

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Social Care Services (ILACS) Findings

Cabinet**Date: 4th September 2019**

Author: Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Corporate Director Children's Services

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

1.1 This report provides a summary of the key findings from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Social Care Services (ILACS) in Swindon, completed in July 2019. The two week inspection undertaken between 1st and 12th July 2019 by 6 inspectors evaluated the effectiveness and impact of Children's Social Care services which includes the Early Help Offer. The Ofsted report provides the Local Authority with an overall effectiveness judgement of the performance of the whole service. It also provides individual judgement grades for:

- The experience and progress of children who need help and protection
- The experience and progress of children in care and care leavers
- The impact of leaders on social work practice

1.2 Cabinet members need to be briefed on the findings of the full inspection so that they are aware of the progress and improvement within Children's Social Care and have an overview of the areas that need further improvement so that this can be monitored and scrutinised. The full Ofsted report is included at Appendix 1 and was published in the public domain on the Ofsted web-site on the 12th August 2019.

1.3 Children's Services helps deliver the Council's priority to protect vulnerable children and achieve the Council pledges 20, 21 and 22 which focus on increasing the capacity of local foster provision, safeguarding of children and the provision of effective early help interventions through working within the Troubled Families Programme.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the judgements and key findings from the OFSTED report across each of the judgements.
- 2.2 Recognise where positive progress and improvement has been made and understand how this has been achieved.

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- 2.3 Note the areas for continued improvement for future scrutiny and assurance that improvements continue to be made and are embedded and sustained.
- 2.4 Thank all staff in Children's Services and across the Council for their commitment and hard work to achieve a successful inspection outcome.

3. Detail

Overall Effectiveness of Children's Social Care Services graded as: **Good**

- 3.1 The overall effectiveness in Swindon of Children's Social Care Services in Swindon is judged to be good. The report recognises the effectiveness of elected members, corporate managers and senior leaders in prioritising resource for children's services, implementing strong Governance arrangements and driving rapid improvement. It notes that the Director of Children Services and the Senior Leadership Team have taken systematic, swift and decisive action to implement significant service improvements. The quality of leadership is noted as a key strength and includes high visibility, well-targeted actions, an accurate knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement and creating the right conditions for good social work practice to flourish. This has contributed to the rapid pace of improvement both in terms of practice and workforce development. The report recognises that the quality of practice had declined since the 2014 inspection and that the service is still addressing some legacy issues. It notes that progress continues at pace and plans are already being implemented to address the areas that need to improve further, which are:
 - 3.1.1 The extent to which plans for children, across the services, include clear, specific and time bound actions as well as contingency arrangements
 - 3.1.2 The Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of older children, as well as those children with complex needs
 - 3.1.3 The timeliness and quality of preparation of care leavers for independent living
 - 3.1.4 Health histories, so that they are routinely available for care leavers in a timely way
- 3.2 These areas of improvement had already been identified by the DCS and Senior Leadership team and are incorporated into the Strategic Service Improvement Plan. Progress against these areas for improvement will continue to be reported through the existing Governance arrangements, including the External Improvement Board, Cabinet and the Children's overview and scrutiny committee reports.

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The Experiences of children who need help and protection graded as: **Good**

- 3.3 The Experiences of children who need help and protection is judged to be good. Inspectors recognised the work undertaken to strengthen the Early Help Offer and embed good quality work in the newly established Early Help Hub. The report notes that all priority actions from the focussed inspection in April 2018 within MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) function have been addressed. It is pleasing to note that the report confirms that children are seen quickly by social workers and receive an effective and timely response in relation to child protection enquiries and assessment. The assessments are of a good quality and set out the risk for children and young people. Children are visited regularly because caseloads for social workers have been reduced. Ofsted confirmed our self-assessment of child protection plans and endorsed the actions that are being put in place to improve them.
- 3.4 The report notes that vulnerable groups including Disabled Children and Children at risk of sexual exploitation receive an effective and timely service. The use of risk assessment tools with vulnerable children and young people was highlighted as a particular strength. Ofsted recognised the good practice for children who are privately fostered and that arrangements for children who go missing have improved significantly. It noted that senior managers are working to continue to strengthen the oversight of an increasing number of children who are electively home educated.
- 3.5 The overall findings for children in need of help and protection are very positive and reflective of the concentrated service improvements that have been delivered. The pace of change and improved management oversight has enabled the service to progress from a low base line in a relatively short period of time. The embedding of practice improvement has been key and remains so in terms of sustainability and driving even higher standards going forward.

The experience and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers graded as: **Requires Improvement to be Good**

- 3.6 Ofsted judged that the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers requires improvement to be good. The report evidences confidence in the strong leadership and sharper focus that is in place to bring about the required improvements. Addressing the legacy issues for children looked after means that permanency for some children takes longer than it should. There was recognition that permanency planning has improved and the Independent Reviewing Service

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has been strengthened to monitor the progress of Children Looked After. Ofsted particularly liked the way that the reviews are written directly to the child, making them easy for children to understand. A shortage of foster carers means that placement sufficiency and stability is a challenge. It was noted that the service has appointed additional capacity and has a strategic approach to develop the range and skill of foster carers available locally.

- 3.7 The report notes the strong partnership with health professionals to improve the Health of Children Looked After, particularly those that are placed out of Swindon. The recent work to support children with emotional and mental health issues was endorsed and identified as good practice. The virtual school provides an effective service working with children and schools to help children achieve their learning potential. It notes that children in care are well supported and make good progress in school and that systems are in place to improve the quality of personal education plans. Gaps in progress are reducing and attendance at school is improving for looked after children.
- 3.8 The report reflected the positive step of the establishment of a dedicated Care Leavers team to assist transition to adulthood. It noted that improvements are needed to ensure pathway planning is more consistent and this is underway. Favourable comments are made on the work with the Housing Department to ensure an effective joint approach to young people who may be at risk of homelessness.

The impact of leaders on social work practice within Children and Families graded as: **Good**

- 3.9 The impact of leaders on social work practice is judged to be good and was identified as a key strength. The report notes the strong support of corporate managers and elected members and that leaders and managers know the service's strengths and areas for improvement and have worked decisively to address weaknesses. It is noted that governance and quality assurance arrangements are strong and have ensured the right framework is in place to support the pace of change required and provide managers with the tools to monitor progress. The use of data to manage performance has improved as has the quality and frequency of staff supervision.
- 3.10 The Council's significant additional financial investment has reduced caseloads which has helped with social worker stability, although it is recognised that this still remains a challenge. The investment has enabled good progress to be made quickly and sustained. The report notes the strength of partnership working and the impact of this on improved outcomes for children and young people. It also notes that the workforce recruitment and retention sets out a revised set of

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recruitment and retention strategies to manage a workforce with a high proportion of agency staff and attract permanent workers to Swindon.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options in relation to this report.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications in relation to this report. The report recognises the positive impact of the investment that Cabinet have made into Children's Services.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no legal implications in relation to this report.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications in relation to this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A diversity Impact Assessment is not required for this report as a briefing of an external inspection.

Risk Management

- 5.5 A risk assessment is not required for this report as a briefing of an external inspection and has no risks for consideration. .

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The officer preparing the report must consult appropriate Corporate Directors, Directors, Heads of Service, other officers, and relevant partners on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report before presenting the draft report to Cabinet Agenda Review.
- 6.2 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all Cabinet reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 There are no background papers associated with this report.

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8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Ofsted Report for Inspection of Children's Social Care Services in Swindon

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

- 9.1 The report is not a key decision and is in the Cabinet Work Programme for September 2019.