

Report for: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel – 19 March 2019

Item number:

Title: **Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services.**

Report

authorised by:



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Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Non Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 Haringey's Children's Social Care Service was inspected by Ofsted between 22 October and 9 November 2018. The inspection took place in accordance with legislation and the new Ofsted inspection framework that became operational in January 2018. The findings from the inspection were published on 14 December 2018 and identified areas of strength in practice and areas for improvement. The judgement for all areas inspected is that services 'require improvement to be good'. An action plan is in place to address the findings as part of the wider programme of service improvement in Children and Young People's Services.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the Ofsted report and the plans in place to address the findings to further improve services and outcomes for children who are in need of help and protection, in care and for care leavers in the Borough.

3. Background information

- 3.1 Children's social care services were subject to a full Ofsted inspection called the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) by a team of Ofsted inspectors over a three-week period from 22 October to 9 November 2019. During the first week of the inspection, inspectors were off site and were provided with data and information in line with statutory guidance. Inspectors were based in Haringey for the last two weeks of the inspection.
- 3.2 The inspection framework is now much more focused on evidence about improving outcomes for children and young people and evidence of the impact of leaders. There is a strong emphasis on examining frontline practice, talking directly with practitioners and taking into account the views of children, young

people, parents and carers. Our work with partner agencies and in fulfilling responsibilities as Corporate Parents was also of great importance.

3.3 In advance of the inspection, the service produced a self-evaluation that set out the strengths, areas for improvement and actions needed to improve children's social care. Ofsted received a copy of the self-evaluation in advance of the inspection and used this alongside a set of required data and information to form their key lines of enquiry. As part of the inspection process, inspectors look for evidence of progress from previous inspections. The last full inspection of children's services took place in 2014 and a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) on neglect took place in December 2017.

3.4 The judgement from the inspection is that services 'requires improvement to be good'.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

3.5 This is consistent with the service's self-evaluation. Whilst the report underpins this judgement with evidence in the examination of practice, inspectors were positive and encouraging about the work now underway and the arrangements and plans for improvement in place. Services were regarded as being safe and there was no practice found in which a child was considered to be at risk.

Under a heading, 'what needs to improve', inspectors noted the following nine areas.

- Assessment of children's needs when their circumstances change, in order to inform plans.
- Child-focused plans, particularly in the disabled children's team, where the understanding of thresholds when risks escalate also needs to improve.
- Timely and effective permanence planning for all children in care, including effective challenge brought by independent reviewing officers.
- Placement sufficiency for vulnerable adolescents.
- The quality and timeliness of case recording, including the recording of management decision-making.
- The quality of audits to inform practice and drive practice improvements.
- The strategic partnership response to criminally exploited children.

- The offer and take-up of return home interviews and the subsequent use of intelligence to inform individual children's plans and wider partnership activity.
- Pathways to private fostering.

3.6 An action plan focused on these areas is under development and will be sent to Ofsted in advance of their deadline of 18th March 2019. The action plan will be overseen by the Children's Improvement Board and progress will be reported to Corporate Board and Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel.

4. Findings from the inspection.

4.1 Overall, the inspectors reported an improving picture for services for children and young people and were complimentary about staff, stating that,

'Staff and managers are ambitious for children and young people and are tenacious in their efforts to help and support them'.

The focus of the inspection was on practice and the variability of this was recorded through the report.

The inspection report has three main sections. These are;

- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
- The experiences and progress of children care and care leavers; and
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

A short summary of the findings of these sections is set out below. Further detail can be found in the full inspection report at Appendix 1.

4.2 The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

4.2.1 Work on improvement across the service since past inspections was identified. For example, the strengthening of safeguarding through the 'front door' arrangements with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) since the JTAI and the significant improvements in services for young people leaving care since the 2014 full inspection.

4.2.2. It was found that young people who present as homeless are responded to appropriately, that assessments are jointly undertaken with housing and that young people who need accommodation are provided with it.

4.2.3 Inspectors found that children and young people subject to, or at risk of, criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation and gang affiliation are supported such that the lives of some young people become more stable and less risky.

4.2.4 The inspectors found that the coordination of early help services is underdeveloped. The Director of the Children and Young People's Service is leading the development of a new early help strategy that will include active engagement with partners, in particular, our schools and health services.

- 4.2.5 The report states that thresholds in the children with disability service are not well understood or applied when risk escalates. It should be noted that inspectors did not find any children to be at risk in this service. The Disabled Children's Service now has in place stronger and more robust management oversight from the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Assessment. This will result in a consistent application of thresholds and response to risks across the service.
- 4.2.6 It should be noted that the youth centre at Bruce Grove was singled out for particular praise as offering excellent provision for young people in the Borough.

5. The experiences and progress of children care and care leavers

- 5.1 Inspectors found that the threshold decisions for children coming into care are appropriate and that those with a plan to return home are supported appropriately to ensure that they are returned safely and then thrive. This is important not just for evidence of a safe service but also as evidence of the appropriate use of resources in high cost areas.
- 5.2 Inspectors were impressed with the efforts of social workers to develop relationships with children and young people who have had difficult experiences and they stated that children in care are visited regularly and often beyond statutory expectations.
- 5.3 The work led by Members to ensure that children in care have access to leisure activities was reported positively. The report states that children in care have access to a wide range of leisure activities and the local authority supports funding to access local sports centres.
- 5.4 The service recognised that further work was required to improve permanence planning for children and this too was noted by inspectors. Although work is underway to address this issue, it had not been in place long enough for inspectors to see impact. The inspectors were positive about the services approach to improvement in this area and this will continue to be monitored through the implementation of the action plan.
- 5.5 The service was also aware of the variability in the quality of personal education plans (PEP). These are plans that children in care have that are focused on improving their education outcomes. The quality of these plans will be improved through the use of an electronic virtual school platform for tracking attainment and monitoring attendance called the ePEP. The ePEP process was in the process of being rolled out and implemented at the time of the inspection and had not been in place long enough to see evidence of impact.

6. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

- 6.1 Some of the areas for improvement had been reported in the full inspection that took place in 2014. Inspectors reported that although actions had been taken to address the recommendations from that inspection, that the changes had not been sustained due to a succession of changes in the senior leadership team.

However, it is positive that inspectors reported a significant increase in pace has been noticed since the Dec 2017 JTAI and the arrival of the new director.

- 6.2 The impact of leaders was also recognised by Ofsted who acknowledged significant changes in governance and the contributions of the chief executive who is leading the development of a youth strategy. Inspectors were impressed by the Lead Member and made the following comment,

“the well informed, confident and aspirational lead member is fully involved across a range of committees and boards”.

- 6.3 The work undertaken by Members was praised. Inspectors found that Members appropriately challenge performance in areas of concern and request further information to improve their understanding of issues such as knife crime.
- 6.4 It was noted that Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee undertake regular visits to a wide range of services so that they are able to tackle issues for children and young people. And that young people from ASPIRE, our children in care council are well supported by their participation officer to meaningfully participate in the development of a local offer for the care leavers service.
- 6.5 It was noted that the staff in children’s social care reflect the diversity of the local population and have a sophisticated awareness of diversity and how cultural, religious factors underpin children sense of identity.

7. Communication of findings.

- 7.1 The findings of the inspection have been shared with staff through a number of roadshows that took place on 18th December. Staff have had opportunities to discuss the report in their teams and to contribute to the development of their service plans that are being used to inform the action plan to be sent to Ofsted.
- 7.2 Partner agencies have been informed of the outcome of the inspection at relevant partnership meetings and boards including the local safeguarding children board. Cabinet received a briefing on 10th January and Corporate Board also received a report in January.

8. Action Plans for improvement

- 8.1 Inspectors reported positively on the pace of improvement in recent months and also the framework through which this has taken place. These arrangements will also be used to drive the implementation of actions from this inspection.
- 8.2 The improvements identified in the Ofsted inspection are already included within a wider programme of plans for service delivery and improvement across Children’s Services. These are being overseen through the Children’s Improvement Board and progress will be reported to Corporate Board and Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel with close involvement of the lead

member for Children's Services. There will also be feedback to Ofsted through the regular engagement meetings.

8.3 Some of these improvement areas are as follows;

- **Quality Assurance.** A revised quality assurance framework is also now in place and there are new arrangements for the auditing and reporting of the quality of practice. The service also has additional capacity, two auditors, who will help managers and staff to improve practice.
- **Quality of practice.** We will be working with Professor David Shemmings to support the improvement in the quality of assessments. David Shemmings is an expert in relationship based approaches to working with families.
- A set of expectations about practice has been put in place for staff and there are arrangements to provide support through regular supervision along with training.
- The service will be recruiting a Principal Social Worker who will have a lead responsibility for improving the quality of practice. This role was identified as good practice for improvement by Professor Eileen Munro in her work that informed recent legislation.
- **Recruitment and Retention.** The plans for improvement go hand in hand with work to recruit permanent managers and social workers and achieve greater stability in the workforce and also to maintain manageable workloads. These benefit children and young people through building trusting relationships, the direct work achieved and with greater chance of improved outcomes. The vacancy rate for social workers has reduced from 34.3% in July 2019 to 29.5% in December 2019. A report on actions to recruit and retain staff was presented to the Staffing and Remuneration Committee on 17 December 2018.

Although the inspection report focuses on nine areas for improvement the detailed action plan will respond to all concerns raised within the report.

9. Future Inspections

- 9.1 It is expected that in the next 12 months we are likely to have at least one other inspection. This is likely to be the Ofsted inspection into services for children with special education needs.
- 9.2 It should also be noted that the current inspection framework includes focused visits, joint targeted area inspections into specific areas of practice as well as full inspections. The range of inspections is in place to 'catch services before they fall'. All local authorities are now expecting inspections of services to take place much more frequently than previously.

10. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 10.1 The findings for improvement will be included as part of the programme of service improvement plans which is led and overseen through the Children's Improvement Board. These are aligned within the wider framework of the Borough Plan and its outcomes for children and young people in Haringey, most particularly:
- Best start in life: the first few years of every child's life will give them the long-term foundations to thrive
 - Happy childhood: all children across the borough will be happy and healthy as they grow up, feeling safe and secure in their family, networks and communities
 - Every young person, whatever their background, has a pathway to success for the future
- 10.2 This is particularly relevant to contributions to the Borough's strategic work with vulnerable adolescents at risk of crime and exploitation; early help and preventive work; work with children and young people who have special needs and/or are living with a disability; those who are affected by neglect; children and young people who experience domestic abuse or parenting affected by alcohol or drug misuse.

11. Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities)

- 11.1 Children's Social Care services are delivered to fulfil the Council's statutory responsibilities towards children in the Borough who are in need of help and protection or are in care or are leaving care. Services are regulated by legislation and by statutory guidance.
- 11.2 The programme of service improvement plans is supported by approved budgets and MTFs for 2019-20, plans for the commissioning of services and bids for additional monies through innovation from regional and national initiatives.

12. Use of Appendices

**Appendix 1 : Ofsted inspection of children's social care services
published
14 December 2018**