

Meeting date: 8th November 2022

Report to: CPH Children and Education Decision Session

Report title: Children's Services Improvement Hub - DFE Grant

Report from: Pete Campbell – Director of Children's Services

Report author/lead contact officer: Ben Fegghi – Programme Manager, Children's Services

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
-

Public/private report: Public

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Department for Education (DfE) grant for £642,402 to support essential improvement activity within Children's Services.
- 1.2 Following the outcome of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), and the Non-Statutory Improvement Notice issued by the DfE in February 2022, it was deemed necessary that grant funding would be required to help provide transformational and cultural change to address serious practice failings within Solihull's Children's Social Care Services.
- 1.3 Due to the immediate need for improvement across the service, expenditure has already been committed against the value of the grant during the current financial year, as well as the terms of conditions of the grant being signed by the then Interim Director for Children's Services.

2. Decision(s) Recommended

- 2.1 To note the terms and conditions of the grant and to gain retrospective approval.
- 2.2 To note the value of the grant and the expenditure committed to date.
- 2.3 To seek approval for the continued commitment of expenditure against the grant.

Report Title: Children's Services Improvement Hub - DfE Grant

1. Matters for Consideration

- 1.1 In February 2022, the DfE issued a Non-Statutory Improvement Notice to the Authority following concerns raised in respect of fragility of the MASH and insufficient social worker capacity in the Council to deal effectively with presenting need; crisis management to reduce unallocated cases and situations of unassessed and unknown risk for a significant number of children in the Council's area; and the findings from the Joint Targeted Area Inspection.
- 1.2 To support improvement work, the Authority was successful obtaining grant funding from the DfE of £642,402 to cover the period June 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 1.3 This funding aims to support delivery of 4 immediate priorities:
 - Improving social work practice including improving quality and timeliness of assessments, SMART planning, capturing the lived experience of the child, purposeful visiting, child exploitation and supervision.
 - Develop quality assurance including strengthening audit activity so that there is a clear line of oversight on the quality of social work practice.
 - Management grip on quality of practice, including ensuring thresholds and assessments are timely and clear, decisions are robust and clarified and ensuring that staff receive reflective and impactful supervision.
 - Early help including development of a more streamlined early help offer so children in Solihull receive the right service at the right time.
- 1.4 Conditions of the grant are outlined in a grant offer letter which was sent to the Authority on 12th September 2022, which is attached to this report in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 Due to the urgent need to commence improvement activity; the Interim Director for Children's Services accepted the terms and conditions of the grant on 12th September 2022 and expenditure has been committed against the value of the grant from June 2022.
- 1.6 Expenditure incurred to date has covered the following pieces of work:
 - Formation of an experienced Improvement Hub team
 - Development of performance monitoring with service leaders
 - Service wide Best Practice workforce training programme
 - Regular quality assurance and performance management
- 1.7 With the approval of the Cabinet member, to continue the successful operation of the activities as set out in 1.6, further expenditure is required to be drawn down from the grant, to maximise use of the £642,402 available within the terms and conditions of the grant.

2. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

2.1 The utilisation of the grant is required to help provide transformational and cultural change to address serious practice failings within Solihull’s Children’s Social Care Services.

3. Reasons for recommending preferred option

3.1 Owing to the urgent need to commence improvement activity, and in consideration of service wide financial pressures, senior leaders felt it was in the best interests of the Authority to seek grant funding to immediately mobilise a workforce that will act upon the issues identified in the JTAI and Non-Statutory Improvement Notice.

4. Implications and Considerations

4.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull. 2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it. 3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities. 4. Enable communities to thrive. 	<p>The development of earlier intervention for families who need assistance to meet the needs of their children should reduce the number of children and young people who are impacted by longer term neglect, injury, or abuse. Adults who need support to meet the needs of their children can be supported in a respectful and responsive way, improving life chances, health and ability to thrive and make best use of or contribute to services available.</p>
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Develop and promote the borough’s economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres. 6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. 7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable. 	<p>The development of our response to children and families who are at risk/in need across the borough will improve outcomes for those who are vulnerable as well as our wider communities. Investment in families and children will contribute to healthy and thriving communities with effective support structures</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions. 	<p>NA</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Promote employee wellbeing 	<p>Providing supportive and enabling workplace systems, learning and development aligned with sufficient resources to deliver the</p>

Priority:	Contribution:
	services required by the community. Meeting the needs of key workers.

4.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

4.2.1 Regular progress reports / updates are to be provided to the DfE as defined in the grant offer letter

4.3 Financial implications:

4.3.1 The grant conditions require specific targets to be met within an identified timescale. To maximise the full claim of the grant, the progress against the targets will need to be managed tightly.

4.4 Legal implications:

4.4.1 None as a result of this report.

4.5 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

4.5.1 Risks identified due to grant activity and/or inspection and improvement work will be reflected within risk registers. These will be revised accordingly and managed within current processes.

4.6 Equality implications:

4.6.1 The children's improvement plan will actively seek to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, and their families within the borough.

4.7 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

4.7.1 Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS) are a key partner in delivering our services to children, young people, and families.

5. List of appendices referred to

5.1 Grant offer letter – which has been attached to the private section of the agenda.

6. Background papers used to compile this report

6.1 NA

7. List of Other Relevant Documents

7.1 NA