

**County Council Meeting – 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024****Question to Councillor Mark Sutton  
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People****By Councillor Charlotte Atkins**

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**Question**

After the County Council's substantial investment in the Transformation of Children's Services, why have Children's Services been downgraded from good to requires improvement?

How much did the Transformation cost the Council, including the redundancy costs of all the senior managers?

Has the Transformation of Children's Services achieved the savings that were promised or have reinvestments been required to refill posts/re-establish posts deleted in the Transformation Plan?

How much is the Council paying in interim/agency/non-Staffordshire employed managers, social workers and support workers per month compared to before the Transformation?

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**Reply****Ofsted Outcome**

Staffordshire Children's Services was inspected by OFSTED in November 2023 and received an overall rating of requires improvement to be good:

- The quality and effectiveness of management oversight of contacts, referrals and assessments in the 'front door'.
- The effectiveness and impact of performance data and quality assurance to drive practice improvement.
- The effectiveness and oversight of allegations against those in positions of trust undertaken by the local authority designated officer (LADO) service.
- The effectiveness of partnership working, particularly with housing and health partners, to improve children's access to dentistry and for children in care with more complex health needs to get timely assessment and support and ensure that care leavers are not placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Whilst the inspection outcome is not what we would have wanted there were many positives acknowledged including:

- Our arrangements to determine the suitability of elective home education (EHE) and to ensure children missing full-time education are able to access education as quickly as possible. The inspection concluded that these are well-considered, well-implemented and ably managed. As part of the overall transformation, additional resource was provided for EHE as this was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- The effective partnership between education providers and our virtual school help children make good progress from their starting points. The inspection recognised that children in care attend school regularly.
- There were examples of excellent practice for UASC such as the Amity Hub which supports children with a broad range of skills and services for Children in Care which maintained good overall.
- The inspection recognised that no children were found to be unsafe in Staffordshire and the majority had their plans progressed in a timely manner, these are massive achievements given the scale of change that we have experienced.

## **Transformation**

- The Children's Transformation was a significant change which we anticipated would take five years to embed. We recognise that we have more work to do and remain confident that the next inspection will demonstrate the scale of activity and staff commitment to get us to good.
- All of our District Leads and first-line managers in Social Care are now permanent (this was not the position prior to the transformation), the number of permanent social workers is increasing (this is different to the position across most local authorities in England), staff satisfaction rates are increasing, staff sickness rates are decreasing.
- For children and families, the district model of combining our social care and education offer reduces duplication and ensures we have a holistic approach to providing the right services and support which we remain committed to securing.
- Between 2016 and 2019 Cabinet received papers outlining proposed changes to the wider children's system to develop a whole system approach, bringing together children's social care, SEND and Inclusion, the Place Based Approach and commissioning. This approach was informed by best practice, an evidence base from outstanding local authorities, research and performance data.
- In order to facilitate that change, additional investment was required and provided for c £8.1m over the years 2019/20 – 2025/26.

- The majority of this was temporary short term funding front loaded for the initial years 2019/20 to 2022/23 for £6.3m that has now been removed; however, there is also an on-going amount of c £0.6m for the continuing provision of family group conferencing and additional support for virtual school.
- The savings were estimated to be £17 million based on reducing the number of children in care. During 2023 there has been a steady reduction however the anticipated financial impact is yet to be realised.
- This was exacerbated by covid and the significant change that followed the staffing restructure. The number of children in care have not reduced as initially intended, however as the changes we made have been embedded and staff retention has improved the number of children in our care has reduced over the past 12 months seeing a reduction virtually every month during 2023, as we are able to work more restoratively with families keeping them together and return more children to their families when it's safe to do so.

### **Redundancy Costs and Agency Staff**

- 11 Senior managers (members of WLT or OMT) including associated actuarial strain was £1.3 million. None of these positions have since been reestablished.
  - 10% of the current staff overall within Children's Services are agency staff.
  - Nationally Children's Services have struggled with the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, Staffordshire comparatively performs well overall in the use of agency staff.
  - In 2020/21 Childrens Service spent £3.8m on circa 70 temporary agency staff but in 2022/23 that had increased to £7.9m covering vacant positions within our structure this includes maternity and staff absence.
  - This was recognised in the MTFs and significant additional resource brought into the budget this year (23/24) of £5.7m to address those concerns to provide for both additional resource and an increase in funding for social workers. The service has secured people within the majority of those roles and is actively recruiting to the remaining positions; however for the majority of this year Childrens services has continued to rely on more expensive agency support for essential service delivery.
  - Whilst this has reduced from last year, the service continues to employ around 90 agency staff at present (includes c 20 staff for sickness/maternity cover) at a cost of c £0.5m / month. That is down from over 120 in the summer 2023 and we anticipate will reduce further over the next few months.
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