

# **Report of the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 10 September 2014**

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**Subject: Report on the outcomes for Looked After Children of the February 2014 Ofsted Single Inspection of Children's Services in the Bradford District.**

## **Summary statement:**

This report summarises the judgements of OFSTED's report of the Single Inspection of Children's Services (comprising: children in need of help and protection; Children Looked After; care leavers; adoption and fostering services and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board). It provides an overview of the findings and judgements as they relate to Looked After Children: Residential Provision, Fostering, Adoption and services to those Leaving Care.

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## 1. Summary

This report summarises the judgements of OFSTED's report of the Single Inspection of Children's Services (comprising: children in need of help and protection; Children Looked After; care leavers; adoption and fostering services and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board). It provides an overview of the findings and judgements as they relate to Looked After Children: Residential Provision, Fostering, Adoption and Services to those Leaving Care.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Bradford's Children's Services had been previously inspected in May 2012 and were judged to be 'Good'. Fostering Services were inspected in 2011 and were judged to be Good. Adoption Services were inspected in 2010 and were judged to be Good. Private Fostering was inspected in 2009 and was judged to be Satisfactory. Twelve out of thirteen Children's Homes were judged to be Good or Outstanding in their most recent inspection.
- 2.2 Whilst an Authority judged to be Good in 2012 could expect to be inspected three years later, inspection may be triggered at any time by incidents or cases which raise serious concerns. The publication of the Serious Case Review of the Hamzah Khan case in Autumn 2013 was such an incident.
- 2.3 The inspection in February 2014 took place under a newly introduced framework. It brought together previously separate inspection frameworks for Adoption and Fostering Services and included a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- 2.4 The four judgement grades under this new inspection framework are Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement (which replaces Satisfactory) and Inadequate.

## 3. Inspection Findings

### Overall Judgement

- 3.1 The overall judgement of the inspection was that Bradford Children's Services "Requires Improvement". This resulted from a concept called "Limiting Judgement" whereby the performance of one part of the service defines the performance of the rest. On this occasion, concerns about the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Case Conferences was the limiting factor.
- 3.2 Ofsted's individual judgements on Children Looked After; achieving permanence; adoption and the experience and progress of care leavers were, however, all "Good"

### Children Looked After and achieving permanence is good

- 3.3 The Ofsted inspection found the following: No cases were seen where children needed to be Looked After and this had not happened. Good performance has resulted in a 2.1% decrease in the number of Looked After children over the last year, compared to by strengthening the early help offer, increasing use of special guardianship and further improving adoption performance. Thorough consideration

of children on the edge of care at the weekly Family Support Panel reviews their support needs, provides services and prevents care.

- 3.4 Good quality care plans are consistently clear about the importance of achieving permanence as soon as possible for those children who are not able to return to their birth families. Arrangements for finding permanence placements are strong, with good co-ordinated work by the family finding team and the placement co-ordination service. Where the plan is for children to return to their parents' care, comprehensive assessments balance the child's needs and the parents' ability to meet them safely and consistently. Social Workers provide the support that families and children need to ensure that children can stay safely at home and the risks of a return to care are minimised.
- 3.5 The Authority recruits carers and commissions placements to ensure that brothers and sisters stay together wherever possible. Children benefit from stable, good quality in-house foster homes and residential care. The vast majority of children do not move in an unplanned way and most are placed in their local district. When a child's placement ends suddenly, a meeting to learn lessons is held and effective sharing of the learning is taken forward through the regular placement stability meeting.
- 3.6 Fostering Service Managers have well-informed plans to provide sufficient numbers and types of foster carers for children Looked After. An identified shortage of long-term carers has resulted in appropriately targeted publicity and recruitment activity. Currently, 96 children are waiting for a range of permanence placements, but 60% are either formally linked to a potential carer or a plan is in progress. Senior Managers meet monthly to track progress in finding placements for these children and to ensure that all work is efficiently co-ordinated to avoid delay or drift. The Authority is forecast to achieve its target of 30 new carers for the year 2013–2014, and plans to recruit at least this number in the following year are realistic. Good use is already made of Special Guardianship, with 20 new arrangements last year.
- 3.7 Good work with the Police has led to a very low rate of offending for children Looked After, which is 2.8% compared to a national average of 6.9%. A recent joint-funded Police Officer with specific responsibility for children Looked After will further strengthen work on offending and for those who go missing from care.
- 3.8 The team of six dedicated Nurses for children Looked After provide good support to the young people in their care. Health assessments take place where young people feel most comfortable and this works well in conjunction with regular drop-in sessions. Performance in this area is good, with 90% having an up-to-date health assessment compared to 87% nationally. Good partnership work with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) enables prompt access to therapeutic services at times of acute need. Waiting times of 14 weeks for less urgent cases are too long. To mitigate this, the Looked After Nursing Team carry out their own therapeutic work or signpost young people to services such as Off the Record, an advocacy service, or to independent counselling.
- 3.9 Children Looked After make good progress from their individual starting points at age seven to the time they leave primary school at the age of eleven. In 2013 the percentage making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics was above that of similar pupils nationally. This was especially the case for reading and writing, where there was a 10% and 8% point difference respectively. The virtual

school team are targeting extra support for individual pupils and are supporting schools to ensure that writing is as good as other subjects for this group.

