailed in the Ofsted reports and acknowledged by senior Trust and SBC staff and partners. Issues included high use of agency staff, high staff turnover, low staff satisfaction and poor performance.
- The Trust has committed substantial resources to developing its workforce, in line with the Ofsted improvement plan. It has implemented a suite of initiatives, including measures around recruitment and retention, performance management, staff satisfaction, and a range of support initiatives (including improved supervision, appraisals and training).
- The Trust has seen improvements to its agency worker and permanence rates.
- Middle management and frontline Trust staff responded broadly positively to these developments, suggesting ways in which their practice has improved as a result. However, they also suggested progress has been uneven across the organisation, with more time and attention to staff development required in hubs which were established later.

Chapter 5: Monitoring and measuring service performance in the Trust

Performance management infrastructure

The Trust has established effective performance monitoring infrastructure and processes which provide Trust staff with trusted intelligence on which to base decisions about the future delivery of children's services. Key to the establishment of infrastructure and processes to capture data was the Trust's appointment of a data manager prior to autumn 2017. This led to the development of new procedures and structures for collecting and analysing data as well as for driving improvement of existing processes: for example the indicator analysis shows that the percentage of care leavers with a current Pathway Plan has risen from 56% to 77% between 2015 to 2017 (Appendix C).⁶⁸ For example, the manager generates data outputs on each hub and service at least weekly, highlighting information such as number of cases per hub and outstanding assessments and visits. The data manager has also contributed to re-drafting KPIs which reflect discussions with the senior management team highlighting the value of clearer and more visual KPI reports and accompanying commentary.

According to middle management and frontline Trust staff, the Trust may benefit further from improving the quality and consistency of data recording – specifically with regards to the way in which frontline staff record information on to the ICS system.⁶⁹ For example, some frontline Trust staff found they had been recording home visits in the incorrect place on the system leading to inaccurate performance data. These frontline staff and some senior Trust staff felt more guidance around recording of data at the frontline level would improve this process.

According to participants, during the first year of the Trust discussion and sight of performance intelligence in SBC remained with the senior management team. In an effort to shift the culture of performance management, year one of the Trust saw the sharing of intelligence with all managers and frontline practitioners. Staff interviewed welcomed the weekly performance reports, however fewer than half (48%) of staff surveyed agreed that they had seen improvement to '*the provision of performance management data to help ... [them] do ... [their] job*' in 2016 (see Figure 5.1 below).

⁶⁸ Proportion of care leavers (excluding qualifying) whose Pathway Plan was reviewed within the last six months at month end.

⁶⁹ The Integrated Children's System (ICS) provides a conceptual framework, a method of practice and a business process to support practitioners and managers in undertaking the key tasks of assessment, planning, intervention and review. It is used by Trust staff for recording activities relating to social work practice.

“There’s a lot of stats being pushed out and not just to senior managers ... there’s a lot of communication ... before we would never hear about.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 1)

By autumn 2017, Trust staff at all levels were aware of and received weekly performance reports from the data manager. Frontline and middle management Trust staff commonly found the reports helpful both as a reminder of actions that needed to be taken (e.g. overdue CP visits), and as a stimulus to improve overall hub performance. This was reflected in the survey, with 65% of staff surveyed agreeing that they had seen improvement to the provision of performance management data to help in how they do their job (see Figure 5.1).

“So again, it’s not something that’s just done and kept quiet in a corner and just passed to the directors. All of that information gets shared with everyone.” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

“What I do remember thinking is, ‘okay, so this is what we need to do as an organisation, as a children’s service; this is what we look like at the minute, this is where we need to get to.’” (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

Figure 5.1 The provision of performance management data to help you do your job

Reflection on the establishment of the Trust

The provision of performance management data to help you do your job



Q012: Since the establishment of the Trust, what change have you seen in each of the following areas? The provision of performance management data to help you do your job
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

It was understood by staff at all levels that the circulation of reports increased transparency and accountability. Hub coordinators said that the reports had stimulated a competitive spirit between hubs which increased motivation to improve their own results compared to the results of other hubs.

Additionally, senior Trust staff and partners interviewed in autumn 2017 generally found that improvements had been made to the quantity and quality of data made available to various performance boards. Senior staff recognised that performance data was made available to and was reviewed regularly by the Joint Improvement Board (chaired by SBC's interim chief executive), the Trust's Performance Board, the Finance and Resources Committee, the LSCB, the QA subgroup of the LSCB and the Quality and Innovation Committee. Senior Trust staff felt that the Trust was now in a position to use this data to drive longer-term strategic and operational decisions.

