



Slough Children's Trust Annual Report April 2019 to March 2020

Policy/Report Summary
Slough Children's Trust Annual
Report April 2019 to March
2020

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Version: 1.0

Date: March 2020

Review Date: March 2021

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Registered Company: England and Wales:
9487106



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be
..... Safe, Secure and Successful

Foreword by Robert Tapsfield, Board Chair

The Trust started the year full of optimism and with expectations of being able to build on the successful outcome of the Ofsted Inspection in January 2019 when children's services were deemed to be Requires Improvement and no longer inadequate. We were looking forward to taking the steps necessary to continue to improve our services, and as you will see from this report the Trust has succeeded in continuing to improve services which is a credit to staff. But we have faced significant and unanticipated challenges which have had and will continue to have an impact on our performance. This includes the impact of Covid-19 which will challenge how we maintain services and respond to the potential impacts on children and families in Slough.

The improvements that we have made are described in detail in the report and are a testament to the work of senior leaders and of staff at all levels of the Trust who share a determination for services to improve. The Trust continues to ensure that the voices of children are heard, both on a daily basis and through our Reach Out (Slough's Children in Care Council) group and we are listening more to the parents of children who are engaged with us. Their views have contributed to the development of improved child protection conferences. It is particularly encouraging to see that a restructuring of services for care leavers, a part of our transformation programme has led to an improvement in the service care leavers receive and that securing permanency for children in care is also performing well.

Demand for our services has continued at unexpectedly high levels and this has put significant pressure on our services and finances. This has inevitably had an impact on the capacity of some services for some children and families who require our services. Staff have worked hard to manage this prolonged increase in demand and, the Trust has taken steps to ensure that all children and families receive services that will keep children safe, and will support and help them to reach their potential.

The Trust will continue to take the steps necessary to improve children's services in Slough and we look forward to being able to complete our transformation programme which will enable us to increase our resilience, maintain levels of front line social workers and improve our practice. We look forward to there being agreement on the future arrangements for the delivery of children's services in Slough which we think is necessary for the improvement journey to continue.

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Summary

In January 2019, Ofsted told the Trust and the Council that the services provided were considered *Requires improvement to be good*. This was a massive and significant achievement for the Trust, however there were improvements to focus upon in six specific areas to enable services to get to good. These were:

- The quality of children’s plans, so that they include clear measureable actions, with timescales for delivery and clarity about what will happen if concerns do not reduce.
- The timeliness of initial health assessments when children come into care.
- The way strategy discussions are convened, so that processes are clear and relevant agencies participate in initial decision-making.
- The quality of assessment, planning and service provision for privately fostered children and homeless 16 and 17 year olds.
- The rigour of planning and coordination for children at risk of exploitation.
- Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of older children and for care leavers.

Following the inspection, the Trust developed an improvement plan and made significant progress in conjunction with partners in addressing areas for improvement. Many of these improvements have been maintained, however, this sustainability has been tested with a combination of increased demand commencing in the autumn and significant financial challenges which is impacting on reported key performance indicators.

Delivering quality child and family-centred services

Our strengths and where we have seen improvements in practice

Addressing the timeliness of Initial health assessments (IHA's) (*Ofsted area for improvement*)

We have seen a continued improvement of initial health assessments (IHA) following a grip on timeliness and closer working ties with health partners. Between April 2019 and January 2020, 65% of new children into care received an IHA in time, an increase of 25% from January 2019. This has been achieved through careful tracking by a single point of contact within the Trust, and both Trust and health professionals holding each other to account through a shared escalation policy as an example of effective joint working on a specific issue. Since the January 2019 Ofsted inspection, the average number of working days to complete an IHA has fallen from 26.4 days to 22.5 days, and the Trust is on course to achieve the statutory timescale of 20 working days.

Better outcomes for children and young people through achieving permanence

The required average duration for care proceedings is 26 weeks and Slough's current average performance is 20.3 weeks, the best in Berkshire. Apart from April to June 2019 where there was a considerable dip in performance to an average of 45.9 weeks caused by issues outside the control of the Trust, Slough is amongst the top performing of all LA's in Berkshire. There has also been an improvement in the quality of care proceedings and consistency of care planning, with no court applications being dismissed.

Slough is also leading the way on adoption timeliness. The DfE's threshold for children entering care and being placed with a family for adoption is 426 days, and from July 2018 through to July 2019 the Trust equalled this threshold averaging 427 days across 10 children. In the last six months, Slough's Voluntary Adoption Agency has reduced the time from entering care to being placed for adoption to be an average of 398 days across 12 children, an incredible 29 days under DfE threshold.

Positive outcomes for the education of looked after children

With the support of the Trust's "transformed" Virtual School, Slough's looked after children have seen some amazing results in the last academic year. Educational performance has matched or bettered CLA peers across the country and attainment matched non CLA peers in all key stages except for Early Years foundation where the overall attainment was just slightly below. The GCSE results for June 2019 were better than national and statistical neighbours and matched Slough's best every results. Record numbers of our young people are accessing university with 6 young people in September 2019 joining the 7 young people already studying at university.

This success has been achieved with a forensic focus on support to improve attendance, a reduction in exclusions from 44 in 2017/18 to 15 in the 2018/2019 academic year and 100% of children have a Personal Education Plan to support their learning.

Significant improvements in Care Leaver Support

In October 2019, the Trust welcomed back Mark Riddle, National Advisor from the DfE to assess its response to his visit to the Care Leavers service in December 2018. In April 2019

the Trust created a ring fenced care leaver service which included an assistant team manager to increase management oversight and a strengthened personal advisor service to focus solely on support for care leavers. This change has retained staff so that the service is staff by permanent staff and this stability has supported consistent performance.

The Trust refreshed its Local Offer for care leavers aged up to 25, co-designing it with care leavers. It builds on the strong relationships with the Council, Job Centre, Probation, Drug and Alcohol services, Prison Service and placement providers to provide a more effective joined up local offer for care leavers.

In his letter dated 1st October 2019 to the Trust Mark Riddle noted good improvements in a number of areas including *“an exceptional health offer to care leavers up to 25yrs”*, *“the housing offer is good with a good range of support tailored to care leavers”* and *“Investment in Personal Advisors has kept caseloads consistently low.”* The work of clinicians in supporting care leavers has also been identified by Mark Riddell as *“being an area of innovative and positive practice”*.

Breakaway’s Good Ofsted rating

In July 2019, the Trust’s children’s home, Breakaway received an Ofsted rating of ‘good’. Breakaway provides overnight short breaks, after school visits and occasional day care for children from 6 years of age up to their 18th birthday, and many areas of the service received high praise during the inspection. As with all children’s homes, Breakaway receives interim visits from Ofsted and in February 2020 received a judgement of sustained effectiveness which meant that it was still achieving “good” outcomes.

Breakaway is due to undergo refurbishment from early May 2020 and its residents will move into a next door property until this is completed in January 2021. It is anticipated the improvements to the current premises will address some of Ofsted’s current recommendations and enable the provision to push for “outstanding” in its next full inspection.

What we are still improving and how we are doing this

Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of older children and for care leavers and the quality of assessment, planning and service provision for homeless 16 and 17 year olds (Ofsted areas for improvements)

The sufficiency of suitable placements for adolescents with complex needs remains a challenge. 71.3 % of children looked after are placed within Slough or within 20 miles of the borough, only 3.7% off Slough’s target of 75%. Given that Slough is a small borough of 12.5 square miles and needs of children and young people are increasing complexity, some continue to be placed outside of the borough to manage risk and ensure their safety. The average distance placed outside Slough is 22.9 miles and newer entrants into care have an increased likelihood of being placed outside of Slough boundaries with 1/3rd of children who have become looked after in the last 12 months placed more than 20 miles outside of Slough, an increase of 14.9%.

