

Cabinet Committee on Performance Improvement

Meeting to be held on 10th December 2015

Electoral Division affected: All

Report on the 2015 Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

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Executive Summary

This report is to update the Cabinet Committee on Performance Improvement (CCPI) on the outcomes of the inspection of Children's Services that took place between 14 September and 8 October 2015.

It will also update CCPI on the actions that have been taken in the immediate period following the inadequate inspection judgement.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee on Performance Improvement is asked to:

- i. receive and comment on the report and the actions taken following the inspection, and
- ii. receive further reports on the development of actions taken to address the findings of the inspection and to improve Children's Services in Lancashire.

Background and Advice

Ofsted carried out an unannounced inspection of Children's Services which commenced on 14 September 2014 and which lasted for four weeks. This was the County Council's first inspection under the single inspection framework, which came into place in 2014.

The inspection focused on the experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. It also included looking at the effectiveness of our services and arrangements to help these children, including adoption and fostering.

Ofsted also carried out a review of the effectiveness of the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) at the same time.

The Inspection Process

The inspection took place between 14 September and 8 October and involved 12 inspectors undertaking a range of activity. Inspectors spoke to staff at all levels, to children and young people, and to representatives of a number of partner organisations.

Much of their work involved reviewing documents but they also observed a small amount of frontline practice and, overall, there was significantly more emphasis on frontline care than under the previous inspection regime.

Outcome of the Inspection

Ofsted published its report on Friday 27 November 2015 rating the overall effectiveness of the Children's Services as inadequate.

The overall judgement is an amalgamated judgement resulting from the following:

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| • Children who need help and protection | inadequate |
| • Children looked after and achieving permanence | requires improvement |
| ○ Adoption performance | requires improvement |
| ○ Experiences and progress of care leavers | inadequate |
| • Leadership, management and governance | inadequate |

The judgement for the LSCB was good.

A link to the full report is shown at the end of this paper.

A Post Inspection Improvement Board (PIIB) has been established in shadow prior to the appointment of an independent Chair by the Department for Education (DfE). This Board along with the DfE will have oversight of the actions that will be taken to make the improvements required to services following the inspection outcomes. It is intended that the PIIB will report into CCPI on a regular basis.

Actions taken since the Inspection

A number of actions have been put in place since the end of the inspection period:

- An additional £5m investment in children's services has been approved by the Cabinet - This will allow increased staffing levels at the frontline, enabling the caseloads carried by staff to be reduced and increasing the capacity of managers to oversee and support their work. It will also create additional professional development and training opportunities, improving the quality of practice and recording of case work.
- Electronic records system - A plan has been developed to improve the way our electronic records system is used as an effective tool for both operational and managerial staff, so that it will always provide timely and accurate information that enables performance and quality to be carefully monitored.
- Addressing variations in social work - Initial work has been undertaken to address variations in the consistency of social work practice, clarifying practice standards and expectations.

- Weekly reporting - New weekly reporting arrangements have been introduced to reinforce monitoring of activity and compliance.
- Single strategic adoption lead - Strategic responsibility for the team that looks after children awaiting adoption has been transferred to the adoption service, so that there is now one single strategic lead for adoption.
- Improving services for care leavers - We are developing our work with the national New Belongings project to improve our services for care leavers. This also involves close working with Trafford Borough Council, whose care leaver services have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted.
- Auditing and quality assurance - We have reviewed our audit grading system to reflect the Ofsted grading judgements and refocused our approach to auditing and quality assurance. This work will be supported by the involvement of additional social workers in our audit processes and support the monitoring of our improvement plan.

Children's Services Pathway Review

Prior to the inspection, the County Council had already tendered for an independent review of the operation of children's services within Lancashire to see how practice, processes and systems could be improved. The tender was awarded to a company called Newton who are Local Government Association accredited. This work was due to begin on September 14th, but this was postponed when we were notified of the inspection commencing on that date.

Following the inspection outcome the County Council has agreed a slight reconfiguration of the project to ensure that it clearly focuses on Ofsted's findings. Delivery of the project began on 30th November, with the aim of improving the end-to-end pathway for children, families and the staff who support them. This will complement and inform the post inspection improvement plan and help to define and deliver changes over the coming months.

The assessment will be carried out by a small specialist team from Newton, who will be shadowing frontline workers to gain an understanding of how much time we are able to spend with families day-to-day and how cases are managed. They will be talking to staff and managers and reviewing some of our cases to understand how practice, processes and our systems and structures can best support the pathways.

