

Agenda Item 21.

TITLE	Ofsted Inspection Outcomes and Action Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 September 2019
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Children's Services is subject to regular inspection under the new Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. The purpose of the inspection is to provide an independent rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of local authority services for children and young people and drive improvement where necessary, with associated benefits for children and young people and the wider community.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the outcome of the ILACS inspection in June 2019 is noted;
- 2) That the action taken so far in response to the identified areas for improvement, and next steps are noted.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham's Children's Social Care Services were subject to Ofsted Inspection under the new "ILACS" framework (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) from 3rd – 14th June 2019. This paper summarises the outcome of the inspection and outlines next steps.

1. Background

Wokingham's Children's Social Care Services were subject to Ofsted Inspection under the new "ILACS" framework (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) from 3rd – 14th June 2019. The published inspection report is attached. This paper summarises the outcome of the inspection and outlines next steps.

2. Inspection outcome

The judgement of overall effectiveness was "**Requires Improvement to be Good**" which the local authority considers to be a fair and accurate appraisal of its current position.

In the Summer of 2018, the local authority experienced a rapid rise in demand for services, which, combined with instability at leadership level, and a high turnover of social care staff, led to a deterioration in the quality of services for children.

This is no longer the case. Steps have been taken by the new senior leadership team to establish stability and improve services.

3. Areas of good and improving practice

Notable improvements and areas of good practice acknowledged in the report are:

- "The duty, triage and assessment (DTA) team is more effective than it was at the time of Ofsted's focussed visit in October 2018."
- "Two-way communication with the emergency duty team has improved since the focussed visit. This is helping to ensure an effective response to children in need of help and protection outside of normal office hours."
- "Prompt action is taken to protect children who are at immediate risk of significant harm. Strategy meetings are better managed and recorded now than at the time of the focussed visit."
- "Children and young people have ready access to high-quality advocacy support."
- "Children who go missing from home or care are routinely offered good-quality return home interviews."
- "When children come into care, the local authority's commitment to helping them achieve permanence is tangible."
- "Care planning is thoughtful and creative."
- "Good attention is paid to children's physical health and emotional wellbeing, irrespective of whether the child or young person is living in Wokingham or out of area."
- "Social workers are particularly good at not letting go of, and keeping open channels of communication with, parents and families, even when there are no plans for children to return to live with them."
- "Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are child-centred and conscientious."
- "Foster carers talk positively about the quality and responsiveness of the support they receive from their supervising social workers."
- "Since her appointment in November last year, the director of children's services (DCS) has succeeded in establishing a permanent senior management team in children's social care."

- “There are clear signs that the action taken by senior leaders is beginning to have an impact.”
- “The local authority is making progress in developing a comprehensive performance culture.”
- “Poor performance is no longer tolerated in the way it might have been a year ago.”
- “Senior leaders have succeeded in reducing the size of social workers’ caseloads”.
- “Staff, including agency staff, have good access to training.”
- “Newly qualified staff are well supported during their assisted and supported year in employment... they value the support, supervision and training they receive.”

However, whilst the report cites the “renewed optimism among managers and staff” and gives many examples of improvement and positive, effective work with children and families, the local authority accepts that the quality of social work practice is “still too variable”.

4. What needs to improve

Five areas were identified for improvement in the inspection report:

- a. The stability of the workforce in the disabled children’s team and the three long-term teams.
- b. The effectiveness of child in need and child protection plans.
- c. The quality and effectiveness of the social work support that disabled children and their families receive.
- d. The level of critical scrutiny, and quality of supervision, provided by frontline managers.
- e. The oversight and impact of the corporate parenting board.

5. How we have responded to the Ofsted findings

a. The stability of the workforce in the disabled children’s team and the three long-term teams; and

c. The quality and effectiveness of the social work support that disabled children and their families receive

A Children with Disabilities Improvement Board has been put in place with a specific remit to respond to the Ofsted findings. All vacancies within the team have now been filled with highly skilled and experienced locum staff in order to make the improvements necessary for children, and stabilise the performance of the team. Locum staff have also been engaged to respond to the improvements required in the Children with Disabilities (early help) cohort. Specific training is being developed and implemented across the teams to further improve and embed a stronger performance culture. The team has been split into discreet areas of practice to ensure effective management oversight.

b. The effectiveness of child in need and child protection plans

Training sessions on developing and implementing effective child protection plans are being rolled out across children’s services. The impact of this is being monitored by the child protection conference chairs and a full audit is planned in January 2020 to report on progress.

d. The level of critical scrutiny, and quality of supervision, provided by frontline managers

All front line supervisors are in the process of completing a programme of training designed to improve the quality of supervision, increasing the level of both challenge and support. Senior Managers are undertaking a similar programme to enable them to support front line managers and embed a culture in which supervision is recognised as central to effective social work practice. Practitioners have participated in a parallel programme to enable them to make the most of their supervision. A survey is underway to capture workers' experience of supervision and an audit in February will focus on the impact of supervision on practice and performance.

e. The oversight and impact of the corporate parenting board

A paper is being prepared to propose changes to the approach of the board to engaging with children and young people in care, enhancing its impact. The proposal will be considered by the corporate parenting board.

Next Steps

Ofsted require an action plan to be submitted explaining how the five areas for improvement will be addressed. The action plan is currently being finalised for delivery to the inspectorate by the deadline of 17th October 2019. The action plan will be implemented through the Children's Services Continuous Improvement Programme.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £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)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

Contact Viki Elliot-King	Service Children's Services
Telephone No Tel: 0118 908 8226	Email viki.elliott-king@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank