

Ofsted Post Inspection Update

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.

A number of actions have been put in place and developed since the last report to CCPI in March 2016:

Remodelling children's social care – significant plans have been developed and are being implemented to introduce additional capacity, at all staff levels, across children's social care. When complete this will equate to an additional investment of £4.6 million in staffing. As well as additional capacity this exercise will also provide a more specialist social care model ensuring that cohorts such as children in need and care leavers receive support from teams solely focussed on their needs. Recruitment has initially been focussed internally but in June this was supplemented by a high profile external campaign that was launched through a recruitment event at Woodlands and really promoted the benefits of working for the County Council.

Framework agreement – an ongoing challenge across the north-west region is that demand for children's social care services continues to increase. In Lancashire this has meant that there is a significant backlog of work that social workers are not finding the time to address. For the last three weeks, additional capacity has been drawn down from a framework agreement that was agreed a couple of months ago. This has meant two social work agencies picking up initial work and assessments for any new referrals into children's social care and will allow social workers to start to address the backlog of work. In the first two weeks of this additional capacity being in place social workers have completed over 2,000 tasks to address the backlog including completing 631 assessments and closing 350 cases.

Improvement Plan – the Improvement Plan has been produced and was agreed by the Improvement Board in March and then also agreed by the DfE. Delivery of the Improvement Plan is on track with all areas either completed or well on schedule to be completed within the agreed timeframe. Recent meetings with Ofsted and the DfE have also provided assurance that we have the right plan in place and this now needs to be progressed at pace. An additional 12 week plan is being developed to sit alongside the Improvement Plan with the aim of ensuring a sharper focus on some key areas and providing a challenge to address these over a very short timeframe.

[Link to the Improvement Plan](#)

Ofsted – since February 2016 Ofsted have been visiting Lancashire on a monthly basis, looking at case files and providing feedback on the progress being made to

improve services. The last visit took place on 18 May 2016. At this visit Ofsted noted that they can now see 'some green shoots of improvement'. This will be the last visit of this kind from Ofsted as from June they be moving to a new model of quarterly monitoring inspections. The first of these monitoring inspections in Lancashire will be in September. Further detail around these new arrangements will be available in June.

Improvement Notice – in February 2016 the DfE commissioned a diagnostic report with the intention that this will provide a clear steer to ministers around the County Council's capacity and capability to improve services for children and young people. The outcome of this report and subsequent conversation with civil servants determines the approach the DfE will take with the county council. This can range from a formal intervention with parts of children's services being run by external bodies/organisation or an Improvement Notice which provides formal notice for what needs to be improved and by and how the DfE will monitor this. At the time of writing this report an Improvement Notice has been received and which the Leader has agreed. This can be seen [here](#).

Peer Challenge - following discussion with colleagues from the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ACDS) it has been agreed that Lancashire will undergo two reviews over the next 12 months. In October 2016, Bernie Brown (Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, Liverpool City Council) will lead a team drawn from across the region who will spend four days reviewing cases, referrals, assessments and practice. In February 2017, the LGA will facilitate a Safeguarding Peer Review and the themes that will be covered will include: effective practice service delivery and voice of a child; outcomes, impact and performance; working together; capacity and managing resources; and vision, strategy and leadership. The LGA team will consist of a Director of Children's Services, a Cabinet Member, two operational peers (at head of service level), a health peer and an LGA peer review manager.

Operational Improvement Group – this group has been established as a subgroup of the Improvement Board to ensure that the decisions and discussions at the Board are grounded in the reality of issues and challenges faced by frontline practitioners. The Operational Improvement Group consists of frontline staff from across the County Council's children's services, health, police, education and voluntary sector and is chaired by the Principal Social Worker, Louise Storey. Already the Group has met with Jo Turton and the independent chair of the Improvement Board, Tony Crane. They have also produced a practitioner's guide to the Improvement Plan. A one page guide that has been commended by Ofsted and the Improvement Board as an excellent piece of work.

[Link to the practitioners guide to the Improvement Plan](#)

Young People – a group of young people from a range of vulnerable backgrounds are working with the Improvement Board so that we can ensure that the Board is capturing the voice and experiences of children and young people. Young people recently led an hour long session at the Board and already some of the feedback from these young people is being used to shape the way we provide services for care leavers. In addition, the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, has been impressed by the approach the Board is taking to working with young people and arrangements are being made for her to visit Lancashire and meet them in the autumn.

Refreshed audit model – at the May meeting of the Improvement Board a new audit model was agreed to improve the way audits are undertaken and that the learning from audit activity supports continuous improvements in practice and outcomes for children. The new Audit Framework serves three basic functions:

- 1) It identifies both good practice and where practice needs to improve through a systematic approach to sampling files;
- 2) It provides senior management with assurance as to the quality of work;
- 3) It provides a framework for responding to areas of concern through continuous learning and embedding good practice.

The framework was launched to practitioners and managers in May and the first audit report will be available in July, and then on a monthly basis.

Project Accuracy – a project launched in April to improve the quality of practice and recording of case work. It is focused on improving the accuracy of the seven key pieces of information below:

1. Team structures
2. Caseloads
3. S47s and strategy discussions
4. Referrals per week
5. C&Fs due and overdue
6. Visits due and overdue
7. Reviews due and overdue

Performance Management – in addition to the specific work being undertaken through project accuracy other developments are starting to increase confidence in performance data and management. A multi-agency Performance Sub Group of the Improvement Board now meets on a monthly basis to better understand the performance data and in particular the wide variance in this across Districts. Senior social care managers are also holding monthly Practice Improvement Meetings in East, Central and North Lancashire to better understand what performance data is telling us and ensuring that this then informs decisions about resources. And finally, a significant piece of work is underway to address the issues in the LCS system and ensure we can produce accurate information in the Annex A submission when Ofsted undertake the first of their monitoring inspections in September.