

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Ofsted focussed inspection on the front door including MASH</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 November 2018
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Director of Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The new statutory inspection framework "Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services" (ILACS) supports improvement activity and promotes achievement of the best outcomes for vulnerable children in Wokingham.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the outcomes and findings of the recent Focused Visit from Ofsted as part of the new ILACS framework, and next steps, are noted.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This report summarises the findings of a focused visit to the Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services "Front Door" carried out by Ofsted on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018, and outlines the next steps to be taken to address areas identified for improvement.

## **Background**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Ofsted Inspectors came to Wokingham to carry out a short focused visit to the Children's Services Front Door as part of the new "Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services" (ILACS) framework. Inspectors reviewed Wokingham's arrangements for responding to concerns about children, including decision-making within the front door's "Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub" (MASH). They also considered transfers to and from early help services, the effectiveness of child protection enquiries and the quality of assessments for children in need of help and protection.

Following the focused visit, the inspectorate have written a letter to the Director of Children's Services outlining their findings and areas for recommended action. There is no judgement or grading of services, but the findings are taken into account when planning the next inspection or visit. The letter was published on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2018, and is attached to this report as Annex A.

## **Analysis of Issues**

A summary of the main findings and areas identified for improvement from the visit is presented here.

## **How Well Do We Know Ourselves?**

As part of the new inspection framework, Wokingham Children's Services are required to submit a self-assessment of the quality and impact of Services, which the inspectorate use to plan and assess how they can best support improvement of services through a mix of focused visits and inspections. The inspectorate also use this document during visits and inspections to test how well the leadership demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing their Services and have plans in place for improvement.

The focused visit to Wokingham Children's Services Front Door identified that the most recent self-assessment of Services was an accurate reflection of the current position, stating that "*the current leadership team, led by the current interim DCS, has a clearer understanding of the areas for development within the service.*"

### **Are Children Safe?**

The inspectors looked at a sample of cases and were satisfied that, whilst in some cases practice could be improved, no children were found to be unsafe.

### **Response to Increased Demand – Workforce Stability**

The inspectorate acknowledged that there have been significant increases in demand for services since the last inspection (January 2016), and that this, along with instability at leadership and frontline level, had led to a "*deterioration in the quality, timeliness and delivery of services to children*", but that this was now being addressed through assertive action, leading to positive changes which now need to be shored up.

### **Effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

The inspectorate felt that the MASH was effective, but not as efficient as it could be, with work needed to "*improve the recording and audit trail of initial decisions about contacts and referrals*".

It was also found that there is a need to ensure that the Police are engaged and play a "*full and active role*" within the MASH.

### **Child Protection Strategy Discussions and Application of Thresholds**

The findings from the visit indicated that Strategy Discussions, which assess the risks of significant harm to a child or young person, need to include more partners (other than the Police and Social Care) to get a fuller picture of family circumstances, and that sometimes these discussions do not take place quickly enough.

The inspectorate also found that sometimes thresholds applied to a need for a child protection enquiries have been too low, resulting in a "*small number of families being drawn into the child protection process when this is not required*".

### **Audit Process**

Children's Services in Wokingham have implemented an audit programme designed to identify where improvements to practice are needed, and promote learning from examples of outstanding practice. The inspectorate gave some very useful feedback about the process, advising that "*the process of learning and practice change in*

*response to audit findings is not always rigorous and there are some missed opportunities to promote learning through audit discussion and supervision”.*

**Supervision of Frontline Staff**

It was found that most frontline staff receive regular supervision, and feel “*well supported*” by meeting with managers, but that supervision doesn’t always sufficiently challenge practice or performance and provide clear timescales for action.

**Summary and Next Steps**

The focused visit to the front door highlighted a number of strengths and recognised the pressure increased demand has put on services, but also found a number of areas for improvement. It recognised that progress has been made in a number of areas identified for improvement in the Ofsted Single Inspection in 2016, but advised that some aspects of the progress identified still need to be fully embedded into the work of the service.

The areas for improvement identified by Ofsted will form part of a service wide comprehensive improvement programme already in development by the Children’s Services Leadership Team following its most recent self-assessment, which will proceed at pace over the coming months under the new Director of Children’s Services, Carol Cammiss.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
N/A

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b>
N/A

<b>List of Background Papers</b>	
N/A	
<b>Contact</b> Viki Elliot-King	<b>Service</b> Intelligence & Impact
<b>Telephone</b> 07824 605030	<b>Email</b> viki.elliott-king@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank