

## Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 10 October 2018

Electoral Division affected:  
(All Divisions);

### Report on the Ofsted re-inspection of Children's Services

(Appendix A refers)

Contact for further information:

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#### Executive Summary

The report provides an overview of the Ofsted re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

#### Recommendation

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

### Background and Advice

In June 2018 Ofsted completed a four week re-inspection of Children's Services (Appendix A refers to the full report). Inspectors recognised the significant improvements made since our last inspection (September 2015) and gave an overall effectiveness judgement of requires improvement to be good.

The table below provides a breakdown of the individual inspection judgements:

Children's services in Lancashire require improvement to be good	
<b>1. Children who need help and protection</b>	Requires improvement
<b>2. Children looked after and achieving permanence</b>	Requires improvement
2.1 Adoption performance	Good
2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b>	Requires improvement

During the course of the inspection inspectors looked at 152 children's cases in detail and sampled more; they completed 96 formal interviews and focus groups

involving 268 staff and partners; 145 evidence documents were submitted and 101 responses were provided in relation to enquiries from inspectors.

The report, published on the 17 August 2018, highlights that leaders know their services well and that senior managers and leaders have taken appropriate action to improve services, utilising feedback from Ofsted monitoring visits and peer reviews to ensure that change is informed by best practice and previous inspection recommendations. Senior managers, the chief executive and political leaders are aware of their respective responsibilities and the priorities for Children's Services. Additionally, the improved visibility and communication from senior leaders has given staff a renewed confidence and energy in their efforts to improve services.

### **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection**

In most cases it was found that prompt and effective action is taken to safeguard and protect children and the way in which help and support is delivered to children in need is no longer a cause for concern. Social workers know their children well and in the majority of cases seen by inspectors, children and families are helped and protected at the right level by suitably qualified staff. There is also a more joined up approach to supporting children who go missing from home, care or education and those at risk of exploitation. Improvement was noted in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where social work capacity has been strengthened.

However, further work is required to ensure consistency in the quality of practice across services; in particular, to improve the analysis within assessments and to ensure that children's plans are specific, measurable, realistic and include appropriate timescales so that parents/carers understand what needs to change.

### **The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence**

Services for children looked after (CLA) have improved since the last inspection. Inspectors highlighted that the council is a committed and responsible corporate parent. Dedicated social work teams have resulted in more child-focused practice with manageable workloads. Children are seen regularly by their social worker and independent reviewing officer (IRO). Significant progress has been made to improve the educational attainment and progress of CLA at Key Stages 1 and 2. Effective partnership arrangements are supporting the delivery of health assessments and effective placement finding has resulted in a high number of CLA living within the county, which means that children retain their school placement and friendship groups. The participation and engagement of children is positively encouraged and supported and their voices come through clearly in case recording. The Corporate Parenting Board has also engaged meaningfully with the Children in Care Council, LINX.

However, planning for children's permanence is not consistently strong enough, except where there is a plan for adoption and management decision making is not always clearly recorded. Further work is also required to improve the educational attainment of CLA at Key Stage 4.

## **Adoption performance**

The adoption service is judged to be a strength. Adoption is appropriately considered for all children when they cannot remain living with their birth families. The numbers of children adopted compares favourably with similar local authorities and children move promptly to live with their prospective adopters. Assessments and prospective adopters' reports for the adoption panel are of a reliably good quality and the panel offers good oversight of the quality of adoption work and robust challenge when necessary. Work to identify suitable adopters is consistently rigorous, creative and persistent, contributing to good matches for children. Visits to placements are regular and purposeful and direct work to support children is well planned, prioritised and effective. Skilled, committed foster carers are fully engaged and work well with adopters.

Given the strength of the service only a limited number of areas for improvement were identified, including earlier permanence planning and more timely transfer of cases to the Children Awaiting Adoption Team where there is a plan of adoption. The quality of child permanence reports is not consistently good.

## **The experience and progress of care leavers**

Care leavers have a positive and confident view of the local authority as a corporate parent and appreciate the higher profile they now have. The vast majority have good relationships with their personal advisors, who provide effective support with matters such as housing or attendance at health appointments. Most care leavers are clear about their entitlements, the leaving care grant has been significantly increased and council tax has been waived. The local authority is now in touch with the vast majority of care leavers. Care leavers attend and have a presence at the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as being involved in staff training. Most care leavers are living in suitable accommodation and the small number who are not, are nearly all in custody. The number of care leavers staying put with their former foster carers has significantly increased. A dedicated Employment Support Team works proactively with the Leaving Care Service to support young people into education, employment or training.

However, whilst a high proportion of care leavers age 16 and 17 are in education, employment and training, too few are still in education, employment and training at age 19 to 21. Also, whilst all care leavers are registered with a doctor and most with a dentist, waiting times for CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services) are too long. The quality of pathway plans requires improvement so that they are an effective tool for planning a young person's future.

## **Leadership, management and governance**

Leadership and governance is increasingly effective. Senior managers, the chief executive and political leaders are aware of and are acting on their respective responsibilities and the priorities for Children's Services. Strategic plans are now better aligned and partnerships in key agencies are working more effectively. Commissioning arrangements across the local authority have improved. The workforce strategy is effective and is well supported by corporate council services.

As a result there is a better balance of newly qualified and experienced staff. The ambition to develop into a learning organisation is described as tangible. Auditing activity is effective and provides an accurate evaluation of the quality of practice, and was aligned to the findings of inspectors. A number of initiatives were identified as having a positive impact on staff recruitment and retention, including a new teaching partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), the Social Work Academy and a recently launched Leadership Academy.

Although data is increasingly accurate and well presented, further work is required to ensure it is used by front-line managers as a dynamic tool to measure progress, explore gaps, patterns and trends. Together with partner agencies we need to improve our response to children and families affected by domestic abuse.

An Improvement Plan is in development which addresses the 11 recommendations in the report. This will be presented to Cabinet for approval in November 2018. However, work has already commenced in respect of the inspection findings to ensure that the pace of change on our improvement journey is maintained.

### **Consultations**

N/A

### **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

As Children's Services are no longer judged to be inadequate, intervention by the Department for Education has now ceased. Future inspections by Ofsted will be undertaken under a new inspection framework: inspection of local authority children's services, with a strong focus on the quality and impact of social work practice. The Improvement Plan sets out the priorities for the next twelve months, maintaining the pace and focus on areas for improvement.

### **Risk management**

#### Financial Risks

Children's Services continues to experience increases in demand and as such increases in the cost of placements and allowances, which have been reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The most significant pressures relate to the cost of residential and fostering placements with external providers. However, it is assumed in the MTFS that demand will ultimately plateau in future years with lower increases in demand reflected in the later years of the MTFS period, and that recurring savings from 2017/18 previously approved by Cabinet will be achieved. The last MTFS update was approved by Cabinet on 13th September 2018.

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985  
List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A