We have been working with local providers to build a better understanding of each other’s needs and requirements to be able to place children and young people in more locally based provision, and the Trust is working towards progressing new arrangements with local

providers. The Commissioning Lead (due to start in May 2020) will provide a greater focus on commissioning activity going forward to address the semi independent market and more effective management of emergency placements with the aim of delivering a more cost effective service going forward.

Placement stability is a positive indicator of sufficiency meeting needs. As part of the Ofsted improvement plan, the Trust targeted itself to increase the percentage of children looked after in the same placement for 2 years or more from 64.8% in January 2019 to 70% in March 2020. This target was achieved in August 2019 and has steadily increased over the last five months to reach a high of 77.2%.

Slough continues to outperform both England and statistical neighbours in the suitability of accommodation suitability for care leavers. 90% of 17 and 18 year old care leavers and 84% of 19 to 21 year old care leavers live in suitable accommodation which is evidence of stable and sustainable progress as of April 2019 with figures of 92% and 80% respectively. No care leaver lives in bed and breakfast accommodation, something the Trust is pleased to state hasn't happened for many years.

In July 2019 the Trust and Council's Joint Parenting Panel formally ratified the 'Getting it Right for Homeless 16 & 17 year olds' as the joint protocol between the Trust and SBC to support young people where homelessness appears not to be immediately preventable. The Trust and the Council also collectively invested in the role of a Young Persons Advisor to support any young person under the age of 18 who present as homeless either to the Trust or to Housing Services. The first post holder left shortly after being appointed and the role has since been refilled.

Ofsted welcomed the Trust's robust approach to additional questions about unregulated in the Trust and Council's 2020 Annual Conversation. Ofsted saw that the Trust has a detailed process that it follows to ensure children are in the most appropriate placement and a comprehensive quality assurance process which includes being part of a consortium framework that completes checks and further monitoring by a cross authorities group. Ofsted stated it wanted to use the Trust's approach as an exemplar of good practice for other LA's, but the Trust still wants to keep strengthening its response to placements and provision to reduce the number of young people aged 16 – 18 years old (currently 19 and 17 of whom are Care Leavers) who live in semi-independent provisions not regulated by Ofsted.

Closure of Mallards

In conjunction with the LGA a decision was taken by the Trust to close Mallards, Slough's only children's home in mid-2019. The view of the Trust was that it wasn't a viable option for a number of reasons. This included the location and fabric of building which hadn't kept pace with the changing landscape of children's residential care alongside the cost of developing and maintaining the building. Given the small size of the building, the Trust was unable to have full occupancy as it had to carefully match children with complex needs, many of whom could not be placed within the same residential care. This resulted in both the overall and unit costs of running Mallards becoming disproportionate and better value for money externally.

The two long term residents placed in Mallards already had plans in place to move to independence and supported living by mid-June 2019, leaving Mallards the unit empty. This

gave the Trust the ideal opportunity to close it down. All staff working in Mallards were redeployed across the Trust retaining their skills sets with no redundancies. Savings delivered from closing Mallards have helped towards expanding the placement choice to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.

Increase the number of foster carers (to help meet sufficiency of placements)

The Trust's Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and communications team continues to prioritise the recruitment of in-house foster carers to provide placements in or closer to Slough. A microsite has been developed with anecdotal feedback of being more user friendly, a detailed marketing strategy based on customer insight has delivered some innovative communication, social media and public relations campaigns.

The Trust developed two strong Fostering Fortnight campaigns in May 2019, one of which involved foster carers sharing their stories, and the second showed foster children's views on fostering and ran during Fostering Fortnight and a couple of weeks afterwards, generating over 50 leads. There has also been work to build relationships with community faith groups and business, and the Trust started a short code text service to make it easier for potential foster carers to get in touch.

This resulted in a significant increase in fostering leads through digital channels, with a tripling of leads compared to the previous year and the Trust recruited 5 new sets of foster carers between April to December 2019. It was identified in late 2019 the conversion rate of foster carers was too low compared to the high volume of enquiries, a new Practice Manager took over responsibility for this work and the pace of response has accelerated.