“It's getting a grip on their management information and using the performance data to really try and embed improvement, and learn from the best bits that go on in the Trust. And I think that's something they've put a lot of effort into, and it seems to me well worth the effort. It's one of these invisibles, you know, it's getting your infrastructure right.” (Partner, Wave 2)

Improved quality assurance processes

A key aim for the Trust is to improve quality, performance and information.⁷⁰ In its first year, the Trust established a quality assurance framework and case audit programme which was seen by managers in the Trust to signify to staff that accountability and the need to demonstrate quality of practice are priorities for the Trust. However, restructuring to the hub model and turnover of staff in services meant audits were not consistently conducted during the time of fieldwork.

The operationalisation of the case audit programme shortly before autumn 2017 fieldwork has formally established a protocol for monitoring and measuring performance, with the ultimate aim of raising the quality of practice. Awareness of case audits among Trust staff at all levels was high during autumn 2017, as were experiences of the value of audits in providing effective, timely feedback on case management. Staff reported that internal case audits were being carried out regularly by senior managers and CSWs who typically produced a short report which was subsequently reviewed by heads of service.

Additionally, frontline staff commonly reported being given an action plan based on the audit, which they would discuss with managers during supervisions. This process was understood by frontline staff to have impacted positively on their practice – for example, by challenging SWs to re-think thresholds and by contributing to the standardisation of

⁷⁰ Slough Children's Services Trust. October 2016, Our First Year: An executive summary of our achievements.

practice generally. Some frontline staff wanted greater clarification on how audits and corresponding action plans factored into the Trust's long-term strategy.

Another example of improvements to quality assurance processes relates to work done by the Trust's independent review officers (IROs). Middle management staff reported that there had been improvements to the independent review process in the Trust and a handbook had been provided to IROs summarising the process. At the same time, they felt the Trust as an organisation would benefit by increasing the profile of IROs within the Trust and suggested that their knowledge and expertise could be better harnessed to support quality of practice.

The Trust has also made progress in capturing the voice of its service users – an important factor in ensuring that services meet the needs and requirements of children, young people and families. According to senior Trust staff, by summer 2016 the Trust had introduced new systems and processes and revised existing initiatives aimed at better capturing the views and experiences of children. These included working with the National Youth Advocacy Service to strengthen its advocacy offer, developing a new pledge for (and with) children in care, increasing children in care forums from one to three to account for differences in the needs across age groups, and strengthening the fostering and adoption panel to better capture carers views. Another development seen as a key improvement from SBC was the employment of a Complaints Manager to revise the process for receiving and responding to complaints.

Initiatives to improve the Trust's ability to capture the views of its service users were valued by staff who took part in the 2016 survey, with over half of staff seeing improvements to '*the voice of service users*' (56%). Yet comments provided in the 2016 staff survey suggested that more could be done in this area, and further clarification was needed about how the Trust would use the insight gained from these initiatives to better meet the needs of its users.

“There should be more effort to involve service users in the shaping and commissioning of services, particularly young people and parents of children who have been through the system. There also needs to be an understanding that complaints and representations present an opportunity to learn and change things and it is important to listen to these.” (Staff survey, Open Q14, Wave 1)

By autumn 2017, further efforts had been made to establish processes around collecting data on the voice of the child, with 71% of staff reporting to have seen improvements to collecting data on the voice of service users. Indeed, the Trust has set up three Reach Out! groups for children and young people aged 8 to 24 years old. Two of the groups, Reach Out! Juniors (for children aged 8–12) and the senior Reach Out! group (for young people aged 13+) hold meetings once a month. A group specifically for care leavers has

been set up and care leavers are also members of the senior Reach Out! group.⁷¹ Additionally, a forum for care leavers was set up in July 2016. Senior Trust staff have also launched surveys capturing feedback from young people to inform possible changes to services (e.g. a recent online feedback form for young people to complete before CLA reviews).

Overall, while senior staff were positive about these initiatives, middle management staff suggested that the Trust would benefit from further improvements in this area; in particular around establishing and embedding processes that capture the voice of the child – for example, by leveraging SBC’s Youth Services; in particular, ‘Youth Parliament’ and ‘Youth Voice’ which senior staff at SBC felt were useful mechanisms through which to capture the voice of the child.

