



24 January 2023

Agenda Item 7

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL WORK

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise the Corporate Parenting Panel of the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers using Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.

Information

2. Children and Families Service's improvement cycle includes a self-evaluation of the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers that is based on the ILACS evaluative criteria. The self-assessment is reviewed throughout the year with quality assurance activities contributing to the self-assessment so that the evidence base for identified strengths and challenges are robust and the Council can continue to evaluate the impacts of improvement activity.
3. The ILACS self-assessment is theme-based with a format that outlines a position and then highlight strengths, challenges and priorities. The relevant themes set out in the self-assessment relate to children in care, fostering, kinship, adoption and leaving care, and are summarised in **Appendix 1**.
4. The self-assessment also has a specific section on progress made over the last 12 months against recommendations from the most recent inspection. **Table 1** outlines progress over the last 12 months against recommendations from the inspection in October 2019 that are relevant to children in care:

Table 1

Area for improvement	Progress
Consistency of social work	<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. To further embed this, a revised set

Area for improvement	Progress
practice across the County	<p>of practice standards have been developed with practice guidance. This will launch in the new year with a set of direct work tools (called Time for Me) and include a programme of practice workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is being undertaken to improve the impact of supervision and management oversight in driving progress for all children. Consistency in these areas through the launch of common templates and processes will improve the consistency of practice across the County. • We have developed training to improve analytical and critical skills of staff to weigh up risks and needs to come up with well-reasoned recommendations that are outcomes focused. • An improvement project to improve the quality of chronologies across the Department has been implemented, using a set of core principles that constitute what makes a good chronology. There are positive signs from practitioners to indicate the use of these materials. • We have introduced a new quality assurance process for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that is a shared responsibility and overseen by Children’s Service Managers and the virtual school. This process aims to identify good practice, and ensure actions are in place to identify challenges and gaps.
Care for children in care placed with family and friend carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Group Manager continues to oversee and authorise connected person placements on the first night, with regulation 24 assessments commenced within 24 hours of the placement, provided that police checks have been received. When assessments have taken place and minimum standards are not met or are unlikely to be met, authorisation is required by the Service Director. • In order to promote and support kinship arrangements a specialist Kinship Support Service was launched towards the end of 2022, providing information, advice and guidance, training and support • The authority has created a more robust process for overseeing unregulated placements since the 2019 Ofsted report, and we have reduced the number of these placements. As part of the Kinship Review, and as the outcome of a recent audit, we will ensure that these unregulated placements have access to support.

5. Children and Families Services’ improvement cycle is overseen by the departmental Learning and Improvement Board. The Board is progressing a revised Children and Families Services Learning and Improvement Framework. A key component of the Framework is to adopt Quality Management System principles as the business-as-usual approach to streamlining quality assurance, quality control and service improvement activities. The impact of this re-focus includes the practice standards outlined in **Table 1**

above becoming central to the Council's assessment of the quality of social work practice and its impact.

6. As the responsible governance mechanism, the Learning and Improvement Board will quality assure the accuracy of self-assessment through a reliable 'line of sight' to the quality of practice and ensure it shapes learning for the department.

Other Options Considered

7. To not develop further improvement activity: Children and Families Services have a responsibility to continually seek to improve the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers in line with Ofsted expectations, so this option is rejected.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

8. To assist the Corporate Parenting Panel in undertaking its role in scrutinising the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers.

Statutory and Policy Implications

9. 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

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers the summary self-evaluation of the experiences of children in care and care leavers and advises of any additional actions required.

Amanda Collinson
Service Director, Youth, Families and Social Work

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Ahmed Esat
Group Manager, Service Improvement
T: 0115 9773262
E: Ahmed.Esat@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (LPW 29/12/22)

11. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (VC 12/01/23)

12. There are no financial implications arising 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.

[Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 13 January 2020](#)

[Progress in implementing areas for improvement outlines in the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 22 February 2021](#)

[OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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