

## **OFSTED POST INSPECTION UPDATE**

### **Background and Advice**

Ofsted carried out an unannounced inspection of Children's Services which commenced on 14 September 2015 and which lasted for four weeks.

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 (LCSB) at the same time.

Ofsted published its report on Friday 27 November 2015 rating the overall effectiveness of the Children's Services as inadequate. The judgement for the LCSB was good.

### **Actions taken since the last CCPI**

A number of actions have been put in place and developed since the last report to CCPI on 10 December 2015:

#### **Director of Children's Services**

Agreement has been reached between the County Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for Linda Clegg to fulfil the position of Director of Children's Services for both authorities. Linda will bring additional leadership capacity and extensive expertise around children's social care and will lead the improvement agenda.

#### **Child in Need Reviews**

A concern raised by Ofsted was whether there was sufficient social work oversight over Child in Need cases and therefore a clear understanding of the levels of risk to children. In response, all Child in Need cases are being reviewed and appropriate levels of intervention are being put in place to ensure children are safe. It has been identified that 2,345 child in need cases need reviewing and by 31 January a review has taken place for 1,150. All 2,345 will be completed by the end of February. Work is also underway to ensure that in future there is an effective social care model that provides sufficient oversight to manage risk in child in need cases. An outline for this model will be presented to February's Improvement Board. Plans to revise the approach and structure of the Early Help and Wellbeing Service will also strengthen and support this new model for Child in Need.

#### **Improvement Seminar**

Ofsted facilitated an improvement seminar on the 13 January which was attended by senior colleagues from the County Council, representatives from partner organisations and also social care managers and frontline social workers.

The purpose of the seminar was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the inspection judgements and this is being used to help shape and inform the improvement plan. Whilst the focus of the seminar was the areas of improvement that need to be made, a key message from the inspectors was that 'it is not all broken'. Children Services Scrutiny will have a role in ensuring that the other areas of children's services do not drift or deteriorate particularly given that inspections of Youth Offending and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities services are expected in the near future.

## **Lancashire Children's Services Improvement Board**

The Improvement Board has been established, which is usual practice following an 'inadequate' inspection judgement. The Board will be responsible for closely monitoring the development and delivery of an improvement plan which will be critical to achieving a much improved outcome when Ofsted carries out a further inspection in due course.

The independent chair of the Improvement Board has been appointed. Tony Crane is a specialist children's services improvement advisor for the Department for Education (DfE). He was previously the Director of Children's Services at Cheshire East Council and has more recently been working with Leicester City Council through their improvement journey as chair of their Improvement Board. Tony will be responsible for reporting improvement progress to the Secretary of State.

The first board meeting took place on 20 January, with monthly meetings thereafter. A summary of the Board meeting discussions, term of reference and other information can be found [here](#)

## **Improvement Notice**

Tony Crane is currently undertaking a diagnostic which will establish a detailed understanding of the capacity and capability of Lancashire's ability to improve children's services. The diagnostic is being informed through interviews with managers and partners, focus groups with staff and analysis of performance information and existing policy, plans and strategy.

The diagnostic will be reported in early March directly to Edward Timpson, the Minister of State for Children and Families and will determine the approach taken by the DfE. This could either be in the form of an improvement notice to Lancashire County Council which will specify the areas of concern, the level of improvement required and how progress will be assessed and reported. Or it could be in the form of more direct intervention which in some instances has meant parts of children's services being run by an external organisation or Trust.

## **Improvement Plan**

An Improvement Plan is currently being developed and will outline in detail the activity and action that will be developed to make the improvements to children's services that are needed at the scale and pace that is required. The Improvement

Plan will respond to all the concerns that have been raised by Ofsted in their inspection report and will be submitted to the DfE for approval on 5 March 2016. The Improvement Board is responsible for the development of this Plan and for overseeing its implementation and impact.

### **Ofsted Improvement Offer**

Ofsted have agreed for two inspectors to spend two days a month in Lancashire. They will undertake further scrutiny and analysis of areas of social care that align with areas identified within the Improvement Plan. This work will continue for 12 months and feedback will be provided to the Director of Children's Services after each visit. In addition, Ofsted will produce a quarterly report of this work and findings which will be presented to the Improvement Board.

The first visit took place in early February and six cases from Burnley have been audited. Initial feedback from Ofsted highlighted that the cases audited demonstrated a mix in quality from inadequate to good. Ofsted also voiced criticism of the audit tool being used. The audit tool and its use will be reviewed.

### **Children's Services Pathway Review**

The team from Newton has completed its work in developing an understanding of the effectiveness of the process, systems, structure and approach within children's services. Although the Newton work is not as a result of the Ofsted inspection, it will complement and inform the post inspection improvement plan and help to define and deliver changes over the coming months.

Staff have fully engaged with the Newton team and provided a very high level of response around their working practices. The initial Newton findings indicate that there are opportunities to improve the effectiveness of social care practice and increase the amount of time that Social Workers spend in direct contact with families.

A final report from Newton outlining their findings and recommendations will be presented to cabinet and management team by the end of February.

### **What does good look like?**

Independent consultant, Stephen Hart, has been commissioned to help frontline staff and managers understand what 'good' social work practice looks like and what more is needed to 'get to good'. So far Steve has worked in detail through over 30 cases with staff to form a shared understanding of what is and isn't good social care practice.

Stephen is a former Ofsted inspector who was instrumental in the design of the Ofsted improvement programme and he is working with staff to identify the steps we need to take to change the culture of our approach and the processes that underpin this.

### **New Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

Full Council recently approved the establishment of a new scrutiny committee. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee will operate in addition to existing committees and its remit will cover all issues relating to children and young people's services. Education matters will still be reserved for the Education Scrutiny Committee. Representatives, including five lay members, one from each of the local Children's Partnership Boards, have now been agreed. The committee has already met informally for a half day briefing so that members could better understand the key issues across children's services and begin to define their role in addressing these issues. The committee will meet for the first time in March and every six weeks thereafter.

### **Increasing Capacity**

Additional management capacity has been redirected from existing resources into the districts to allow increased oversight of social work practice. There are two additional senior managers in North, East and Central Lancashire working with social care district managers.

A social work agency called Skylakes has also started work to help review the child and family assessments of 720 child in need cases, an area of concern specifically identified by the inspectors.

There has been a focus on recruitment to fill vacancies in children's social care and in most areas these are now filled and at establishment levels. In addition, management team have agreed to further social care capacity that is currently being recruited to.

There is weekly reporting and monitoring of children's social care vacancies and recruitment. A refresh of the recruitment and retention strategy is also being developed to enable a renewed and sustainable approach to ensuring appropriate staffing of children's social care both in terms of numbers but also in terms of experience and skills. This is in the context of a national shortage of trained social work staff which is reflected at a regional level.

### **Communication and engagement**

As we move forward to deliver improvements and changes in response to the Ofsted report, there is a need to ensure that staff and partners are fully engaged and able to inform, understand and support improvement plans. A communications strategy and action plan will be developed to support the improvement process and activity.

As part of this approach a staff briefing was held on the 4 February with over 60 managers from across children's services receiving information about improvement development and spending some time discussing their ideas for improvement. This work will be fed into the improvement plan.

### **Care Leavers**

Guidance has been issued to all workers to raise awareness and understanding of the Leaving Care Regulations. Care Leavers have also received an information pack

which details and explains their full entitlements. In addition, a full review of all Pathway Plans has commenced so that we can ensure that all Care Leavers are receiving support that is appropriate, effective and based on their needs.

### **Performance Management**

Weekly reporting arrangements have been established and continue to focus on children's services staffing vacancies, the audits of all Child in Need, the timelessness and multi-agency engagement in section 47 strategy discussions and social worker caseload levels. This is further supported by a weekly assurance conference call with the three children's services area managers. Work is also underway to streamline our performance reporting approach and ensure that key measures have clear and robust targets set against them. This will include the development of a performance dashboard that will be used by the Improvement Board to monitor and challenge the progress being made in delivering help and protection to children and young people.

External expertise is also currently being agreed through the region and Ofsted to support the development of improvement performance reporting.

### **LiquidLogic Children's System (LCS)**

A key area of concern raised by Ofsted was the ability to access timely and accurate information and data from LCS. Work is underway to understand these issues and develop solutions that address this concern. This has included a health check where colleagues from LiquidLogic worked with practitioners and have produced a report that outlines amendments to the system that will streamline processes. Support is also being drawn from Blackburn with Darwen and Bolton, learning from how they have implemented and use the LiquidLogic system. In addition, Newton have been asked to build on the above analysis and develop a clear plan for improvements to the LCS system so that it can be an effective tool moving forward.

### **Peer Challenge**

A programme of peer challenge and review is being discussed with colleagues from across the region and will be firmed up in the coming weeks. The agreement of this periodic external scrutiny will provide a level assurance that improvement progress is being made.