

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Executive to be held on 4th October 2022

V

**Subject: OFSTED MONITORING VISIT - 27TH TO 28TH JULY 2022 –
LEAVING CARE**

Summary statement:

Bradford have been subject to a number of Monitoring Visits and a Focused Visit since the outcome of the full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in 2018, where services were judged to be Inadequate.

The Ofsted inspectorate had advised that a final Monitoring Visit would take place in advance of the next full ILACS Inspection. It is unknown when Bradford will be notified on this inspection but it is expected that this is likely to happen in advance of the inauguration of the Children and Families Trust in April 2023.

Ofsted had requested in advance that Bradford suggested a service area to focus on. After initially suggesting Children in Care and Care Leavers, the Lead Inspector requested that a particular aspect of this area of work was proposed. Children's DMT made the decision to suggest that Ofsted that the visit would focus on the Leaving Care Service; the Lead Inspector agreed with this proposal.

The Monitoring Visit took place on 27th and 28th July 2022 and the report was published on the [Ofsted website](#) on 1st September 2022.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

An Equality Impact Assessment is not applicable. However, this report will provide an update on the Monitoring Visit concerned with care leavers who are amongst the most in need young people in the district with regard to consideration of equality and diversity.

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Portfolio:

Children & Families

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive of the details of the recent Monitoring Visit on the theme of Leaving Care. Bradford has been subject to a number of Monitoring Visits and a Focused Visit since the outcome of the full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in 2018, where services were judged to be Inadequate. Inspectors have provided feedback at subsequent Visits that whilst there have been improvements within the service, that overall more improvements are necessary.
- 1.2 The Ofsted inspectorate had advised that a final Monitoring Visit would take place in advance of the next full ILACS Inspection. It is unknown when Bradford will be notified of this inspection but it is expected that this is likely to happen in advance of the inauguration of the Children and Families Trust in April 2023.
- 1.3 Ofsted had requested in advance that Bradford suggested a service area to focus on. After initially suggesting Children in Care and Care Leavers, the Lead Inspector requested that a particular aspect of this area of work was proposed. Children's DMT made the decision to suggest that Ofsted that the visit would focus on the Leaving Care Service; the Lead Inspector agreed with this proposal.
- 1.4 The Monitoring Visit took place on 27th and 28th July 2022 and the report was published on the [Ofsted website](#) on 1st September 2022.
- 1.5 There is no overall judgement attached to a Monitoring Visit letter. However, the overall findings of the Monitoring Visit are that *'Services to care leavers in Bradford have improved since the last inspection. Over the past year, there has been a focused drive for sustainable practice improvements in the care leavers service.'*

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Monitoring Visits are part of the [Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services](#) (ILACS) framework of inspection activities carried out by Ofsted. They are put in place where a local authority's Children's Services have been judged to be Inadequate.
- 2.2 In September 2021, Steve Walker was appointed by the Secretary of State for Education as Children's Services Commissioner for Bradford, and was asked to bring together evidence to assess the Council's capacity and capability to improve itself in a reasonable time frame and recommend whether or not this evidence is sufficiently strong to suggest that long term sustainable improvement to children's social care functions can be achieved, should operational service control remain within the Council. He was also asked to advise on alternative delivery and governance arrangements for children's social care functions. The outcome was that Department for Education concluded that Children's Services in Bradford would be provided through a Children's Trust arrangement. The planned go live date is in April 2023.
- 2.3 Ofsted have advised that the next inspection activity will be the full ILACS inspection as it is four years since the previous one in 2018. This will be an

inspection of all aspects of children's social care and is anticipated that this will take place in advance of the inauguration of the Trust.

- 2.4 At the time of the Ofsted inspection 2018, Bradford's Care Leavers Service had many positive aspects including a stable workforce, good links with partnership agencies and young people feel who felt listened to and supported. What was not working as well included: limited evidence of impact to our young people, systems and processes which were not sufficiently robust or transparent, and there was a requirement to improve strategic planning and implementation. Since then, and particularly in the last 12 months, the service has had a robust approach to improving practice through an effective improvement plan.
- 2.5 Preparations for the Monitoring Visit were robust, efficient and well organised. Bradford colleagues formed a highly effective virtual inspection team who supported the Leaving Care Service leadership to make all necessary arrangements for the visit. Additionally, through support from Commissioner Steve Walker and the Leeds Relational Practice Centre, a highly experienced practice improvement and Ofsted readiness improvement consultant provided leadership and a framework for preparations. They also led on the development of the self-assessment document with the Head of Service and Service Manager for Leaving Care. This document is the one which sets out the evaluation of effectiveness of services and Inspectors seek to understand if their inspection findings are in sync with the self-assessment.
- 2.6 A challenge for the future will be to ensure that there are sufficient and substantive resources dedicated to improvement and inspection going forward, specifically as the Leeds resource is time limited. All Local Authorities and Trusts can expect some kind of ILACS engagement meeting, inspection or visit every year and it will be essential that there are the right officers in place, with suitable skill sets, dedicated to this critical area of work.
- 2.7 During the two-day visit which took place on 27th and 28th July 2022, Inspectors met with Senior Leaders, Care Leavers, Social Workers, Personal Advisers, the Service Manager, and the Virtual School. They looked in-depth at work carried out with young people in online case files, sought the views of young people, analysed data, reviewed a wide range of documents including the self-assessment (SEF), and considered the outcomes of audits to judge if they felt the overall judgements were in line with the findings.
- 2.8 Keep in touch meetings with Inspectors and Bradford leaders took place on both days; minor issues of clarification were sought, and responded to promptly by Bradford. Not one child or young person was 'referred' back to the Local Authority with a need for immediate action to safeguard.
- 2.9 In the formal feedback session to the Lead Member for Children and Children's DMT, at the conclusion of the Monitoring Visit, and confirmed in the published letter, many highly positive findings were highlighted. These include:
 - Services to care leavers in Bradford have improved since the last inspection. Over the past year, there has been a focused drive for sustainable practice improvements in the care leavers service.
 - The Leaving Care workforce has been increased and stabilised.
 - Committed and capable senior managers have led a service improvement plan

