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Title: Overview of Focus on Practice and Partners in Practice

Report of: Julie Rooke/Melissa Caslake/Clare Chamberlain

Cabinet Member Portfolio: Councillor Danny Chalkley

Wards Involved: All

Policy Context: City for Choice / Heritage / Aspiration

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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report and the attached appendices is to update the Committee on the progress of *Focus on Practice*, our programme within family services funded by the Department for Education Innovation in Social Care programme, and our proposals for our future work as Partners in Practice with the DfE.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- For information

3. Background

- 3.1 It is recognised that in Family Services, practitioners can be constrained by bureaucratic processes, with too much time spent at the computer and too little time spent on effective work with families, and a domination of the case manager role in preference to direct and effective intervention. Too often we see our practitioners in the role of watching and waiting with families, often referring on the most important direct work with the family to other teams or agencies, while they focus on assessment or planning but have neither the time nor the confidence to undertake the clinical and sophisticated interventions which would be most likely to help the family. We see practitioners who come into the profession with an ambition to make a real difference to children's lives, which is frustrated when they are not able to develop the expertise they need or develop trusted relationships with families.
- 3.2 An analysis undertaken in 2013 of the histories of young people who came into care in the Tri-borough revealed that often families had been known to our departments over a period of years, but there was little evidence of significant change despite repeated episodes of assessment and involvement. The findings from this analysis led us to think about how we might create a service where families are not 're-worked' over and over, but where the intervention is deeper, more intensive and able to help families to engage with our service in a meaningful way in order to make significant changes in their lives; and deliver significant savings in the process. We believe there are too many repeat referrals, assessments, child protection plans and interventions which do not result in significant change, and which drive unnecessary costs.
- 3.3 Based on the above, we developed *Focus on Practice*, funded by the DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, for the development of more purposeful practice and effective interventions with children, young people and their families over a two to three year period
- 3.4 Launched in October 2014, the programme covers our work with children and families in all areas of children's social care, and includes both social workers and other allied practitioners who work within early help, with children in need, in child protection, with looked after children or those leaving care, with disabled children and with teenagers and young offenders.
- 3.5 The core objective of *Focus on Practice* is for social workers and other practitioners to use their professional expertise to help create positive change for families and better outcomes for children and young people. Over the next three years, we expect to see a reduction in the number of children looked after and those subject to child protection plans, and more effective interventions with families resulting in fewer re-referrals to our services.
- 3.6 By use of evidence based interventions and a more engaging approach, practitioners are able develop relationships with families that enable them to build on their strengths. To enable this to happen, we have delivered a comprehensive skills development programme incorporating: systemic practice (a 15 day accredited foundation course in systemic family therapy,

undertaken by all practitioners and managers); Signs of Safety approaches; Motivational Interviewing; and parenting programmes.

- 3.7 In December 2015, based on the early successes of Focus on Practice, Westminster City Council, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham were selected as 'Partners in Practice' by the Department for Education. Over the next four years, the DfE will work with the 12 Partners in Practice authorities to develop models of effective practice which will contribute to overall improvement in the sector, with a particular emphasis on deregulation.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Julie Rooke, 07739 316 192
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APPENDICES:

- Focus on Practice Impact Statement (including case study)
- Partners in Practice proposal summary

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None