While the Trust has made progress in terms of establishing documentation to support SWs to capture the voice of the child, some senior Trust staff raised concerns that these were not yet used systematically by SWs. These staff recognised the need to ensure that SWs, IROs and foster carers are consistently promoting participation opportunities, as well as sharing information packs with children and young people.

Key findings

- The Trust started from a low base regarding performance data, with Trust staff raising concerns about the availability and reliability of performance data at the point of transfer of services to the Trust. For example, senior staff reported that some information had not been made available and that poor staff practice and supervision meant that recorded activities data was often unreliable.
- Owing to effort and resources the Trust has implemented an effective performance management infrastructure and quality assurance processes have improved.
- While work remains to be done on the voice of the child, senior Trust staff and partners felt that the Trust was now in a position to use higher-quality performance data to effectively and efficiently drive longer-term strategic and operational decisions.

⁷¹ Voice of the child – A report on Children Looked After and Care Leavers’ participation January – December 2017, (19 January 2018).

Chapter 6: Working in partnership in Slough

Historical partnership working in Slough

Partnership working under SBC was poor according to Ofsted reports and some Trust staff who had experience of working under SBC, as well as some partners.⁷² Effective partnership working was understood to have been undermined by high staff turnover which hindered relationship building, and a lack of proactive engagement of strategic partners. According to some SBC staff and partners, confidence in SBC's ability to effectively safeguard children and deliver quality services among partner organisations was undermined by a lack of communication, slow response times to partner referrals, lack of feedback about referrals and poor engagement with and attendance at various boards.

“One of the key challenges we always had was, we just didn't know who to go to, we couldn't get hold of the allocated SW for a case. My team really didn't know who to speak to about the issue, and it was a real struggle to get information.”
(Partner, Wave 2)

Partners' confidence in the LSCB's ability to promote and foster effective partnership working with children's services was generally low when the Trust was launched. According to some partners, this was due to the receipt of poor, late and inaccurate reports and lack of follow-through on commitments made by attendees at LSCB meetings, which resulted in a lack of progress on action items between meetings.

Partnership working under the Trust

In autumn 2017, the views of Trust and SBC staff, as well as of partners themselves, suggested that commitment to partnership working – particularly at the strategic level – has improved. This was reflected in the 2017 Trust staff survey, with 84% of staff feeling that the Trust '*supports effective partnership working*', compared with 69% in 2016 (see Figure 6.1). There was also a belief among staff that this commitment has translated into improvements in partnership working, with 71% of staff surveyed reporting that '*partnerships in the delivery of children's services*' had improved compared to 50% in 2016 (see Figure 6.2).

“I'd like to think that, on the whole, partners feel more confident in what we're doing and what we're achieving.” (Trust, Strategic, Wave 2)

⁷² Ofsted Inspection, April 2011.

*"I think they engage quite well with us. Slough are one of the better ones actually."
(Partner, Wave 2)*

Figure 6.1 My organisation supports effective partnership working with other agencies

Organisational support

My organisation supports effective partnership working with other agencies

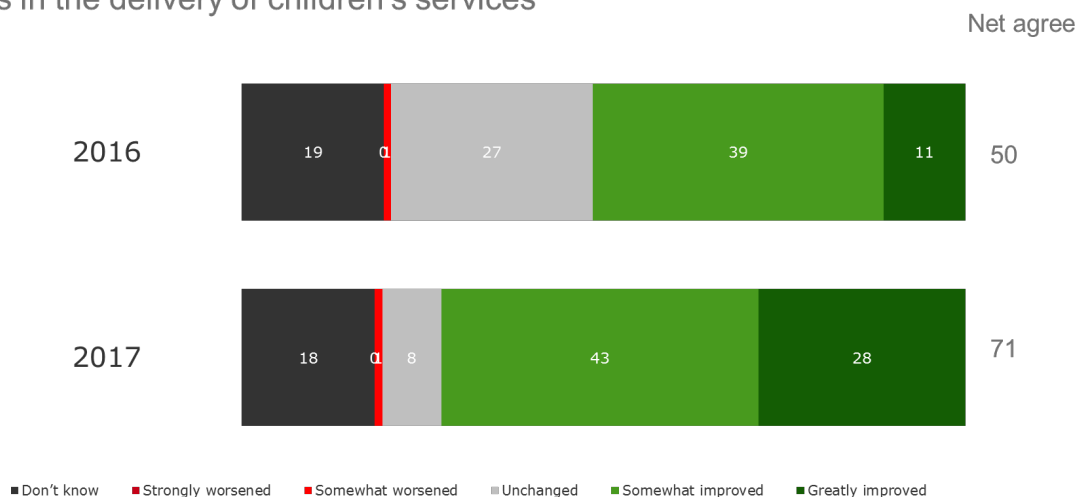


Q010: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My organization supports effective partnership working with other agencies
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

Figure 6.2 Partnerships in the delivery of children's services

Reflection on the establishment of the Trust

Partnerships in the delivery of children's services



Q012: Since the establishment of the Trust, what change have you seen in each of the following areas? Partnerships in the delivery of children's services
Wave 1 base: All staff members (175); Wave 2 base: All staff members (193)

Developments in strategic level partnerships

In 2017, senior Trust staff and partners were more positive about partnership working in Slough, reporting the contribution of the following factors to this:

- Improved inter-personal relationships: greater visibility of senior Trust staff – for example, attendance at meetings - and, according to some partners, lower turnover of senior staff have reportedly led to improved interpersonal relationships. Partners also tended to view the Trust as more accountable, open, and honest which was recognised as a significant improvement from partnership working under SBC. Furthermore, an improved working relationship between the Trust and SBC was recognised by strategic level staff as having supported the development of partnership working between the organisations. For example, at the senior level it was understood that the relationship between the Trust and SBC as housing provider had improved, with the head of housing meeting regularly with care leavers and the leaving care teams. This resulted in the development of new housing initiatives and a joint protocol for housing led by SBC.
- Increased responsiveness: some partners found that, at the strategic level, the Trust was more responsive to case issues and to feedback. For example, the Trust was seen to be working closely with schools to develop approaches to support young people in crisis and with the police in responding positively to feedback on issues with the Trust's phone systems.
- Engagement activities and initiatives led by the Trust's SMT: partners and Trust staff reported that a number of activities and initiatives supported effective partnership working. These included engaging partners through head teacher briefings, bi-monthly meetings with the police, quarterly commissioning meetings with independent foster agencies, picnics for adopters, and sharing training opportunities with partners.

"I think what we've seen is our bosses going out and actively trying to draw in partners." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

- Financial commitments: strategic level financial commitments were understood to have supported partnership working. Senior Trust and SBC staff reported, for example, that an improved relationship between the Trust and SBC's placement team has led to joint-funding ventures, such as offering 125 pantomime tickets to foster families (funded by the Trust, SBC and a pantomime company). Senior Trust staff also reported committing funds to improve relationships with carers who receive money as a 'thank you' payment following successful annual reviews. Similarly, the Trust has committed to holding an annual ball for carers which includes an awards ceremony in recognition of the work they do. The Trust's fostering and adoption team secured funding from SBC (£150,000) for one of the

residential units needing renovation work, which the Trust plans to convert into semi-independent living units for care leavers.

- New relationships with the voluntary section: senior Trust staff and partners were more positive about partnership working in Slough and senior Trust staff were very positive about the new relationships which have been forged with the voluntary sector (e.g. Home Start and initiatives which have been given section 17 monies to assist in providing support to families away from children's services).
- Improvements in the LSCB: the appointment of a new chair in 2017 with experience of wider issues affecting adults as well as children – such as gang violence, domestic abuse and neglect – and improved action plans following meetings were identified as increasing accountability around partnership working. For example, the LSCB has worked closely with schools to develop plans to ensure that section 11 audits are completed and there is a strong sense among partners that the LSCB chair that audits would be actioned and progressed. This contrasted with partners' experiences under SBC, where there was not a strong sense that actions would be followed through. The new chair has also set up the executive safeguarding group to bring together senior leaders from across organisations such as health, police, and adult services, which a senior Trust leader believed would help to drive improvement in Slough. In addition, following the introduction of a new LSCB business manager, senior Trust staff expected the business manager would further ensure actions were followed up and support agencies and practitioners to challenge practice in Slough.

Developments in frontline partnerships

Whilst Trust staff and partners generally felt that strategic level partnership working had improved, there was less evidence throughout the evaluation to suggest improvements had filtered down to the frontline. Nevertheless, Trust staff and partners noted aspects of the Trust which had supported frontline partnership working, primarily around the new organisational structure of the Trust as compared to SBC (see chapter 3).

