

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

14 NOVEMBER 2019

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS) – MAY 2019

SUMMARY

This report summarises the key message from the recent ILACS inspection held in 2019. ILACS is the current format of the Ofsted inspection regime for Children's Services, replacing the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) under which we were last inspected in June 2016. The new framework includes a self-assessment, an annual conversation with Ofsted, one or more focussed visits which address a particular theme and the ILACS inspection.

The overall judgement from the inspection is that services 'require improvement' across the three areas of: impact of leaders; experience and progress of children who need help and protection; and experience and progress of children in care and care leavers. The overall effectiveness is therefore also 'requires improvement'.

The key outcome from the inspection was that an action plan would be required to address the issues identified. This was submitted on 3 October 2019 and can be found at **appendix 1**.

This report outlines the key issues from the inspection, the content of the action plan and next steps.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

To inform Cabinet of the outcome the inspection and the submitted written statement of action in response. Cabinet will be updated on progress in 6 months' time.

DETAIL

ILACS Inspection

1. Between 20th May and 24th May 2019 Ofsted conducted an ILACS inspection with focus on 3 key areas:
 - 1) The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
 - 2) The experiences of children who need help and protection;
 - 3) The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers.

2. Inspectors found that whilst our self-assessment had identified many of the areas for improvement, the extent of delay was not fully recognised, raising questions about quality assurance.
3. **The inspection outcomes were that the following areas needed to improve:**
 - Timeliness in delivering children's plans without delay across all services by generally improving management oversight and grip.
 - More effective tracking of children who are the subject of pre-proceedings work under the public law outline (PLO) procedures.
 - Better recognition and approval of family and friends as carers under regulation 24 arrangements;
 - All casework decisions to be made by social work qualified staff;
 - The quality and sustainable impact of assessment and intervention with families who are repeatedly the subject of referrals and PLO's;
 - Clarity in supervision records about both positive and negative changes to children's circumstances and challenge from managers to any delay in agreed actions being achieved.
4. **There were many positives identified within the inspection:**
 - **The impact of leaders on social work practice;**
 - Effective work to reduce the numbers of children subject to statutory intervention;
 - New services such as Our Place (edge of care) and Family Group Conferencing (FGC) having an impact;
 - Greater stability on the workforce with a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy;
 - Significant reductions in vacancy and turnover rates and less resilience on agency staff;
 - Social Workers positive about working in Stockton;
 - An openness to external scrutiny and to partnership arrangements;
 - Strong political support;
 - Commitment to the voice of children and young people such as via the Big Committee.
5. **The experiences of children who need help and protection:**
 - Early help providing effective support for families;
 - The development of FGC supporting more families to find their own solutions;
 - The Children's Hub;
 - The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO);
 - Good multi-agency attendance at strategies;
 - Good analysis and work on mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse;
 - Social Workers knowing children well;
 - A good and developing understanding of contextual safeguarding;
 - Effective arrangements for children at risk of exploitation, including our responses when children go missing;
 - Good support for children who are electively home educated or excluded from school;

- Effective private fostering arrangements;
- Appropriate responses to the needs of homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

6. In terms of the experience of children in care and care leavers:

- Successful development of edge of care;
- Children are seen and have long term positive relationships with their social workers;
- Good direct work and life story work;
- Care plans are regularly reviewed and updated;
- Effective work to ensure that children's views are heard and acted upon;
- Suitable permanence plans signed off;
- Improved adoption timeliness;
- Well managed contact arrangements;
- Good links with CAMHS services ensuring timely responses;
- Active children in care counsel;
- A highly valued virtual school;
- Strong Leaving Care service;
- Effective choice of accommodation provided for care leavers.

7. There was therefore much evidence of positive changes and improvements since our last Ofsted inspection conducted under the Single Assessment Framework in 2016. These improvements were seen across the whole system from early help to the front door to social care into fieldwork teams and to teams working with children and care leavers.

Response to the inspection

8. The outcome of the inspection was disappointing, a view that is shared by all staff who are determined to improve.

9. The key areas for improvement are focussed in two main areas:

- 1) Oversight and management/grip of cases, including the need for thorough and effective supervision, challenging any delay and monitoring the effectiveness of interventions; a sense that for some children we are not enabling purposeful change in their circumstances;
- 2) A specific issue about a more effective approach to the tracking of children in pre-proceedings under the public law outline (PLO) procedures which can result in delays in bringing cases to court and drift in permanence planning.

10. Inspectors were clear in their view that these issues can be resolved and that the basis of our system is sound with many good features. These therefore are the key over-riding issues which we are focussing on in our response:

A. Timeliness in delivering children's plans without delay across all services by improving management oversight and grip. We have already responded to this by reviewing the cases identified by Ofsted and using them as a focus with teams. This is an area we are working on with additional support from South Tyneside Council

Partners in Practice (PIP). We aim to enable Team Managers and Service Managers to reflect on the outcomes of the inspection through an externally facilitated process to explore issues on management grip and oversight.

- B. **More effective tracking of children who are the subject of pre-proceedings work** under the Public Law Outline (PLO) procedures. We have established a new panel which tracks cases on a weekly basis in advance of this functionality being included in our new children's ICT system, being implemented in November 2019.
- C. **Better recognition and approval of family and friends as carers under regulation 24 arrangements.** We have reviewed all placements and accept the need for clearer record keeping. We will continue to pursue alternatives to bringing children into care through our edge of care and reunifications models.
- D. **All case work decisions to be made by qualified workers.** We have reallocated the cases held by our senior Family Workers to qualified Social Workers. It should be noted that this was an area of debate with Ofsted in that all work undertaken by our senior Family Workers was subject to supervision by a qualified Social Work Team Manager and there is nothing explicit in regulations which specifically requires casework (children in need) to be led by a qualified Social Worker.
- E. **The quality and sustainable impact of assessments and intervention with families who are repeatedly the subject of referrals and child protection plans.** We recognise that for some families there is evidence of ongoing and multiple involvement with not enough evidence of progress. We are exploring this issue as part of our practice framework alongside South Tyneside Council.
- F. **Clarity in supervision records** in relation to both positive and negative changes to children's circumstances and challenge from Managers to any delay in agreed actions being achieved. Although we have made many changes to supervision processes we clearly were not able to demonstrate that these are as effective as we would want them to be. This is a further area in which we are working with South Tyneside Council.

Next steps

- 11. We will be regularly reviewing our Ofsted action plan with Managers to ensure progress is effective and timely.
- 12. We can expect to receive a focussed visit in May/June 2020 with an explicit focus on one of the issues from the inspection. This ungraded visit will check on our progress in responding to the inspection.
- 13. We are scheduled to have our next ILACS inspection on or around May/June 2022.

Governance and accountability

- 14. The Children's Services Management Group (CSMG) consisting of Children's Service Managers, the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and chaired by the Director of Children's Services, has the strategic and operational oversight of the work relating to the implementation of our response to the ILACS inspection.

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