To support foster carers we are working more closely with our existing foster carers as a key improvement partner, engaging with them to gauge their level of satisfaction and identify suitable mechanisms that will help them feel more supported, appreciated and retain them. In September 2019, the IFA investigated the feasibility of a fostering mentor scheme, and by December 2019 three foster carer champions have been appointed to provide support for all new foster carers through their first year of fostering.

Making the Independent Fostering Agency 'Good'

Ofsted's regulatory inspection of the Trust's Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) in April 2019 judged it to be inadequate and Ofsted issued four compliance notices. Two monitoring visits were conducted in June 2019 and August 2019 with positive feedback from Ofsted on both visits, and the August 2019 monitoring visit confirmed all compliance notices were met. The IFA is currently awaiting its next regulatory inspection which was due by the end of March 2020 but has since been deferred to an unknown date as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

There has been a refresh of the management structure which resulted in the appointment of the IFA Service Manager in June 2019 and both the IFA's Registered Manager and Responsible Individual were appointed to in August and October 2019 addressing a weakness in the service's structure.

A robust IFA improvement plan was recognised by Ofsted in the August monitoring visit as being a detailed review of the areas in need of development and a clear roadmap for the

IFA to get to good. A grip on performance is driving forward improvements and key performance indicators are showing a positive trajectory, though no one is complacent and there is still work to do.

The quality of children's plans, so that they include clear measureable actions, with timescales for delivery and clarity about what will happen if concerns do not reduce.

(Ofsted area for improvement)

Slough's most recent SEF refresh identified the need to achieve a consistency in written practice, especially the quality of children's plans. The increased demand since autumn 2019 has seen an increase in the number children subject to children protection plans rising to be above both statistical neighbours and England average, and as a result has put pressure on achieving consistently good social work practice.

For those on a Child Protection Plan, 8% of plans are closed within the first six months and 51% within a year, with repeat CP plans at 17.2% (a slight drop from end of 2019 figures). Out of the 238 child protection registrations since April 2019 to January 2020, only 41 (17%) were re-registrations (children who have previously been on a CP plan,) and only 5/41 (12%) were within 12 months of the previous CP plan end. This is good evidence of social work plans effectively resolving need at the earliest opportunity and the additional staff in the CP teams through the Transformation Programme will drive improvements through a focus on the simple things that have a big impact on outcomes for children.

Clinicians who are at the heart of our systemic model provide in-depth consultations to practitioners to influence child protection and care plans. In doing so they are positively contributing to family relational resilience to keep children from becoming looked after and prevent placement breakdowns with 102 children, young people and families supported since April 2019.

Recent audit activity showed practice in relation to care plans is improving but there is scope for further development to achieve consistency despite increases in demand. Since April 2019 there has been a 20% increase in the percentage of Pathway Plans completed with 72% of Care Leavers having an up to date Pathway Plan, but there is still more to do to reach our 100% target. However, the targeted support evidenced in these plans are producing positive performance for our care leavers with the majority in suitable accommodation and the numbers in employment, education and training (EET) both above statistical neighbours and the England average.

The quality of assessment, planning and service provision for privately fostered children

(Ofsted area for improvement)

Since March 2019, three new private fostering assessments were completed bringing the total number of private fostering arrangements in Slough to four, which although in line with our statistical neighbours needs to be increased. We continue to raise awareness across professionals and partners in education, health and the community, as well as social work staff via an e-learning package and the communications team regularly includes private fostering in its social media messaging and marketing campaigns.

Being an employer of choice

Growing Our Own and retaining them

The Trust has created a place where newly qualified social workers want to come and work and stay. In February 2020 we welcomed the seventh cohort of newly qualified social workers since September 2016 to complete our Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. Historically the Trust has a strong retention rate with nearly 60% of the 34 newly qualified social workers who have completed their ASYE programme from 2016 remaining with the Trust.



To continue to grown our own, the Trust supports the Step up to Social Work programme, welcoming 10 new students in the last two years. It has also enabled student social workers to get a taste of social work in Slough in their student placements, and in September 2020 the Trust will be offering 3 social work apprenticeship places in partnership with Slough's Adult Social Care Services. The Trust was exceptionally pleased to receive the following feedback from a father of a child we have supported about one of the Step up to Social Work students who completed their ASYE last year.

B's father outlined that he was very anxious and nervous when the Trust became involved, as he is 'old school' and has a negative view of statutory intervention. However 'dealing with A has completely changed my view.....she has been absolutely fantastic and changed B's path'.

The feedback outlines that A's approach, commitment and drive to arrange a plan in a short period of time (to keep B out of care) has been invaluable to the family. B was outlined to be at the centre of decision making, but the father also felt the whole family was considered and explored. A was outlined to have developed a network and support which may not have otherwise been possible due to the escalating behaviours the family where struggling to manage.

The Trust doesn't just support those starting out on their social work careers. Many experienced social workers are being helped to become Practice Educations through the PEPs 1 and PEPs 2 programme. This will strengthen our senior practitioner cohort and will provide social work staff with a variety of career pathways, a principle of the Transformation Programme.

Recruiting new staff

The Trust had a good response when it opened its doors to potential new recruits as part of the Recruitment evening in November 2019 and 6 staff were recruited as a result. This was to be the first of many events but we have had to postpone the one scheduled in April 2020.

The Trust implemented a master vendor arrangement with Sanctuary personnel in March 2019, and whilst this has assisted in regulating the costs for agency staff, there has been a limited amount of success regarding the recruitment of permanent staff. The current market for recruiting staff is highly competitive, and feedback from agencies is that Slough's historical reputation in the marketplace is taking longer to change, meaning experienced social workers are reluctant to come and work permanently in the area. There have also been concerns expressed by agencies, prospective staff and employed staff around the speculation that has occurred on the future of the Trust and the speculation on the future financial security and whether there will be future job security.

The recruitment of permanent staff has been largely driven by the Executive Leadership Team and this has had some success throughout a large part of the year, but with increased demand for services and speculation on the future of the trust the success of permanent recruitment has declined. The workforce profile is currently 67% permanent and 33% agency with the number of permanent social work staff at its highest levels since February 2020 (51/76). However, this has been largely due to staff recruited in late autumn and the ASYE's who started in February 2020, and the numbers of agency staff are still too high.

Focusing on the retention of staff

There has been a recent turnover of staff, especially in the Front Door which has coincided with the increase in demand. The CLA service, although staffed by permanent staff which has been a key factor in improvements in practice, was stable for many months and started in the autumn to show a gradual increase in turnover which means the percentage of CLA who have had two or more changes in social worker in the last 12 months rose from 18.9% in April 2019 to 33.8% in January 2020.

The introduction of IR35 in April 2020, which although now postponed for a year after government legislation around covid-19, caused some agency staff to seek what they perceived to be better packages which included accommodation and travelling costs and leave for other roles. The delay in changing tax rules gives the Trust longer to talk to agency staff and encourage them to move from temporary to permanent roles.

The Trust undertakes to understand staff morale through a variety of mechanisms and includes the staff health check survey which has been carried out for the last 2 years. The latest health check in June 2019 found staff morale was high and there are plans for a third later this summer. Pulse surveys, comments boxes, Chief Executive staff surgeries and the peer staff thank you scheme all provide the staff with opportunities to give their views about what is going well and what is not going as well. In the latter part of 2019 and early 2020, there have been a number of whistle blowing concerning the Trust to the Council and Ofsted. The Trust Board have decided to have these independently investigated for both transparency and to ensure we learn from these. Staff have been informed of this decision. We know that our staff are extremely committed to both children and families and to the

work and ethos of the trust. We are proud of our staff work ethic and the improved quality of the social work and support services that are offered to the vulnerable children of Slough.

Modelling strong and inspiring leadership

Leaders prioritise the needs of children

In the autumn, the Executive Leadership Team was strengthened with the creation of the Assistant Director of Quality Improvement Practice and Performance post and a new Director of Operations joined the Trust following the retirement of Eric De Mello. Both leaders brought with them a positive track record for good quality service delivery and outcomes for children, and in their first few months have driven forward the alignment of the Quality Assurance and Performance Framework and embedding across the Trust, a strengthening of Front Door arrangements and a focus on the recruitment of high quality staff.

Using the voice of children, young people and their families to shape services

Reach Out! (Slough's Children In Care Council) have a visible influence on initiatives across both the Council and the Trust. Over the last year they have been instrumental in the refresh of our Local Offer for Care Leavers which was recognised as a strong offer by the DfE in October 2019.

As well internal surveys for Children Looked After the Trust commissions external surveys such as 'Bright Spots' to get impartial feedback from children in care, and in the summer of 2019, 25% of Slough's looked after children completed this survey. The survey gave the Trust some areas to work on, including increased contact with family members and siblings and finding ways to mitigate the impact of changes in social workers on children, but most pleasingly 94% of Slough's children in care felt their lives were improving.

The Trust has been trialling capturing service user feedback as part of audit activity in Practice Learning Week's during 2019 with a view to making this part of business as usual auditing activity in January 2020. However, the increase in demand has had a negative impact on auditing activity in recent months and the move to contact service users has been paused to enable frontline managers who routinely audit to focus on practice.

Developing the Trust's culture

In November 2019 after a lot of collaboration and co-creation with the Employee Engagement Group, the Trust launched its new values which have the child at the heart of everything that we do. The Chief Executive in February 2020 as part of her regular staff briefings reinforced the values to all staff, thanked those who played a huge role in co-creating them and the values champions who are embedding them in their services. These values are being written into new and existing job descriptions so that they are lived by all staff, permanent and agency



Embracing external challenge

The Trust continues to welcome external challenge and has invited the DfE and other local authorities to help improve services. In early March 2020, Hampshire as a new Partner in Practice conducted a peer view of the Trust's Youth Offending Services and serious youth violence work to sense check the effectiveness of the service in its pending HMIP inspection. The peer review found lots of positives and left the Trust with areas to further improve to work on but confirmed effective working in service delivery. The Trust awaits the formal report.

Encouraging innovation

New child protection conferencing model

During Slough's second Practice Learning Week in April 2019, it was identified child protection conferences needed to include children and families more effectively, and a project started in July 2019 to make the conferences shorter, more participatory and increase the quality of plans by training staff to complete danger and safety planning to a high standard in advance of conferences. Over the last six months a total of 164 frontline staff have been trained. To include partners briefing sessions have been held for designated safeguarding leads in schools and there are plans underway for other frontline professionals across the partnership to be trained in the new style conferencing.

The impact of this work is already being seen as in January 2020 95% of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC's) resulted in a child protection plan suggesting more robust decision making and planning earlier on and only those cases more likely to result in a CP Plan are being progressed. The Trust has increased the capacity of child protection chairs and this will have a positive effect on child protection conferences and plans.

The Trust's Virtual School innovating to prevent exclusions and get children into education

Our Virtual School, already recognised by Ofsted as transformative, started a pilot scheme in the summer with four local schools to reach out to children subject to child protection and child in need plans. This focused on children who were missing education, on part-time hours, not allocated a school place and were at risk of contextual safeguarding, and getting them into schools would enhance their safety. A small scale sample of work with 54 children in the summer showed promising results to ensure vulnerable children were in school and receiving appropriate educational provision. The additional resource to make this pilot

scheme 'business as usual' has been secured, and in the last 10 months 130 children have been supported. In carrying out this work the Virtual Schools is a key partner with social workers in achieving positive outcomes, ensuring improved safeguarding and addressing systemic issues of neglect.

Launch of the Mockingbird Programme to support Slough's foster carers

The Mockingbird Programme was launched in November 2018, putting in place an innovative method of delivering foster care by using the extended family model to improve the stability of placements and strengthen the relationship between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families. The first Mockingbird constellation in Slough (which is offered by less than 20 organisations in the UK) is already enabling children to have more natural contact with their siblings, supporting placement stability and has passed fidelity checks from the fostering network.