According to some partners, for example, the hub model provides easier and more reliable contact to relevant professionals to monitor or track cases. Partners were more able to reach hub coordinators when they needed information in the absence of specific SWs. Partners also said that hub-coordinators ensured that invoices were paid to partners on time; welcomed the role of clinicians who offered useful advice on children's health and wellbeing; and appreciated the role of family support workers working together on cases when multiple issues arose. Challenges to partnership working at the frontline level were identified by Trust staff and partners as:

- Workforce stability: participants felt relationships were being undermined by what they perceived to be high operational staff turnover, although there was recognition among some partners that this had improved. Building relationships from 'scratch' was seen as time intensive and often undermined progress made with previous staff.

"I'm conscious that some of the management systems and the variation in practice has been problematic. And I think part of that has been to do with having so many agency staff, and not being able to say, 'these are our staff, and these people are working to our values and our approach'. I think that has been quite a priority for them to get hold of." (Partner, Wave 2)

- Variable/inconsistent case notes and transfers: poor case handovers had implications for partners whose ability to discuss cases and work with SWs was undermined as a result of missing or inaccurate information.
- Communication: some partners still struggled to get direct contact numbers for SWs and their managers, undermining their ability to forge relationships and discuss cases with operational staff at the Trust.

Finally, although the relationship between SBC and the Trust has reportedly greatly improved from when the Trust was first launched, some frontline Trust staff felt that improvements could be made to support partnership working with SBC as a housing provider at the operational level. They felt that senior Trust staff and SBC could be doing more to prioritise access to housing for young people. For example, Trust frontline staff described extremely long waits and sometimes inadequate housing for care leavers. Trust personal advisers to young people thought they would benefit from having a single point of contact in housing, dedicated to housing 16–21 year-olds.

"I think that we, the Trust, are inconsistent with messages I don't know that we have the basic policies and procedures in place ... like even an agreement between us and housing ... if there is, nobody has told us about it ... we have looked after children that are going for four to five hours with their PAs to sort out housing." (Trust, Frontline, Wave 2)

Key findings

- Partnership working in Slough was widely reported to be poor under SBC. The Trust has undertaken numerous initiatives aimed at improving partner relationships and joint working with partner agencies. Overall, the views of Trust and SBC staff, as well as of partners themselves, suggest that commitment to partnership working – particularly at the strategic level – has improved since the launch of the Trust.
- Improvements in partnership working at the frontline were less evident than at the strategic level, with partners feeling that frontline partnership working could be improved. Partners felt that staff turnover, although improved, continued to undermine relationship building at the frontline level.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Key findings

Since 2015, the Trust has been on a journey to improve service quality from a low base. Considerable work has been initiated by the Trust, working with SBC and partner organisations, to strengthen children's services and put the necessary infrastructure, processes, skills and relationships in place needed to achieve this – while simultaneously continuing to provide children's services in Slough. The scope and scale of work needed was substantial, and while significant progress has been made, further work remains. There is some evidence of improved outcomes in Slough, however the indicator analysis (Appendix C) and January 2018 Ofsted report present a mixed picture regarding outcomes, suggesting further work is required. For some indicators this is expected because of the time it takes for these outcomes to emerge, and because through its work the Trust uncovered historic issues that required time to unpack and respond to.

Developments

Since the implementation of the Trust, numerous changes have been made to the organisation, management and delivery of children's services in Slough – detailed in the body of this report. Significant progress has been made from a low base, in a difficult and politicised context, particularly where the Trust has:

- **Developed a clear vision** – there is good recognition of the vision statement to ensure children are 'safe, secure and successful'.
- **Improved governance and its relationship with SBC** – by streamlining governance boards to improve efficiency and working with the new leadership in SBC to reduce tensions in and optimise the commissioner–provider relationship.
- **Strengthened the organisation of services** – by introducing the hub model to provide more consistent service and wider professional input into cases.
- **Improved the safety of the front door** – by improving the assessment process and strengthening the staffing of the First Contact service.
- **Driven a more open and inclusive culture** – which is more innovative and open to suggestions from all staff, to address what senior staff saw as a hierarchical, bureaucratic, and closed-door culture in SBC.
- **Reduced strategic bureaucracy** – as the flatter management structure has enabled faster workforce and programme funding decision making.

- **Improved the workforce** – by increasing stability (by reducing dependence on agency staff) and improving the quality of the workforce (through improvements to performance management, supervision, appraisals, training).
- **Strengthened performance monitoring and quality assurance** – by improving the collection, analysis and communication of performance data.
- **Improved strategic partnership working** – through greater visibility and openness from senior Trust staff with partners.

Areas for further attention

The Trust has made significant progress and as its journey of improvement continues further attention is required to strengthen some aspects of its services and organisation, including:

- **Improve communication of its business plan and roadmap to its vision** – while the vision is widely recognised, the Trust's business plan and progress on the path to achieve this is less clear. Clearer communication may improve staff and partner buy-in.
- **Maintain and improve staff satisfaction** – staff generally felt more supported in the Trust than in SBC, but satisfaction was mixed across the services suggesting there is more work to be done to contribute to improving satisfaction and retention.
- **Ensure staff across the organisation understand the ingredients important for supporting buy-in to culture change** – there was a mixed response to the cultural changes from frontline staff, particularly when they had not seen increased openness from their managers. The Trust could do more to ensure these managers are listening and acting upon staff suggestions where relevant, to support culture change.
- **Enable easier access to what 'good' looks like** – frontline and middle management staff across the hubs lacked knowledge about how to access policies and procedures detailing what 'good' looks like and improved access could help ensure greater practice consistency.
- **Improve case handovers** – concern was raised about poor handovers when staff left and when cases were transferred between hubs. The Trust should ensure staff are supported to deliver effective handovers, and do these in face to face meetings, where possible.
- **Improve the mechanisms available to listen to the voice of the child** – good work has been initiated in 2017 but still falls behind some middle managers' expectations, who wanted to see processes embedded (e.g. surveys with children) and SBC's Youth Services leveraged (e.g. the Youth Parliament).

- **Strengthen frontline partnership working** – there was less evidence to suggest improvements had filtered down from the strategic to the frontline level and the Trust could improve lines of communication at the operational level (e.g. access to phone numbers) and the quality of case information shared with partners.

The future in Slough

Overall, the implementation journey to date was described by senior Trust and SBC staff as challenging but these staff and partners remain committed to bringing about positive change for children in Slough. Interviews with senior Trust staff and partners suggest that the Trust is more reflective than SBC about their performance and aware of the challenges the Trust faces. There was wide admiration expressed, among partners and frontline Trust staff, for the senior Trust staff who are facing these challenges head on and were seen to be open to suggestions and innovation. While more time is needed to assess the full impact of the model on outcomes for children and families, feedback from staff and partners suggests the Trust has made strides towards a more efficient and effective service, and that it has improved children's services compared to before the Trust was established. They were generally optimistic about the future and the Trust's ability to continue to drive improvements to staff satisfaction, outcomes and services.

The Trust has implemented changes and seen improvements to its practice. However, at the time of writing overall quality of social work practice remains inconsistent, according to Ofsted, and frontline and middle management staff we spoke to who were able to identify improvements and areas needing further attention.⁷³ Quality of practice was thought to vary between services and hubs, and was reported to be more advanced in hubs which were established earlier.

Senior Trust staff expressed concern about the Trust's ability to achieve the scale of change required at the pace expected by DfE and Ofsted. It was widely perceived across the Trust that it will take longer to achieve consistently high quality practice due to the extent of historic challenges in Slough. Staff across the Trust thought the Trust needs time for the changes it has implemented to bed in across the organisation, particularly the change to the hub model and systemic practice and the shift in working culture. Analysis of the feedback from staff across the Trust suggests that the organisation would benefit from focusing on achieving its vision, rather than making further changes reactively to arising operational challenges and Ofsted reports. Staff from across the Trust, and particularly senior Trust staff, reported that they felt that there had been a high level of inspection and scrutiny of the service since the establishment of the Trust and that preparation for, participation in, and reflection on these exercises (including by Ofsted)

⁷³ Ofsted monitoring visit, Jan 2018.

was a distraction from focusing on driving improvement in Slough. Senior Trust staff also reported that the organisation faces extra layers of regulation and inspection, due to its status as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) and use of these alternative delivery models, which other inadequate children's services do not face, and that this has placed further burden on the organisation.

Added value of the Trust model

These changes to the organisation, management and delivery of children's services described above are not unique to the Trust model. They theoretically could have been made under another model or SBC – and this was noted by frontline and middle management Trust staff. However, as senior Trust staff and partners said, the implementation of the Trust model in Slough has been the catalyst to drive these substantial developments. Senior stakeholders from the Trust, SBC and partner organisations said that they did not believe these would have been possible in Slough without the leadership and momentum the Trust provided.

A fresh start

Senior Trust staff and partners said the implementation of the Trust model added value to children's services, in particular by providing a break from the past. In 2016, there were high expectations of the Trust model among senior Trust staff, some partners, and DfE stakeholders that it was something 'new' and would trigger change and improvement to services at a rapid pace, including the improvement of the 'inadequate' Ofsted ratings.

There was wide agreement among all levels of Trust staff and partners that change was needed and that the Trust presented an opportunity for a 'fresh start'. Yet detailed discussions with Trust staff suggested the implementation of the Trust was an important and positive 'shake-up' of children's services, rather than the creation of something 'new'. Indeed, staff acknowledged that the Trust comprised of many of the same staff and cases as when services were provided by SBC, and faced the same challenges the wider sector faces (e.g. funding and recruitment). Providing this break from the past was part of the added value the implementation of the Trust model was seen to have given children's services in Slough. The fresh start gave senior Trust staff and partners the opportunity and permission to innovate and do things differently because it was seen as a new beginning.

Strong leadership and a flatter management structure

Leadership of the Trust has been an important driver of change in Slough. The Trust has a flatter management structure than under SBC and this reduction in hierarchy enabled the organisation to be more dynamic and agile, particularly with regards to faster decision

making about workforce decisions, organisational changes, and allocating funds to new programmes and initiatives. The SMT used this opportunity to drive change and improvement in Slough (for example, to the social work model and workforce).

Senior management in the Trust has been reflective about the organisation's performance, and recognised the need for improvement. They have also been committed to innovation and dedicated to improving the quality of practice in children's services, which have been essential ingredients to strong and positive leadership in the Trust.

Single focus on and independence of children's services

Senior Trust staff reported that the single focus on and independence of children's services is an important part of the added value of the Trust model. The single focus on children has helped the organisation, and particularly the SMT, to focus on service improvement rather than being distracted by other issues and budgets (such as 'recycling and pot holes'). It has also allowed greater freedom to develop the Trust's vision, according to senior Trust staff. Trust staff from across all levels reported that the single focus and Trust vision are creating greater team spirit and a clearer sense of purpose than existed in SBC.

Key lessons learned

A number of key lessons have been learned from the implementation of the Trust model in Slough to inform future policy and practice in Slough and elsewhere:

- **Manage expectations for the pace of change** – the implementation of the Trust model was a catalyst to drive leadership, structural and cultural changes and review staff performance. This enabled the Trust to put new systems and processes in place to drive improvement. However, staff from across the Trust reported that they now need time for these to bed in across the organisation before consistent and sustained impact for children and families can be seen. It is important to agree and embed service delivery changes and to minimise the quantity and frequency of these, where possible, because of the implications this may have on effective and efficient operations.
- **Strong organisational leadership is a key ingredient for successful implementation of the Trust model** – Trust leadership needs to be visible, reflective, committed to change and innovation, and dedicated to improving children's services.
- **A constructive and collaborative relationship with the LA is essential to the success of the Trust model** – the two organisations should be bought in to the model and committed to working together towards the joint goal of improving

children's services. This is especially important during contract discussions, and in particular discussing service user and workforce intelligence, and which services move into the Trust. It is important that the Trust leadership is able to work closely with the LA and DfE before, during and after the transition – and this will depend on the degree to which LA leadership accepts the move to a Trust model.

- **Business infrastructure and acumen should be in place as early as possible for a smooth transition** – the Trust needed access to business skills and resources to set up a new organisation, including financial, legal, HR, IT and data management skills. Thorough baselining before the launch would also have contributed to a smoother transition and enabled the Trust to hit the ground running. Being able to operate as a shadow organisation for a period before the launch may also have further contributed to a smoother transition.
- **Good communication with staff and partners is an important factor in successful implementation of the model** – to reduce tension and anxieties. It has been important for the Trust to communicate clearly and continuously with staff about changes and be clear about their vision and roadmap to achieving this in order to obtain and maintain buy in and support for changes. It has also been important for the Trust to communicate with partners about their vision and business plan, as well as operational changes to maintain and build on partnership working in Slough.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE-RR810

ISBN: 978-1-78105-904-3

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:
rachel.jones@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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