

22nd February 2021

Agenda Item: 9

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OUTLINED IN
THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Children and Young People's Committee on progress in implementing the areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in October 2019.

Information

2. In October 2019, Ofsted undertook an inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Services under the ILACS framework. The scope of the inspection covered services for children in need of help and protection including early help, and services for children in care and care leavers, and the impact of leaders on such services. It also included a regulatory inspection of fostering and adoption services. Under the inspection, the Authority was judged on a four point scale: outstanding; good; requires improvement to be good and inadequate.
3. Ofsted made the following judgements:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

4. The inspection concluded that "good practice has been maintained for children in care, and the care leavers service has been transformed. Most children who require help and protection services receive effective support, but the local authority has not yet successfully sustained good services for all children".
5. The report highlighted many strengths within the Local Authority's practice, notably highlighting the skills and commitment of the workforce, and the positive support provided by their managers. The report also highlights the strength of political and corporate support,

and the positive impact in particular on services for children in care and care leavers, for example through leisure cards and council tax exemptions.

6. The report outlined a number of discrete areas for improvement that the Council is required to make:
 - a. The quality of strategy discussions and meetings so that they are always timely, involve all relevant partners and are well recorded.
 - b. The consistency of social work practice in all geographical areas of the county.
 - c. The awareness of, and social work response to, safeguarding privately fostered children.
 - d. The assessments, support and oversight of children in care placed with family and friends carers.
7. Despite the constraints that the Covid-19 pandemic has placed on the Local Authority, progress has been made in all improvement areas:

Area for improvement	Progress
Quality and timeliness of strategy discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-agency working group established and meeting regularly following initial pause during lockdown • Pilot taking place with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) health team now attending strategy discussions for new referrals showing early positive impact • Challenges in progressing development work with schools due to pandemic so this remains a priority • Police have delivered briefings to staff to increase awareness of their role in respect of strategy discussions and joint investigations • Social care developing Mosaic recording system to ensure supports good practice and enable better performance monitoring • Joint training planned across health, police and social care to continue to improve practice.
Consistency of social work practice across the County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The values and principles within our strengths-based practice model have continued to underpin our approach to improving the quality of social work practice this year, within the context of the pandemic • We have sought to drive consistent practice in our response to the pandemic through setting clear practice guidance standards around weekly contact with families, risk assessment, approach to assessment and visiting. Management information and audit have identified that practice standards have been achieved and that many families have benefited from increased contact and support • There has been weekly communication to staff from the Service Director which has aimed to highlight and celebrate good practice, recognise, value and support

Area for improvement	Progress
	<p>staff, and provide clear guidance on practice expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout the pandemic we have maintained mechanisms to support the development of consistent practice, for example group reflective supervisions, development of practice briefings, team development days, knowledge and skill statement of the week, • We have developed an improvement cycle to ensure that when we identify areas for practice improvement, that there is a clear plan for how improvements will be achieved, and impact evaluated. In the next year there will be a focus on driving consistency of practice in respect of neglect, including a focus on understanding the impact of neglect, child development, the importance of chronologies and analytical writing.
Safeguarding privately fostered children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the last year there has been an increased level of scrutiny and oversight on practice in respect of privately fostered children. • There are currently 15 privately fostered children. The designated Service Manager lead for private fostering reviews all cases of privately fostered children on a monthly basis to check that the assessment of suitability is being progressed, that there is management oversight on the case and the child is being seen in accordance with practice guidance and on their own. If areas of concern are identified, the relevant team manager and children's service manager for that area is notified. • To support improvements in consistency of practice, recognising that social workers may only infrequently hold a case of a privately fostered child, a lead Social Work Practice Consultant and Social Work Support Officer have been identified to provide practice expertise and ensure all the relevant checks are sent out in a timely manner and ensure cases progress accordingly. • Work has also been undertaken with the raise awareness of privately fostered children both within social work teams and across the NSCP, through virtual briefings. New leaflets have been published to distribute across the partnership.
Care for children in care placed with family and friend carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the last year significant improvements have been made in the assessment and oversight of family and friends carers. • Processes have now changed so that there is Group Manager authorisation of connected person placements on the first night, with regulation 24 assessments commenced within 24 hours of the placement, provided

Area for improvement	Progress
	<p>that police checks have been received. When assessments have taken place and minimum standards not met or are unlikely to be met, authorisation is required by the Service Director.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service Director reviews cases where national minimum standards are not met and sets clear expectations in terms of next steps. Cases are reviewed via the scrutiny panel for looked after children. • There is further work to do to develop robust tracking of all cases, and to ensure that the support available to children in these placements is consistent and in line with the support available to children in other placement types. This is being addressed as part of the kinship review. • An audit of placements is planned for Quarter 4 of 2020/21.

8. Progress against the areas for improvement, within the context of the pandemic, was discussed by Officers with Ofsted as part of the Annual Engagement Meeting on 26th November 2020. This was a delayed annual conversation due to the pandemic. It was a constructive conversation which recognised the commitment that the Council has displayed to continuing to improve services for vulnerable children and young people. The formal record of the meeting is attached as **Appendix 1**. Ofsted confirmed that when inspection activity resumes, Nottinghamshire's next activity is likely to be an assurance or focussed visit.
9. The Department's Senior Leadership Team will continue to review progress against the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and propose further reporting to Children and Young People's Committee on progress in six months.

Other Options Considered

10. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. It is important the Children and Young People's Committee receives assurance on progress in respect of areas for improvement within children's services.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

13. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

14. Successful delivery of the improvement plan arising from the Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services will continue to strengthen arrangements to safeguard vulnerable children and young people in Nottinghamshire.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That Members consider the progress made in responding to the recommendations for improvement arising from the Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in October 2019 and agree to receiving a further progress report in six months' time.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 08/02/21)

15. The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee.

Financial Comments (SS 01/02/21)

16. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services>)

Joint targeted area inspections: framework and guidance

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832023/Joint_targeted_area_inspections_framework_2.pdf)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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