During an inspection of the Trust's Independent Fostering Agency (April 2019), the inspectors found that the 'Mockingbird Programme' had "*made a positive difference to both the children and foster carers involved*". This has been well received by carers, who felt well supported and prepared to meet the needs of those in their care and as a result 25% of children fostered by Slough have benefited from this programme. Children who have been spoken to reported that they liked belonging to a larger support network, and as a result of such positive feedback the Trust is planning for a second Mockingbird constellation in October 2020 which would extend the beneficial outcomes to 50% of children fostered by Slough.

Developing effective partnerships

Working with businesses to recruit and support foster carers

The Trust has developed new partnerships with some major local businesses to improve the opportunities we can offer children in care and support those businesses to become foster-friendly. In November 2019, the Trust ran the first in a series of Foster Friendly business breakfasts which saw a team from the Trust and one of our fostering champions get together with local organisations to explore how businesses can help support working foster carers. Examples of businesses included O2, Ipsen, Lonza and Slough Aspire. Feedback from attendees was really positive with many happy to leave video messages for future attendees and it was great to see one company drafting its own policy and offering to host the next Fostering Friendly breakfast in spring 2020.



Opening doors for children and young people in Slough Borough Council

The Trust continues to find ways to give new experiences to children and young people in Slough and works with the business community to achieve this. This has provided many great opportunities for care leavers have enjoyed days at large scale companies in Slough including Lego and 8 care leavers enjoyed a day at O2's Slough headquarters in April 2019 to learn about business.



The rigour of planning and coordination for children at risk of exploitation and the way strategy discussions are convened, so that processes are clear and relevant agencies participate in initial decision-making (both Ofsted areas for improvement)

In late summer 2019 a large scale project started to screen all children aged 8 and above open to the Trust with the Child Exploitation (CE) screening tool, and for those that are identified as having risk markers the CE Risk Assessment tool was completed to enable effective safety planning. Around 1500 screening tools were completed with a need for 6% of cases to have the risk assessment tool completed. As a result of this exercise, practitioners have a better awareness of the 8 different forms of exploitation and appropriate safeguards are taking place to safeguard children. Both the screening tool and risk assessment tool are being routinely used for all children aged 8 and above.

The development of multi-agency daily contextual safeguarding meetings has led to better intelligence sharing, leading to more effective responses and outcomes for our children and is strengthening our approach to contextual safeguarding. A weekly, multi-agency contextual safeguarding meeting reviews all missing children and young people to identify patterns and trends in terms of locations, people and incidents of missing. The information gathered is also used to review processes and support for young people who repeatedly go missing as well as developing joint strategies in relation to disruption. This group has already led to improved care plans and risk management for individuals known to social care and is helping to build professional's curiosity for what happens to children and young people whilst they are missing.

Being sustainable

The Trust's financial position

Over the last financial year there have been three key elements driving the financial picture;

- Continued improvement in services and outcomes for children and families
- Unprecedented demands on service
- Challenging financial context for children's services across the country.

The Trust saw significant growth in activity in the last quarter of 2018/19 which has remained through 2019/20 and has contributed to financial pressures. Referral rates into social care have increased to 19.9% of contacts in 2019/20 compared to 16.3% from the prior year. Numbers on a Child Protection plan have averaged 231 per month compared to 177 last year, whilst Children Looked After numbers have increased by 12 on average over 2018/19 and stand at an average of 204 in 2019/20. The impact of this increased demand can be seen in reported key performance indicators.

This has resulted in the overall caseloads for frontline social workers reaching an all time high for the Trust in 2019/20. The increase in social care activity has had an impact on the levels of workforce required to meet the demands and the numbers of placements required for those taken into care. Both the additional resources and placement requirements have resulted in significant cost pressures in year.

