

**AGENDA ITEM
REPORT TO CABINET
15 JUNE 2023**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Lisa Evans

**INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS) – OUTCOMES
AND ACTION PLAN**

SUMMARY

The authority received its most recent inspection on 27 February – 14 March. The report was published on 9 May. This report summarises the key findings of the inspection; details the area of good practice and improvement also identified; introduces the key strands of the already existing improvement plan which has been revised to take into account the outcome of the inspection, and seeks Cabinet approval for the action plan.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/DECISIONS

To ensure Cabinet is sighted on the outcomes of the recent inspection and the actions being taken forward in response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet

1. Notes the outcome of the recent ILACS Inspection;
2. Approves Improvement Plan at Annex 2;
3. Notes the further feedback at a Members Seminar in July.

DETAIL

1. The most recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services was undertaken in February and March 2023, with the report published on 9 May.
2. The inspection resulted in an overall judgment of 'Requires Improvement'.
3. Ofsted require an action plan to be developed in response and to be submitted to them by 16 August.
4. The Good and Beyond Board was already established as an independently chaired body charged with providing effective oversight and drive for continuous improvement planning.

This Board was already providing leadership and focus for actions emerging from the September 2022 Focused Visit. The Board will continue to provide this oversight role for the revised improvement plan.

Key findings

5. The key areas for improvement identified by Ofsted are around:
 - a. The quality and effectiveness of plans for children and care leavers, including safety plans agreed with parents.
 - b. Sufficiency of suitable foster homes for children.
 - c. Frontline management oversight across the service, in relation to the quality of assessment and plans and the impact of interventions.
 - d. Opportunities for more children and care leavers to have a voice and to influence the development of services.
6. Other key areas around the need for further action were:
 - a. for placement sufficiency, especially for children with complex needs
 - b. More capacity for foster care
 - c. Evidence of the impact of challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers
 - d. The need for more opportunities for participation for children and young people in care and care leavers
 - e. Consistency of PA support
 - f. Better arrangements for health information for care leavers
 - g. The visibility of the care leavers offer
 - h. The need for a refresh of the corporate parenting approach
7. The inspection also detailed the considerable amount of progress since the previous inspection and several areas of good and positive practice:
 - a. There are clear signs of progress and improvement since the 2019 inspection and since the September 2022 Focused Visit;
 - b. Leaders know the services well and are realistic about them;
 - c. Positive statements about the front door responses;
 - d. Skills and ability around issues such as domestic abuse;
 - e. Thoroughness of child protection investigations;
 - f. Improving quality of assessments;
 - g. Effective legal planning in deciding when children need to come into care
 - h. Sensitive responses for disabled children
 - i. Effective arrangements around child exploitation
 - j. Tenacious responses for missing children – interviews and responses
 - k. A focus on school attendance
 - l. Effective responses to homeless young people
 - m. Good approaches to family and friends placements
 - n. Effective adoption arrangements

- o. Good management of out of area placements
- p. Good support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- q. High levels of ambition from the Virtual school for children in our care
- r. High quality working and commitment from personal advisers
- s. Arrangements for apprenticeships for care leavers
- t. Good feedback from the Courts and from CAFCASS

Reflection and response

8. The overall outcome is clearly a disappointment. Although there are clear indications of progress since the last inspection, the overall judgement has stayed the same.
9. Our own self-assessment was found to be accurate and that we know the service well and the areas where we need to improve.
10. There are therefore a number of themes we have developed in response:
 - a. The importance of a continued focus on workforce – sufficient staff, with the right skills, who know what is expected of them
 - b. Continuing to improve the quality of assessments and plans across our services as these are the fundamental building block for effective work with children, young people and families
 - c. Continuing to focus on the need for more foster care placements as this is a significant sufficiency challenge – these are being developed as part of our Investment Plan for children in care, and as part of the regional fostering pathfinder work which is being taken forward in the North east as part of the region's response to the national care review and Government response
 - d. Developing more effective arrangements for hearing and responding to the views of children in the care system and those with experience of it.

Action Plan

11. Therefore response to the inspection, and as part of the ongoing process of self-evaluation and improvement planning linked to the inspection framework, an action plan has been developed to respond to the key issues highlighted in the inspection. This is attached at Annex 2.
12. The action plan has been developed around four key areas:
 - a. **Our people** – these elements focus on recruitment and retention as well as the way in which we support and develop staff and include a new proposal for an Academy for ASYE social workers - those in their first year of employment following graduation
 - b. **Our practice** – how we embed our focus on our practice model *(for how we want our staff to work); our use our quality framework which oversees the data, feedback and qualitative information we use to drive improvement
 - c. **Our processes** – making sure that key issues such as accommodation, HR, Finance and ICT are enablers of good practice rather than barriers. A review of the case management system and how this can more effectively provide data and intelligence on practice has already been commissioned.

- d. ***Our partnerships*** – how we will work with key partners to address some of the thematic challenges – around threats to children, issues such as domestic abuse and experiences of the care system
13. We are proposing to continue to make use of external support to help drive forward improvements. Our improvement board is currently independently chaired, and we have benefitted from other support from other Local Authorities such as around our Emergency Duty Team, and on our use of our ICT system to help drive improvement. This will continue as we implement our action plan.
 14. Feedback on the inspection and action plan will also be presented to a member seminar in July.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

15. There is no requirement for an assessment in relation to this report. The update does not constitute a new policy, strategy, or a change in the delivery of a service insofar as the Council is concerned.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

16. There are a number of key implications arising from this work and which are being taken forward as part of the action plan, including:
 - a. The refresh of the strategy
 - b. Greater opportunities for participation;
 - c. A specific focus on foster care placements;
 - d. The refresh of the offer for care leavers
17. A specific report will be provided for Corporate Parenting Board on the proposed new strategy, which will include those relevant aspects identified in the action plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. There are no direct financial implications attached to this report.
19. There are some aspects of improvement activity which will require funding, and a number of these are outlined above, and will be considered as part of usual budget processes and their fit with broader transformation work across the Authority.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

20. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

21. Risks are included in standard risk assessments.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

22. Not applicable.

BACKGROUND PAPERS