- 3.10 Good progress is evident for children from entering secondary school in Year 7 to Year 11, and has moved from below that of similar young people nationally in 2011 to above in 2013. Although there was a dip in the number of students gaining five good GCSEs including English and Mathematics in 2013, good performance is projected for 2014. The proportion projected to gain these qualifications at 29%, will be well above the current national average of 20% for Looked After children.
- 3.11 The quality of case records seen is at least good. Children's voices are clearly present and taken account of in social work practice and recording. This is a real strength, and well-managed caseloads mean that Social Workers have time to get to know children really well. This approach to valuing and including children and young people's opinions is also evident in service development and review. Both the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children in Care Council are high profile groups. The confident and well-supported Children in Care Council meets Elected Members and Senior Managers regularly and attends Scrutiny Committee. Examples of how the contribution of young people has been harnessed include the monitoring of the CAMHS service and the design of a new residential home.

### **The graded judgment for adoption performance is good**

- 3.12 Adoption performance in Bradford is good. Performance on the adoption scorecard is broadly in line with or better than the national average. Children live with their adopters quickly. The percentage of children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 64% in Bradford, which is better than the England rate of 55%.
- 3.13 Adoption is considered for all children who need a permanent alternative home. Effective care planning provides thorough consideration of adoption early in the child's journey through care. For unborn children where there is a high likelihood of adoption, good work ensures early and proactive links with the family finding team. In line with the national picture, Bradford has a group of children for whom it is hard to find adopters. These children have foetal alcohol syndrome, uncertain health prognosis or high risks of hereditary mental ill health. Sustained efforts are made to profile the children nationally, but finding prospective adopters remains challenging.
- 3.14 The Adoption Panel is effective and has easy access to good quality legal and medical advice. Members are fully trained and reflect the cultural diversity of the district. Routine reports by the panel chair highlight any learning needed to maintain quality standards. A comprehensive annual review of the adoption service is provided for Senior Managers and Elected Members.
- 3.15 Adoption support is good and easily accessible to all parties in adoption, including birth relatives. The service responds swiftly and practically to requests for help. Good quality assessments and plans effectively support children and families. A well-managed letterbox service is available to facilitate contact. The valued annual Adoption Celebration provides opportunity for brothers and sisters placed separately to meet up. Therapeutic work to support adopted children and their families is quickly accessible and provided by a specialist worker in the service.

**The graded judgment for the experiences and progress of care leavers is good.**

- 3.16 Care leavers speak positively about good support to help them understand how to keep safe, including risks from sexual exploitation, drugs and alcohol. They also speak highly of the support of the designated Leaving Care Nurse, who conducts their health assessments, makes sure they understand their health histories and provides confidential advice through regular drop-ins or outreach in their homes.
- 3.17 A small proportion of care leavers, under 3%, are in custody. Evidence demonstrates that these young people receive a good individual package of support, including regular visits. The Leaving Care Service, and a range of partner agencies, work effectively to enable these young people to return to their local communities successfully. Pregnant care leavers and young parents receive a good range of support from the leaving care service, a dedicated nurse and services with which they work closely. For example, pregnant mums receive intensive support from Bradford's award-winning family nurse partnership that continues until the child is two years old. The Leaving Care duty arrangements and good partnerships between the designated nurse, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and counselling services ensures that care leavers who need support in times of crises get help quickly.
- 3.18 Collective work is impacting well on the number of young people in education, employment or training and in the number moving on to university. Currently 30 care leavers are at university and 10 more are planned to go in September. This compares very favourably to the national average and the number has increased well over the past three years. A good package of support is available to university students. This includes additional funding to the minimum required, regular contact with staff and continuity of living arrangements in vacations if wanted.
- 3.19 The Leaving Care grant of £1,200 is below the level expected within the Government's published 'entitlements for looked after children and care leavers'. However, a wide range of additional funds are provided to young people as they leave care, including £10 weekly top-up and lap tops for those in further education. This means that the combined funding provided is higher than the minimum required.
- 3.20 Young people consider that they are well prepared for their move into independence and say they get good support to help them manage budgets and develop additional skills if needed. They are particularly appreciative of the opportunities, through LEAP, to visit the Ministry of Food and develop their healthy eating skills there. Young people say they are safe where they live and are supported into the accommodation of their choice.
- 3.21 Good preparatory work and work with housing partners such as Stonham and Incommunities help to guide and support young people into independent accommodation when ready. Local data show good improvement in the proportion in suitable accommodation, with the rate currently at 94.5% and above that found nationally. No young people are in bed and breakfast accommodation, use of which has been minimal over the last 12 months.
- 3.22 Young people are not informed well enough about the national government's published 'Entitlements for looked after children and care leavers'. Not all young people who spoke to inspectors were clear about this information. Although they

say they receive updated guidance and information, guidance does not spell out specifically what the entitlements mean for them, so they cannot check if their service meets or exceeds minimum expectations.

## **Actions**

A number of actions have already been taken;

- The Children in Care Council (CICC) have been asked to work on a young person friendly 'app' so that young people can quickly look at their entitlements.
- CAMHS services for Looked After Children are reporting to Corporate Parenting on improvements for children in care.

## **4. Options**

## **5. Financial and Resource Appraisal**

Additional resource has been assigned to the Child Protection Unit in respect of professionally qualified staff and minute taking capacity.

## **6. Legal Appraisal**

There are no legal issues arising.

## **7. Other Implications**

### **7.1 Equal Rights**

None.

### **7.2 Sustainability Implications**

### **7.3 Community Safety Implications**

### **7.4 Human Rights Act**

None.

### **7.5 Trade Unions**

None.

### **7.6 Not for Publication Documents**

None.

## **8. Recommendations**

That the Committee accept the summary report presented and review the full report of the inspection.

**9. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Ofsted Report – [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**10. Background Documents**

None.