

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 15 December 2021

Subject:

O

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

Summary statement:

Following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from the 17 to 28 September 2018, the sixth of a series of Monitoring Visits took place on the 7 to 8 September 2021.

The focus of the Monitoring Visit was around Children in Care and Residential Services.

The findings were published by Ofsted on 22 October 2021.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

There are no direct implications for equality and diversity arising from this report. The Council has a duty to ensure that its services comply with the public sector equality duty.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from the 17 to 28 September 2018, the sixth of a series of Monitoring Visits took place on the 7 to 8 September 2021.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The monitoring visit took place on the 7th & 8th September and is the 6th monitoring visit since the full ILACS inspection in 2018. This monitoring visit reviewed the progress made in strengthening practice for Children in Care. The previous monitoring visit that looked at Children in Care took place in February 2020.
- 2.3 The focus was on the areas identified in the 2018 ILACS Inspection as well as the concerns that had been identified from the inspections of some of the children's homes. The following areas were considered within the scope of this monitoring visit:
- Permanence planning & decision-making for children in care;
 - Placement stability & sufficiency of placements for children;
 - Placement decision-making & the commissioning arrangements;
 - Unregulated and unregistered placements.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Headline Findings

- 3.1.1 The monitoring visit was undertaken within the context that prior to the monitoring visit, a Commissioner had been appointed by the DfE due to a number of concerns that had recently been identified.
- 3.1.2 The monitoring visit acknowledged that whilst there are still significant areas of concern, actions that have been taken since the previous monitoring visit in February 2020 have recently started to show improvements in some areas. Improvements were noted in:
- The quality and frequency of children's review meetings.
 - Life story work which is taking place with more children.
 - Supporting children to achieve timely permanence through adoption.
 - Permanence tracking is now in place and better embedded.
 - The virtual school are persistent advocates for children's education.
 - The introduction of court consultants is beginning to improve drift and delay.
- 3.1.3 The monitoring visit highlighted several areas where practice still need to improve. These areas are:
- Urgently improve the standard of care provided in residential services.
 - Improve the quality and effectiveness of commissioning of placements.
 - Strengthen the effectiveness of corporate parenting.

- Improve the consistency of practice in care and planning & managers' oversight and practice with children living at home under the jurisdiction of the court.
- Further stabilise the workforce and reduce social workers' workloads.
- Strengthen the participation, voice and influence of children & young people in helping to make improvements to the service.

3.2 **Next Steps**

3.2.1 The monitoring visit identified that the action plan was overly long and complex, and therefore this made it difficult to focus on priority areas to enable change to take place. We have acknowledged this point and work has already taken place, led by Children's Services, but with a cross Council approach and support, to put together a new focused Outcomes Improvement Plan.

3.2.2 The Outcomes Improvement Plan is designed to focus on 7 priority outcome areas where our ambition is to demonstrate change within a 3-6 month period. The 7 priority outcomes are:

1. Children & young people recognise Bradford Council as good Corporate Parents.
2. Caseloads across all social work teams, including fostering, are safe & manageable.
3. We will have a sufficient fostering workforce to look after children & young people in Bradford.
4. Fewer children will be coming into care as our Edge of Care strategy is effective.
5. The implementation of our workforce plan will lead to the increased retention of ASYEs, and provide progression opportunities for all social workers.
6. The Sufficiency Strategy is fit for purpose, iterative and responsive to the changing demographic of children in our care.
7. Leaders (all of the Children's Directorate Management Team) have greater understanding of the quality of social work practice.

3.2.3 The Outcomes Improvement Plan has been shared with Heads of Service across Children's Services and work is now underway to ensure that actions under each of the 7 priority outcomes are able to be delivered within the 3-6 month period.

3.2.4 Whilst the Outcomes Improvement Plan is rightly led and driven by Children's Services, there is cross Council support and direct input to enable many of the priority outcomes to be achieved.

3.2.5 It is also recognised that the engagement and activity of our key partners, particularly Health Services, the Police and Schools, will be critical to the success of this Plan. Discussions have begun with key partners to facilitate their support and engagement on the delivery of this work.

4. **FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

4.1 As cited in the enclosed letter, there are likely to be some resource implications in view of the of additional social work capacity created within the service.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The Children's Services Improvement Board continues to monitor progress and will ensure that effective responses are made to all Ofsted's recommendations and DfE required improvements. The Children's Services Improvement Board focuses on outcomes for children and provides the drive and focus to ensure that necessary improvements are achieved and evidenced.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 The inspection in September 2018 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 recent Ofsted monitoring visit was undertaken pursuant to this framework.
- 6.2 On 4 December 2018, following the Secretary of State's decision to take a non-statutory approach in Bradford's case, the DfE issued an Improvement notice to the council, requiring the council to take a number of actions to address all areas of improvement identified in the Ofsted report. The notice also provides for DfE reviews of progress against the improvement agenda.
- 6.3 Following notification to the council on 26 July 2021, the Improvement Notice was escalated by the Secretary of State for Education to a Statutory Direction on 15 September 2021. This directed the council to ensure all its children's social care functions are performed to an adequate standard and appointed an Independent Commissioner for Children's Services. The Commissioner's terms of reference include issuing instructions to the council to secure immediate improvements, identifying improvement requirements and support needed, assessing the council's capacity and capability to improve itself in a reasonable timeframe and to sustain long term improvement and advising on alternative delivery and governance arrangements outside the operational control of the council. The Commissioner is required to report by 14 January 2022.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Not applicable.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The quality of children's social work services can have implications for a number of rights protected by the Act including the right to respect for private and family life.

7.5 TRADE UNION

Consultation with the Trade Unions continues around workforce and budgets. Caseloads continue to be monitored by Management.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The Improvement Notice and Improvement Plan affect all Wards, due to the Inadequate Judgement.

7.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

In addition to the improvements identified, further areas of improvement are also necessary within our children in care and care leavers services.

7.8 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

None; both the Notice to Improve and Ofsted report have been published on their respective websites and are therefore in the public domain.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

8.1 Not applicable.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 Not applicable.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the letter from Ofsted.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: Children's Services Improvement Plan.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 None.