

**CABINET – 10TH MARCH 2017****OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF
HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER, AND CARE
LEAVERS****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of children's social care services in Leicestershire and to present the Action Plan which has been developed to address the recommendations in the Ofsted Report and which sets out the way forward for the development of the Council's Children and Family Services Department.
2. The Cabinet is also asked to note the Department's Improvement Plan which was developed in preparation for the inspection and charts progress made from the time of the inspection to date.

Recommendations

3. The Cabinet is recommended to -
 - (a) Note the content, grades and recommendations of the Ofsted inspection report on children's social care services in Leicestershire;
 - (b) Note the Children and Family Services Improvement Plan which was developed in preparation for the inspection and charts progress made;
 - (c) Note the Action Plan which has been prepared in response to the recommendations in the Ofsted Report and includes proposals for the future development and improvement of services to children and families, and approve the Action Plan as the County Council's formal response to the Ofsted Inspection Report.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. To ensure that members are aware of the measures being taken in response to the Ofsted Report and for the overall development of Children and Family Services.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The findings of the Ofsted inspection were presented to members at a briefing on Monday 13th February.
6. The Children and Family Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider this report at its meeting on 6th March 2017 and its comments will be reported to the Cabinet.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. The inspection was carried out in accordance with Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework. The resulting Action Plan will, when implemented, have an impact on the County Council's Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It will also affect departmental and operational plans which inform the work of the Department.

Resource Implications

8. In the preparation for the Ofsted Inspection, officers of the Council, together with the Independent Chairman of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Boards undertook a self-assessment into the services provided to children and their families. This highlighted a number of areas where improvements needed to be made, the costs of which were reflected in the recent MTFS report approved by the County Council in February 2017.
9. Following the publication of the Ofsted report and the preparation of the Action Plan further work is being undertaken to understand fully the financial implications for the service. This work will be carried out over the next few months and will need to have regard to the impact of changes already made, the views of frontline staff about the effectiveness of change and suggestions for improvements and the Council's extremely challenging financial position.
10. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedures

11. Given the significance of the issues covered, this report will be circulated to all members via Members' News In Brief.

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PART B

Background

12. Ofsted is commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake what is known as the Single Inspection Framework on all English local authority children's social care services. Most councils have now been inspected, with outstanding ones due to be completed in 2017. A new inspection framework will commence in 2018.

The Review Process

13. The inspection of Leicestershire's children's social care services was carried out over four weeks, from 14th November to 8th December 2016. Ten inspectors and one shadow inspector were involved. The inspectors attended 120 meetings, looked at 276 case files, and were provided with around 700 documents.
14. The inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that was being made by the service to the lives of children, young people and their families. They read case files, watched how professional staff worked with families and with each other, and discussed the effectiveness of help and care being given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families.
15. The inspectors also considered the Council's self assessment of its performance which set out its view about how well it is performing and what difference it is making for the young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after and areas for improvement. A copy of improvements underway prior to the inspection which now includes the findings of the Ofsted inspection and the progress made since is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Inspection Findings

16. The findings of the inspection are contained in a detailed report, the executive summary of which is attached at Appendix E. This includes gradings indicating how the service is perceived to be performing in five broad areas and an overall effectiveness rating using the same grading system. The grades are (1) inadequate - which will trigger formal intervention by DfE, (2) requires improvement in order to achieve good, (3) good, and (4) outstanding.
17. To date in relation to overall effectiveness circa 25% of councils have been classed as inadequate, 50% require improvement and 25% are good or outstanding with only two achieving the top grade.
18. Leicestershire has been graded as follows:

Overall effectiveness - Requires improvement to be good

1. Children who need help and protection - Requires improvement

2. Children looked after and achieving permanence - Requires improvement

2.1 Adoption performance - Requires improvement

2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers - Requires improvement

3. Leadership, management and governance - Requires improvement.

Report Headlines

Overall effectiveness

19. The report identifies many areas of good practice but also a number of aspects which do need to improve and is a fair and accurate evaluation. Ofsted's appraisal of the service is in line with the Council's own self-assessment, which is recognised within the Report and is a strength. The Service had already identified the need for investment in certain areas and had commenced improvement work prior to the inspection which is also identified positively within the report.

(1) Children who need help and protection

Strengths

20. The Report indicates that children at risk of significant harm are identified and protected through effective interventions by staff. This is the most important finding as it is the key aspect which underpins all of the Department's activities and is the most influential determinate of overall grade.
21. It was also recognised that the Council provides a wide range of good quality early help services which are having a positive impact for families. Child Protection Plans are reviewed effectively and on time and work to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation is robust and cutting edge. The Authority works closely with colleagues in other agencies such as the police and health services to support and protect children and this joint working is developing in areas such as the management of domestic abuse.

Areas for Improvement

22. Children who are not at significant risk do not always receive a timely service which happens due to staffing shortages and inefficient business processes. This was being addressed at the time of the inspection but changes had not had time to have sufficient impact.
23. Whilst there was evidence of good quality assessments and of care or protection plans overall standards were too inconsistent. The number of repeat child protection plans are too high although were seen to be reducing and since the inspection there have been a further reductions to become close to the national average.
24. Although no children with disabilities were seen to be at immediate risk there was a need for more engagement with partner agencies and a need to

improve the quality and timeliness of assessments. Vulnerable 16/17 year olds at risk of homelessness need speedier support.

(2) Children looked after and achieving permanence

Strengths

25. Given that the Council is experiencing increases in the numbers of those in care, it is encouraging to note that the Report indicates it is only taking children into care when necessary and is then placing them in appropriate placements that are well commissioned and monitored. Although numbers of looked after children are increasing, early help services are having a positive impact on keeping overall numbers below the national average. Where the Authority uses adoption this is achieved in a timely way and children are well matched to adoptive parents. The Council is also very good at keeping in touch with care leavers.
26. The service to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS children) is good and sensitive to support the special needs of this group.
27. There are two very active Children in Care Councils which are supported by senior officers and the Cabinet Lead Member and which are valued by young people. All of the work undertaken to engage and advocate for young people was seen to be of very high quality.

Areas for Improvement

28. Support for those at high risk of coming into care or those returning home from care works well in some cases but overall could be more effective. Although the Council does progress adoptions well it does not provide enough on-going support and does not enable the adoption of enough children with more complex needs.
29. Assessments are not routinely updated and care plans are of variable quality and not always specific enough around what is required. Social workers do not always visit children as they should do or as young people would like.
30. Inspectors were critical of the lack of therapeutic support particularly from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provided by the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust for children in care which is detrimental to achieving good outcomes.
31. Although children who go missing from home are routinely offered return interviews of good quality this is not always the case for those who go missing from care. There is also too much inconsistency in the support offered to care leavers.

(3) Leadership, management and governance

Strengths

32. Senior managers, political leaders and partners are engaged and prioritise children's services. Additional funding has been provided in recognition of

the on-going service pressures particularly in the looked after system and also the need to reduce caseloads, develop quality assurance work, and advocate for children.

33. There is robust member oversight, scrutiny and challenge and a very experienced and committed Lead Member who is focused on improvement. (Appendix B sets out the findings in relation to strategic leadership and provides a brief summary of current arrangements in place for member involvement and oversight).
34. The report recognises the positive impact of the interim Director and Assistant Director who have identified weaknesses and provided a catalyst for recent improvements. The Signs of Safety initiative is also positive and there is a very impressive commitment to the participation of children.

Areas for improvement

35. Caseloads are too high for many staff, which is having a detrimental impact upon standards and can be linked to some shortcomings identified within the report.
36. There are deficiencies and inconsistency in the management oversight of casework practice and provision of good quality regular staff supervision.
37. Developmental support for senior staff and managers is limited as is the support offered to newly qualified social workers, which does not always meet requirements.
38. There are data quality issues in some areas particularly the First Response Team which has led to under reporting of poor performance.

Key Actions

39. The report contains 17 recommendations and the Action Plan prepared in response is attached as Appendix C. The Action Plan provides the blueprint for taking the service forward to achieve good and outstanding standards of practice and the best possible outcomes for the children, young people and the families it supports. A high-level summary (Action Plan on a Page) sets out the vision to improve services and is attached as Appendix D.
40. As mentioned previously, improvement activity was underway prior to the inspection and as a result of this improvements are already being noted in certain areas. These are identified in the Improvement Plan set out in Appendix A.

Staff and member briefings

41. Three briefings have been held for departmental staff regarding the findings in the Ofsted Report and a presentation has been prepared for use by managers who will cascade the findings at service and team levels. The Senior Inspector who oversaw the inspection has visited the Department and held sessions with the Lead and Cabinet Support Member, Senior Managers, and the Director and Assistant Directors. Reports will be made to

the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Children and Families Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Conclusion

42. The Ofsted Report does provide a comprehensive and largely accurate evaluation of the strengths and aspects requiring development in the Council's social care services for children and families that is in line with internal assessments. The updated Action Plan produced in response will be submitted to Ofsted as is required. Additional work needs to be undertaken to understand the further improvements needed and the how these will be resourced and how this work interrelates with Children and Family Services' overall improvement plans.
43. There will be no further engagement from Ofsted in relation to this inspection or the Single Inspection Framework. Future inspections of social care services will be undertaken under a new framework that commences in 2018. There are however outstanding inspections of SEND and School Improvement Services which have no timeline being unannounced.

Background Papers

Ofsted Report - Leicestershire: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/leicestershire>

Appendices

Appendix A - Issues being addressed in the Improvement Plan December 2016 that were identified by Ofsted to require further work

Appendix B - Strategic Leadership - Political and Officer

Appendix C - Draft Ofsted Action Plan 2017-2020

Appendix D - Children and Family Services Improvement Plan 2017-2020 'The Road to Excellence'

Appendix E - Ofsted Report Executive Summary

Equality and Human Rights Implications

44. There are no specific equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The findings apply to all children and young people with whom the Council is engaged regardless of any protected characteristic. The changes as a result of the Action Plan will help improve the outcomes for children and their families.
45. Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments will be undertaken as appropriate should there be any reviews of Departmental strategies or services.

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