- focused on the consistent application of clear practice standards.
- Inspectors saw improved case recording and better quality pathway plans.
 - The voice of the young person is significantly stronger, and this is ensuring young people's views and goals are incorporated into planning.
 - Since the last monitoring visit, the senior leadership team has remained stable and committed to the ongoing improvements required across the whole of the service.
 - Leaders' self-assessment of the care leavers service is accurate and consistent with inspectors' findings during this visit.
 - Effective quality assurance and robust performance data are enabling leaders to have a grip and understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the care leavers service.
 - Care leavers are well supported with financial and practical help by committed and caring social workers and personal advisors. They are provided with a comprehensive offer that has recently been republished following consultation with young people.
 - Young people's faith and cultural needs are well considered. There has been significant development in the support and guidance offered to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through the 'Child first, migrant second' protocol. These young people are now referred to as separated migrant children, in a determined drive to sensitively recognise and respond to their unique and complex needs and vulnerabilities.
 - Social workers and personal advisors speak warmly and with pride about the young people they are working with and their achievements. They are visited and contacted regularly to ensure they feel supported and cared for. In emergencies they can contact a duty worker, enabling them to access help easily and swiftly.
 - Most care leavers have the important documents they need as they move into adulthood, such as birth certificates and passports. They have bank accounts and are given support with budgeting. Their setting up home allowance is carefully monitored to ensure it is used appropriately. This is helping them prepare for the responsibilities of independence and adult life.
 - Social workers and personal advisors told inspectors they felt well supported and appreciated by their managers. Most of them feel that senior managers are more visible and approachable and that this is leading to a more open and positive working culture in Bradford.

2.10 Although within the letter, the Lead Inspector did not state any areas for improvement that Bradford must carry out and report back on, there are some areas of particular focus that should be considered by the Executive and the wider Children's Partnership and these are:

- Young people with complex needs are not easily able to access specialist adult social care support in relation to their learning disabilities. Many young people do not meet the threshold criteria for adult social care assessments or support.
- For 16- to 18- year-olds, there are long waits and delays in assessments for mental health support.
- There are gaps and delays in the provision of specialist mental health care for young people over 18.
- As a result, not all care leavers have their complex needs assessed appropriately, or have the right specialist intervention in place to keep them well

as they enter adulthood.

- For young people aged over 18 who wish to secure their own tenancy, there are challenges in quickly securing appropriate social housing. Although care leavers are given priority band status with local housing providers, there is a shortage of available properties and a backlog of young people waiting for their own homes. Leaders have recognised some of the challenges with accommodation and have established a new protocol with partners. This is a very recent development that is not fully embedded or having an impact.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

N/a

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The financial resources allocated to Children's Services whilst in the Council and in the financial envelope for the emerging Children and Families Trust may need to consider if there is sufficient funding for a dedicated resource for inspection readiness and ongoing improvement activities.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Risk management regarding the outcome of the Monitoring Visit for Care Leavers relate to the areas highlighted in the letter concerning:

- Access to specialist adult social care
- Delay in assessment and access to mental health support
- Challenges in securing social housing

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

Legal considerations relate to the Local Authority's role as Corporate Parent to both children in care who then go on to leave care and become Care Leavers.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

N/a

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

N/a

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/a

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

N/a

7.5 TRADE UNION

N/a

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific ward implications as this report relates to all wards in the District.

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS

(for reports to Area Committees only)

N/a

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

All the implications in this report are concerned with Care Leavers and related to Corporate Parenting. The Local Authority and its officers should make themselves aware of the issues raised in the letter with regard to access to services and housing that care leavers need.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/a

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

'None'.

9. OPTIONS

N/a. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit held in July 2022.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Executive takes note of the content of this report and its implications.

11. APPENDICES

Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter attached.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

N/A