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# Scrutiny Panel

25<sup>th</sup> July 2019

# Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

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- An unannounced three week program of inspection.
- Week one off site – including - performance data, auditing, telephone interviews, review of self-assessment, developing initial lines of enquiry.
- Week two and three on site– 4 HMI, 1 QA, plus 2 Education HMI for two days and 1 Regulatory Inspector for one day.
- Majority of time spent in services/teams reviewing frontline work across out of hours, MASH, duty, safeguarding, early help, looked after, fostering, adoption, leaving care, virtual school.
- Case tracking, file auditing, 1:1 with frontline workers and first line managers, data interrogation, meeting with young people and foster carers etc.
- Formal report and four judgements given.

# Judgements

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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

# High level summary

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- Progress had been slow.
- More recently senior leadership have supported a much strengthened 'whole-council' commitment to improving the quality and impact of services for children.
- Also more widely within the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and political leadership.
- The result a notable increase in the pace and effectiveness of service development.
- Leaders have an improved understanding of how well services are working for children and of their key priorities.

# Some important improvements have been made

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- The scale and effectiveness of early help services have been strengthened through a new locality- based model that is now serving most children well.
- A new multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is ensuring that referrals about children for whom there are safeguarding concerns are almost always dealt with quickly and appropriately.
- An 'edge of care' team works intensively with families to ensure that children only come into care when they need to.
- However, much progress, particularly in services for children in care, is very new and so impact is inevitably limited.
- The local authority is not providing the consistently good services for children that it aspires to.

# Some important improvements have been made (continued)

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- The roll-out of a preferred model of social work practice is helping to strengthen how children's views are sought.
- However, children's views are not consistently used to inform either the analysis in assessments or subsequent actions.
- Efforts to recruit and retain sufficient social workers and an increase in overall staffing levels means that most social workers now have manageable caseloads.
- However, a few still have caseloads that are too high.
- The frequency and regularity of management oversight and supervision has improved but is not consistently effective in ensuring the progression of support to children and families.
- This is compounded by a lack of sufficient challenge and oversight by the chairs of child protection conferences and independent reviewing officers (IROs).

# What needs to improve

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- Timeliness of achieving permanence for children in care.
- The challenge provided by senior leaders, team managers, IROs and conference chairs about the pace and quality of social work and placements for children in care.
- How consistently children's wishes and feelings are used to inform assessments and plans.
- Children's experience of being able to develop a relationship with a consistent social worker who visits them regularly and makes sure their plans are progressed.

# Other areas of focus

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- Complex safeguarding
- Children with Disability services
- Further work on management oversight and driving good practice
- Looked After Children Services
- Virtual school/education
- More granular objectives regarding case loads

# Our own self-Assessment concluded -

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- Much more of our case work now falls into the good or requires improvement category.
- The quality of casework is improving overall. The proportion of inadequate casework is steadily reducing.
- A now permanent and stable senior management team are consolidating improvements made to date, but there remains inconsistency and significant challenges exist around workforce, although this is now showing measurable improvements.

# And identified the following priorities

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- The further stabilisation of our Social Work workforce.
- Improved consistency of good case recording.
- Supervision whilst regular and more evident on files still needs further improvements in consistency and quality.
- The rigor with which children's current needs are assessed and understood.
- The quality of our plans.
- Focus on the quality and timeliness of some specific elements of casework.
- Fully embedding Heart of Practice and SoS, and enabling effective relationship based practice across the service.

# And identified the following priorities (continued)

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- Implement our Fostering Service improvement plan and improve service compliance and quality.
- Placement sufficiency
- Fully embed the MASH and the associated Early Help framework to more effectively direct demands to the appropriate level of intervention.
- Roll out and fully embed our neighborhood working across Early Help, Team Around the School and MASH arrangements.
- Following through upon the Successful Families Strategy to reduce the numbers of children needing to enter or remain in care and consider more permanent alternative ways of gaining capacity to support timely and effective Child in Need interventions
- Build on our current missing and CSE arrangements to the complex safeguarding arrangements across the partnership.
- Drive forward the Starting Well strand of the Corporate Plan with the establishment of a Starting Well Board

# What next?

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## Ofsted

- We can expect our next full inspection on circa 3 years
- In between we can expect two or three focused visits
- Annual Ofsted conversations will continue

# What next (continued)

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## DfE

- Current intervention status will be reviewed by the Minister
- Active decision required to step down from this
- If agreed current intervention advisor will step down and six weekly reporting ends
- This is replaced by a quarterly review meetings for next 12 months

# What next (continued)

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## Governance

- Children Improvement Board will continue bi-monthly
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- New independent chair to be appointed
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- Strategic Management Meetings to continue chaired by LMCS – bi-monthly

# What next (continued)

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- Improvement journey will continue
- Self-assessment to be updated Sept/Oct
- Current improvement/action plans to be reviewed and updated in light of Inspection findings
- Overarching strategic plan to be developed looking 2-3 years ahead

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Any questions?