

# Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee



7 February 2020

## Children's Social Care response to ILACS inspection

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### Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

#### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

#### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report provides Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the activity and strategic planning that has been undertaken since the ILACS inspection of Children's Social Care in October 2019.

#### **Executive summary**

- 2 Ofsted undertook an inspection of children's social care services in Durham between 9 September 2019 to 20 September 2019. The overall judgement was that services require improvement to be good. The pace of change and firm foundations to continue to strengthen services were recognised and services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers were judged to be good.
- 3 In summarising the inspection findings Ofsted found that since the focused visit in January 2019, "the local authority has taken swift and decisive action to strengthen services. Pace has increased since the focused visit, and solid improvements can be seen in many service areas, including at the front door and for children in care. Firm foundations are in place to sustain and build on the improvements made."
- 4 Children's Social Care in partnership with the wider Children and Young People's Service are well placed to continue to build on the improvements in social work practice that have already been made both before and after the ILACS inspection.

5. We are committed to delivering consistently high-quality services for every child and young person and remain ambitious that they all achieve excellent outcomes. We know that there are a number of key areas that are fundamental to delivering high quality services: a highly skilled and stable workforce; a well embedded practice framework which is consistently used by practitioners and is based on high quality relationships with children and families; a robust quality and performance assurance framework which includes meaningful engagement with children and families.
- 6 The ongoing relentless focus on recruitment, retention and development of the workforce continues to be a key strategic priority for the service as it underpins all the work that we do. Our ongoing implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework is described in a separate report, "Signs of Safety Implementation". We have strengthened our Quality Assurance Framework and this is also described in a separate report, "Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework." We have invested in our workforce to strengthen the participation and engagement of children and families within our services and these developments are summarised in this report.
- 7 There is a well-established governance structure in place to support and monitor the improvement activity following the ILACS inspection. The primary mechanism for this is the Social Care Quality Improvement Board, chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care.
- 8 The current inspection framework itself ensures that there is continuous oversight and monitoring by OFSTED of improvement activity via the requirement to produce an annual self-evaluation and take part in an annual engagement conversation as well as at least two further inspection visits within every 3 year ILACS inspection cycle. These will either be focused visits or a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 9 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny are recommended to:
  - (a) Note the contents of this report;
  - (b) receive an annual update on progress within the service

## Background

10 Ofsted undertook an inspection of children's social care services in Durham between 9 September 2019 to 20 September 2019. The judgements are set out below:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement
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	Requires improvement

11 The following areas were identified as areas for improvement:

- The quality and impact of management oversight, including that of child protection chairs.
- The timeliness of assessments and support for children who return home
- The quality of children's plans, so that they are timebound, and include clear actions and contingency plans
- The response to disabled children, children in private fostering arrangements, and children who are homeless aged 16 and 17
- The timeliness of foster carer's reviews
- The tracking and monitoring of children missing from education

## Response to ILACS inspection

12 There is a well-established Children's Social Care Quality Improvement Board chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care. This Board meets monthly and ensures that there is a robust quality improvement plan that drives improvement in the quality of practice throughout the service. The effectiveness of existing leadership was acknowledged within the

inspection and therefore this Board continues to be the primary mechanism to drive improvement across the system.

