

Report of the Chief Executive/ Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Executive to be held on 6th November 2018

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Subject:

OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

Summary statement:

This report provides information about the OFSTED ILACS judgement published on 29 October and the action that the Council has taken and will take in response.

Portfolio: Leader/Children and Families

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Overview & Scrutiny Area: Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

1.1. This report provides a summary of the OFSTED inspection of Bradford's Children's Services, its implications, and the steps that the Council has taken and will take to respond to the judgement.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 OFSTED carried out an inspection of our Children's Services from Monday 17 September 2018 until Friday 28 September 2018.

2.2 The inspection was carried out under the new ILACS framework. This focuses rigorously on the handling of cases and the experience of children. Inspections have been carried out at 18 local authorities to date using the new framework which reports on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements in respect of:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers;
- Overall effectiveness.

2.3 OFSTED's inspection and ratings were published on their website on 29 October (see Appendix 1 for the full report). The report recognises that there has been a significant increase in demand for services across all areas at the same time as the loss of a significant number of experienced social workers and managers resulting in over 30 vacancies in the summer. Despite our recognising these challenges, and the putting in place of improvement plans, the report notes that at the time of the inspection, these had not yet delivered the sustained improvements we need. The judgement and grades are summarised below:

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	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

The overall effectiveness grade of inadequate is determined by the grade given in respect of the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, even though some aspects of the service were seen as strengths (our approach to CSE and missing for example).

2.4 The key areas we need to improve are:

- The identification and response to risk, particularly the longer-term impact of domestic abuse and neglect.
- Clarity about what change is needed by families and by when during proceedings.
- The prioritisation and timely, proportionate responses to contacts, including gaining parental consent.
- Social work practice, including the quality of assessments and plans and their implementation.
- Multi-agency child protection working, including strategy meetings, child protection conferences, core groups and child in need reviews.
- The response to children with specific vulnerabilities, including children aged 16-17 who present as homeless, children privately fostered, as well as the oversight and monitoring of allegations against professionals working with children.
- Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of children in care.
- The provision of life-story work for all children in care.
- Completion of mandatory training for all foster carers.
- Supervision of social work staff, which provides direction, to be regular and reflective.

2.5 However, OFSTED also found good practice in some areas, such as our handling of child sexual exploitation, saying:

- “Specialist multi-agency teams robustly address concerns about child sexual exploitation and respond well to incidents when children go missing. Due to the high-quality focused work, the number of children in care who have gone missing, and the frequency of episodes if going missing has greatly reduced.”
- “Senior managers have recognised that there is an increasing complexity in children’s need when they come into care. They have invested in edge of care services to ensure that, wherever possible, children are able to remain with their birth families or be rehabilitated with their families at the earliest opportunity.”
- “In Throughcare teams inspectors saw high-quality and regular contact consistent with the needs of the child, resulting in good progress being made in the delivery of plans.”
- “The vast majority of social workers and staff report that Bradford is a good place to work, with good support, including access to training and workable caseloads.”

Our response to OFSTED's findings

2.6 Bradford MDC is committed to ensuring that all our children have the best possible start in life and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. External scrutiny and challenge is

essential to ensure we deliver on our ambitions for children and in that context, we welcome OFSTED's inspection. At the same time, it is extremely disappointing that OFSTED found that the services we deliver to protect the most vulnerable are not meeting the high standards our children deserve.

2.7 The inspectors acknowledge that Bradford is taking action to overcome issues of recruitment and retention which are a result of national social worker shortages. Bradford has been very open about the pressure that this has put on our services and the implication for the quality of services, for example in respect of the child's experience of their relationship with social care. It has meant that recently our services to children have not always been as good as they should have been. We referred to this in our annual self-assessment and our improvement plan. In recognising the challenges facing the service, Members reinstated £3.569m of planned savings in the 2018/19 budget, as well as making new investments for retaining social workers (£450,000 p.a) and £1m of transitional funding for Prevention and Early Help services.

2.8 In June 2018, OFSTED noted that Bradford had 38 vacancies for social workers. In response we have worked hard to attract newly qualified social workers and people returning to the profession. In September, 25 newly recruited social workers started in Bradford, but it will take some time for them to complete their induction and gain experience.

2.9 Bradford has not shied away from tackling the issues that have emerged in 2018, and we know that we can provide good services for children. We are now determined to deliver the improvements that we had planned at pace, to stabilise our services and to move as quickly as we can to re-establish services that are consistently good. The commitment and support of our partners in the district and everyone who works with children will be vital in helping us make these changes quickly.

2.10 During and after the inspection, immediate and decisive action has been taken to respond to the findings, including:

- establishing a Shadow Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, which has already started meeting (Terms of Reference at Appendix 2).
- establishing weekly assurance meetings under the leadership of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to ensure that all children are safe.
- under the Chief Executive's delegated authority, an immediate uplift in resources of £134,000 has been agreed to provide additional capacity to review cases, managerial capacity and strengthen oversight of decision-making.
- Initiating an immediate review of arrangements at the front-door.

Next Steps

2.11 The Council will be subject to formal intervention by the Department for Education (DfE) until services improve. DfE, under its intervention policy, will issue the Council with an improvement notice and appoint an improvement adviser to work with the Council to make sure rapid progress is made to improve services for children. OFSTED will monitor our progress regularly and we will be subject to a full re-inspection within two years. Key actions and milestones include:

- Creation of a full Children's Social Care Improvement Board (as soon as possible)

Membership and Terms of Reference will need to be approved by both DfE/OFSTED and Executive.

- Produce a draft Statement of Action for discussion at the OFSTED planning meeting.
- Submit a full Statement of Action (Deadline for submission: 4 February 2019).
- Support a monitoring visit (which will take place 3 months after our publication of inspection i.e. January)
- Quarterly monitoring will continue until we have an inspection and move into a different pathway (i.e. are requires improvement to be good or above)

2.12 Councillors and senior officers collectively are committed to making sure that we work rapidly and effectively to improve our services at pace to meet our ambitions for Bradford's children.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. None

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 As noted in paragraph 2.11, we have already committed £134,000 to address immediate concerns. It will also be necessary to consider the case for additional investment as part of the Budget process.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1. This report is for information only.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 The recent inspection was undertaken under the new Framework, Evaluation Criteria and Inspector Guidance for the Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). This contains provisions regarding actions to be taken after an inadequate inspection report. These include monitoring by Ofsted including an action planning visit, quarterly monitoring visits and a re-inspection, and also an action plan prepared by the local authority within 70 days of receiving the report.

The Secretary of State has a wide range of powers available following an inadequate judgment, including statutory and non-statutory interventions. The type of intervention is dependent on the severity of the situation, how long the authority has been underperforming, and the perceived capacity for improvement.

S497A Education Act 1996 gives the Secretary of State a wide range of statutory powers if satisfied the local authority is failing to perform its social care functions. These include statutory directions to the local authority aimed at securing adequate performance and also statutory directions requiring the functions to be taken over by others including the

Secretary of State or those nominated by him.

In Bradford's case, the Secretary of State intends to take a non-statutory approach, appointing an improvement adviser and issuing a formal improvement notice. The Department for Education 'Putting Children First – Delivering Our Vision for Excellent Children's Social Care (July 2016) indicates that the Secretary of State will only take the non-statutory route if the evidence does not indicate persistent or systemic failure. The local authority will be involved in discussions regarding the content of the notice and it will clearly specify the issues of concern, the improvement required, how this will be assessed and subsequent steps that may be taken if improvement is not achieved.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Report is for information only. No specific issues.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. There are no specific issues.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Report is for information only. There are no specific issues.

7.6 TRADE UNION

Report is for information only. There are no specific issues.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Report is for information only. There are no specific issues.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

The ILACS inspection provides a comprehensive external assessment of outcomes for Looked after Children. An action plan will be produced to address areas for improvement identified by OFSTED and progress will additionally be reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

There are no specific data protection implications.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

Not applicable

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the outcome of the OFSTED inspection
2. To note the plans to deliver rapid improvement and to offer support.
3. To refer the report to the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
4. To request that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services work with officers to prepare a robust Improvement Plan with the voice of the child at its heart for the next meeting of the Executive in December
5. To invite the Chair of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee to join the formal Improvement Board
6. To request that the Chief Executive identify an appropriate Improvement Advisor to work with the council and to act as independent chair of the Improvement Board
7. To refer the report to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – OFSTED Inspection Report

Appendix 2- Shadow Improvement Board Terms of Reference