Capacity Building within Children's Social Care Management

As a result of the findings we have taken rapid actions to increase the management capacity and oversight within Children's Social Care (CSC) at district level. We operate CSC on a three district model, North, East and Central Lancashire. We are moving additional management capacity from County Hall to support the district managers in each district from Monday 7th December. Each area will have two additional senior managers who will work with the district managers to allow increased oversight of social work practice. These arrangements have been put in place for a two month period in the first instance.

Immediate Actions

It is important that we deliver on the longer term strategic actions needed to improve children's services, but it is also critical that we undertake a number of immediate actions to mitigate any possible risk to children and young people and to provide maximum assurance.

The report is critical of the County Council's management oversight of Children in Need (CiN) and asks questions about the model it has been using for many years. The County Council will be undertaking a review of our present model, but this work will take some time to complete. As an immediate task the County Council will begin reviewing the current 2,300 CiN cases held by Children's Social Care to provide assurance that these cases are being managed at the right level.

The first step will be to risk assess all the cases and effectively tier them so that we can focus on the highest priority cases. This will be completed by 11th December. This will include cases where there has been a police notification within the last 6 months, cases which have been deemed CiN following a child protection enquiry, cases which have been stepped down from child protection to CiN, cases which have been open more than 12 months and cases which are presently causing concern where consideration is being given to escalation to child protection. The County Council is reassigning its own resources and has commissioned an external social work agency to work with us to ensure that this is done as quickly as possible. Once the cases have been risk assessed, the County Council will begin reviewing all of them in priority order and this will be fully complete by March 2016.

The report is also critical of aspects of social work practice including child protection strategy discussions not involving other agencies. Guidance has been re-issued to all managers reaffirming that strategy discussions must involve other agencies, namely the police and health, and monitoring of this is taking place.

In respect of care leavers, guidance has been issued to all workers to raise awareness of Leaving Care Regulations and a further briefing for all workers is taking place in January. The County Council has also commenced a review of all Pathway Plans and is ensuring that all care leavers will have received an information pack explaining their full entitlements by 18 December 2015.

Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

In conjunction with Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE), the delivery of an improvement plan will be closely monitored by a Post Inspection Improvement Board (PIIB) with an independent chairperson. The independent chair of the PIIB will be appointed by the DfE and the improvement plan will need to be developed with and formally approved by both the PIIB and the DfE.

A DfE advisor will undertake a diagnostic including discussions with frontline staff and partners. The outcomes of this diagnostic will inform an improvement notice that will be issued to the local authority.

The effective implementation of the improvement plan will be critical to achieving a much improved outcome when Ofsted undertakes a further, shorter inspection of Children's Services in due course.

Positive Feedback

The inspectors' recent findings included positive feedback about a number of aspects of service delivery and practice. These included recognition that, at all levels, there is a commitment and will to succeed in delivering the best outcomes for children and young people. Despite the overall outcome, therefore, the considerable efforts of our staff, and indeed those working for partner agencies, must be recognised here.

Some of the specific aspects of these services that were praised are:

- The way children are listened to and their views recorded.
- The strong focus on identifying and tackling child sexual exploitation.
- The referral system for ensuring cases of children who are potentially at risk of harm are reviewed and allocated promptly to social workers on duty.
- The County Council's effective working relationships with partners on strategic boards, and the way in which children's needs are consistently considered across these partnerships.
- The extensive training programme provided by the council last year around the Common Assessment Framework.
- The strong focus of schools on safeguarding children around the Prevent agenda, which gives schools the confidence to intervene where appropriate to reduce the risk of radicalisation.
- The work of the County Council and police to manage cases of forced marriage and honour based violence.
- The way in which services in children's centres contribute to providing early help to support parents of children in need.
- Social workers reported feeling supported by line managers and that they received regular supervision.
- The County Council has a coherent strategy to monitor children who are missing school.
- Social workers visit looked after children regularly and see them alone where appropriate.
- There are positive relationships with the courts and Cafcass, and court proceedings are better informed and more aligned.
- The number of children adopted has risen significantly over the last three years.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

The County Council has already committed an additional £5m into children's services following the inspection. Clearly there are significant resource pressures on the County Council, these will need to be carefully monitored as the required improvement work is undertaken, which may include the generation of increased demand.

Failure to improve services and to meet the terms of the Improvement Notice could lead to further intervention by the DfE.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Lancashire Inspection Report: http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/performance-inspections-reviews/children,-education-and-families/childrens-services-ofsted-inspection-programmes.aspx	November 2015	Ofsted

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate