London Children’s Social Care Practice Leaders Group

**Business Plan Review 2020-21**

**Summary**

The group met eight times during the year and engaged in workshops focussing on the impact and learning from continuing to provide children’s social care services during the Covid-19 pandemic. Attendance and engagement with the group was stronger this year than the previous year[[1]](#endnote-1). The Business Plan 2020-21 was progressed with relatively few priorities having to be carried forward to the following year.

Practice leaders have significantly contributed to making sure that children’s services adapt and continue to safeguard and promote the welfare of the most vulnerable children in London and support families through a difficult and challenging period. Practice have also contributed to regional improvement at a subregional level and through the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) work programme.

Practice leaders have shared how they have engaged with the workforce and partners following the response and strengthening of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd. Addressing disproportionality within the children’s social care and youth offending system and in outcomes for children is a priority. The value of developing a regional response is evidenced by the sharing of good practice, the commissioning of a new leadership development programme for Black and Asian leaders aspiring to senior leadership roles. Having a senior leadership group who reflect the workforce and people serviced is an ambition. Enabling anti-racist practice is a key improvement priority with good practice examples being shared regionally.

**Business Plan progress**

**Raising standards across the whole child and family practice system.**

Practice leaders are striving to strengthen leadership in children’s social care by succession planning and support for aspiring practice leaders. There is a strong commitment to having senior leadership groups that reflect the workforce and people serviced. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated a more collegiate approach to sharing good practice, problem solving and peer support.

Workforce capacity has focussed more on ensuring service continuity during a period in which there is an absolute shortfall of people to fill qualified social worker roles in both practice and front-line supervisory roles. The group have analysed long term data trends and already contributed to regional workshops on workforce sufficiency.

Practice leaders have looked at the impact of the child safeguarding practice review panel (CSPRP), case review arrangements, national reviews and reporting serious child safeguarding incidents. Engagement with the CSPRP was deferred until next year.

Practice leaders continue to engage with Ofsted and other inspectors through what has been a challenging period. Feedback on the London children’s social care response to the pandemic has been positive.

The group met with the Chief Social Worker and DfE colleagues to share reflections and horizon scan, looking to the independent review of children’s social care and policy initiatives.

Looking at historical abuse and learning from the Independent Inquiry into child abuse was deferred.

**Working effectively with partners on thematic changes.**

Practice leaders have worked closely with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) looking at the implementation of initiatives relating to responding to missing children, the new operating protocol for responding to child exploitation and child sexual abuse. Progress has been made in how to address long standing issues about the numbers of notifications sent and the referral process from the MPS to children’s social care.

The year has seen the roll out of new arrangements for children to give evidence and be cross examined in criminal trials where children have been abused. The pandemic has added to concerns about ‘hidden harm’ in relation to children at risk from familial as well as extra-familial exploitation and abuse. Regional arrangements for safeguarding older children have been strengthened and practice leaders are represented on the new London Adolescent Safeguarding Overview Board.

Practice leaders were joined by partners leading work on preventing and responding to youth homelessness, focussing on securing a more consistent response to 16- and 17-year-olds and preventing care leavers from becoming homeless.

The family court arrangements and capacity to progress children’s cases have been impacted by Covid-19 resulting in the delay of many final hearings. Practice leaders have continued to share approaches to addressing this significant challenge. Meetings with the judiciary and Cafcass were deferred.

Practice leaders have engaged with the proposals to transform mental health services for children and young people, the implementation of which has been affected by the pandemic.

**Strengthening arrangements for children in care and care leavers.**

Practice leaders continue to support the London Children in Care Council and have met with partners leading work on strengthening regional arrangements for children and young people with care experience. During the year a new regional network for leaders in care leavers services has been set up to strengthen regional improvement capacity. The regional protocol for reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers has been implemented.

Arrangements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the use of hotel accommodation for single adults and families and ensuring children from an EU background secure their settled status have been addressed by the group.

**Responding effectively to financial pressures on children’s social care budgets.**

Significant progress has been made this year through the LIIA programme’s commissioning work programme. There are continuing concerns about the availability of placements for children, particularly older children entering care latter in childhood with entrenched patterns of behaviour having disengaged from mainstream education.

1. The table below shows attendance during the year: [↑](#endnote-ref-1)