- 13 The improvement plan has been updated to reflect the outcome of the inspection and there are actions and key milestones linked to each area of improvement. The paragraphs below highlight key actions that have already been undertaken or are planned with a specific focus on the areas identified in the inspection that require improvement.
- 14 The board has identified two strategic priorities over the next six months which will impact on a significant number of the improvement areas:
  - a) Improving the quality and consistency of Care Planning;
  - b) Reflective discussions with managers and supervisions which are targeted at improving outcomes for children.
- 15 A 'key-principles' in good care planning document has been developed and two workshops with Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Offices (IROs) have been held to begin embedding these principles in practice. There is an existing plan of work with our Partners in Practice, South Tyneside Council, focused on improving Care Planning. The second phase of the work will be delivered to Managers and IROs in February and March and will build on the workshops that have taken place in January.
- 16 A realignment of resources has enabled us to create a second Operations Manager post within our IRO service. This will ensure that all IROs receive high quality supervision but will also create additional capacity to support the necessary improvement activity across the service and specifically the ability of the IRO's to increase their level of scrutiny and oversight of planning for children subject to a child protection plan.
- 17 We have commissioned a training consultancy called Strengthening Practice to deliver supervision training to all our front-line managers that will improve the quality of our reflective discussions. We have established a working group to ensure that the learning from this training is aligned with our existing supervision procedure and that the Liquidlogic electronic record system supports the effective recording of these conversations. A development programme for managers is currently being planned, that will include continued support to embed good quality reflective supervision. Additionally, our Practice Lead from the ASYE academy has been identified to develop peer support activity for managers to share their experiences and learn from each other.
- 18 Our practice in relation to young people aged 16 and 17 who are homeless was reviewed during the inspection. The protocol supporting

this practice has been amended and is being implemented. The capacity of the Young People's Service has been reviewed and increased in order to ensure we are able to meet the current demand within this area of the service.

- 19 A steering group has been established and is chaired by the Head of Social Care to review how we effectively respond to disabled children and young people. The work of this group will continue to inform the quality improvement plan.
- 20 The IRO Operations Manager in partnership with the Strategic Manager for Resources has addressed issues in relation to timeliness of Foster Carer reviews and there are currently no outstanding reviews out of timescales. There is a robust performance monitoring system in place to ensure this good performance is maintained.
- 21 Children missing from education are now tracked and monitored via the Synergy electronic system.
- 22 A strategic manager has been identified to lead the improvement required in relation to Private Fostering. Our Performance Management Framework is continually being reviewed and improved to ensure appropriate levels of scrutiny on key areas of performance and this will include Private Fostering within the next three months.
- 23 The timeliness and assessment of children returning home from care is now being scrutinised by Strategic Managers via an existing panel process. There is planned activity to develop the operational procedures to ensure that this practice improves.

## **Participation and Engagement**

- 24 We know that the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families is critical in continuing to deliver and develop outstanding services. We have a thriving Children in Care Council, we continue to have a strong partnership with Investors in Children, we successfully commission NYAS to deliver advocacy, and most recently we have recruited a Participation and Engagement worker to co-ordinate the many strands of this work across Children's Social Care.
- 25 The work programme of the Participation and Engagement worker focuses on the following areas:
  - a) Developing champions across the workforce to ensure participation and engagement remains a priority:
  - b) Broadening participation and engagement mechanisms to hear from a wider range of children, young people and families;

- c) Improving feedback and communication mechanisms to ensure we are regularly communicating with those who had provided feedback;
- d) Ensuring that the voice of children and young people is heard throughout all our work.

## **Scrutiny**

- 26 The current OFSTED framework requires each Local Authority to produce a self-evaluation document on an annual basis setting out what is known about the quality of social work practice and detail plans for improvement where necessary.
- 27 The self-evaluation forms the basis of an Annual Engagement Conversation that takes place between the DCS and Ofsted. In Durham it is expected that this conversation will take place in Spring 2020.

## **Conclusion**

- 28 Children's Social Care in partnership with the wider Children and Young People's Service are well placed to continue to build on the improvements in social work practice that have already been made both before and after the ILACS inspection. There is a well-established governance structure in place to support and monitor these improvements. The current inspection framework ensures that there is continuous oversight and monitoring of the improvement activity via the self-evaluation and annual conversation.

## **Background papers**

- None

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services updated in August 2019 contains the framework for inspections of local authority Children's Services by Ofsted.

### **Finance**

No direct financial implications.

### **Consultation**

No implications

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

No implications

### **Climate Change**

No implications

### **Human Rights**

No implications

### **Crime and Disorder**

No implications

### **Staffing**

No implications

### **Accommodation**

No implications

### **Risk**

No implications

### **Procurement**

No implications