Even though the Trust has experienced significant costs pressures from demands in service, the cost base has only increased year on year by 1% and stands at a projected £34.4m in 2019/20. The 1% increase includes the 2% pay inflation and a 1.7% increase on employers pension contributions both paid from April. The Trust has taken action to curb spending where possible to offset the pressures, developing solutions both in partnership with and in consultation with Trust staff.

Action taken has delivered savings made from the closure of Mallards and phases 1 & 2 of the transformation programme. Other early adoption of transformation programme savings have been achieved where implicated posts have become vacant through the year. The Trust has been unable to deliver in full the transformation programme due to delays in securing the necessary funding to deliver the programme, and as a result have fallen short of the full savings target set in the budget. A number of vacancies have been held through the year where possible, but recognising this has added pressures and strains on staff. Progress has been made in placing children with in house carers, even though we have not achieved the levels expected in the budget due to delays in developing strategies from staff turnover. There has been a ban on any discretionary spend, which has seen small but vital reductions in printing, stationary, and other such costs.

The Trust plans for improving on the percentage of permanent social work staff in post has not achieved the targets set within the budget. The market for permanent social workers is an extremely competitive one driven in part by demand outstripping supply and Slough has struggled to attract experienced qualified social workers. However there has been significant success in the recruitment and retention of ASYE's as part of the Trust's approach for developing a longer term solution for social work.

The Trust is pleased that growth in funding has been provided to help address the workforce requirements to meet demands. An additional £1.4m was added to the contract value in 2019/20, recognises the pressures on the cost base. A further £2m of funds have been secured for 2020/21, which include costs of inflation. The Trust expects further growth in demand over the coming year as services improve and further need is recognised.

Transforming the Trust

In April 2019, the Trust started work on a Transformation Programme to become a sustainable organisation which delivers consistently good services, develops its staff and offers value for money achieved through an evolving delivery model. The principles of Transformation Programme are to ensure a maximum of three steps to permanence for children and thus reduce the number of transfer points experienced by children and young people, build resilience and capacity, strengthen management capacity and management oversight as well as ensuring effective back office support to frontline staff.

The Transformation Programme started with the mainstreaming of resources within the Innovation Hub and the development of a ring fenced Care Leavers service. In July 2019 the third phase of the Transformation programme started with a formal consultation with all Trust staff on the configuration of the social care functions.

In late August 2019, the wider Transformation Programme paused on account of discussions with the DfE and Slough Borough Council regarding Trust funding but since that time other smaller scale transformation activity has continued. This has included a re-structure of the Trust's Independent Fostering Agency, the Children with Disabilities Services moved to the CLA service as agreed by staff in the July consultation, there were discussions with staff over regularised hours and a formal consultation was started adoption service staff about TUPE proposals to the Regional Adoption Agency.

The wider transformation programme was due to commence in late February 2020 with a formal consultation with all Trust staff on the detailed structures within each service, but the coronavirus outbreak has meant another pause in the programme. The Trust are hoping this can be implemented within 2020/21 which will help strengthen the management capacity within the workforce and lead to more career development opportunities for front line practitioners to make Slough attract and retain a more permanent workforce thus reducing agency costs in the Trust's budget.

Going forward

In the next year the Trust will experience at least one Ofsted inspection, the Independent Fostering Agency will finally receive its regulatory inspection, our Youth Offending Services will be subject to HMIP scrutiny and the partnership across Slough may be subject to either a Joint Targeted Area Inspection or a SEND inspection.

This will be against a backdrop of increased demand, the Trust continuing to ensure that children are 'safe, secure and successful' against a backdrop of sustained increased demand, financial difficulties as well as Coronavirus changing how we all live, work and safeguard children. The Trust has made huge improvements since the Ofsted inspection working in

partnership with different agencies and organisations, some of which have become well embedded and some of which we have found it harder to maintain.

In the next year the Trust will complete its transformation programme to become a sustainable organisation which delivers consistently good services, develops its staff and offers value for money, and this will set it on a secure operating footing to get to good.