

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of the Executive to be held on 3 October 2023

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Subject:

Ofsted Monitoring Visit of Children's Social Care

Summary statement:

To report on the outcome of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit of Children's Social Care Services which took place on the 18 and 19 July 2023.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

An Equality Impact Assessment is not applicable. However, this report will provide an update on the Monitoring Visit concerned with the Integrated Front Door who directly work with 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 Integrated Front Door (IFD). 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. A further ILACS took place in November 2022 and services were again judged to be Inadequate.
- 1.2 This Monitoring Visit reviewed progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:
- The IFD and initial response to safeguarding and child in need requests for children.
 - Assessment and planning in the Duty and Assessment Teams.
 - Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) response to allegations against people who work with children.
- 1.3 This report updates on the outcome of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit which took place on the 18 and 19 July 2023. The full Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter is attached as Appendix A.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services in November 2022, this is the first Monitoring Visit since that inspection and the 9th visit since the service was judged inadequate in 2018. The new IFD was launched two weeks before the last full inspection and this was the first external oversight of how the implementation of the new arrangements and embedding of improved practice has gone, and how well the IFD was operating.
- 2.2 Since the last inspection, Bradford Local Authority have voluntarily transferred responsibility for Children's Social Care Services to Bradford Children and Families Trust. Senior leaders in both the Local Authority and the Trust have worked effectively together to minimise disruption for staff during this time. Overall, staff are positive about the change, and they recognise that there have continued to be improvements and greater engagement with the staff. It remains early days for the Trust to have had a significant impact on the quality of services for all children.
- 2.3 **Integrated Front Door (IFD)**

The Bradford Children's Improvement Board commissioned a new improvement plan which came into being from April 2022. Recognising that improvements to social care are most effectively carried out when they start at the front door and continue to follow the journey of the child, improvements to the IFD were prioritised. The Improvement Board decided that a conversations approach which built on the research carried out by Professor David Thorpe should be implemented as a priority. This work took place at considerable pace and was enabled and supported by a multi-agency implementation board and an operational in house group of key officers.

Additionally, the improvement plan included the introduction of a weekly quality assurance meeting to be followed in time with a monthly multi-agency meeting to focus on the quality of contacts made and practice and decision making. The improvements have been made in line with the plan.

A further improvement was agreed to create a discrete Emergency Duty Team (EDT) for children and young people (in addition to one for adults only). Children's EDT has been created.

At the November 2022 ILACS, Ofsted Inspectors recognised the improvements made at that time, but conceded that it was too early to make a judgement on how well the new arrangements were working.

For the July 2023 Monitoring Visit, Inspectors found that the IFD response to concerns at the IFD has continued to improve since the last inspection. Inspectors made very positive statements in the Monitoring Visit letter about practice, multi-agency working, quality assurance, management oversight, decision making, recording, and application of thresholds:

'The conversations-based approach to receiving contact and referrals, initially introduced just prior to the last inspection, is now more embedded. This is having a positive impact on the understanding of concerns for children and the outcomes agreed.'

'Social Workers consistently make efforts to inform referrers of the outcome of referrals, and this is promoting more effective working relationships between partner agencies.'

'A weekly referral meeting, in which data and the quality of referrals are considered, is further assisting the improvement of work in the IFD.'

'Managers' oversight and decision-making in the IFD is timely and appropriate. Managers clearly record direction they give to social workers at the point of contact, and there is clear rationale for decisions.'

'Thresholds are being appropriately applied to ensure that children are directed to the right level of service at the earliest opportunity.'

'The responses to concerns out of hours have been strengthened with a dedicated emergency duty team (EDT) for children.'

The Local Authority will continue to work in partnership with Bradford Children and Families Trust and the wider partnership to further improve the arrangements so that professionals make appropriate contacts to the IFD about children, and a quality response is provided based on the family's views and consent and that decisions about them will be appropriate to the presenting needs and issues.

2.4 Assessment and Planning in the Duty and Assessment Teams

Inspectors found that although there have been improvements to recent work in the Duty and Assessment Teams, the quality of assessment, planning and

management oversight is not consistently strong at this point.

The improvement plan has a robust focus on assessment, planning and decision making as the next critical aspects of the child's journey. Improvements will be led by the Trust and supported by the Local Authority and the wider partnership.

2.5 Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Feedback from Inspectors on the LADO service was that an appropriate and timely response to allegations against professionals who work with children was being provided:

'In those cases seen, the decision-making was clear and LADOs maintained effective oversight of the progression of investigations. The LADOs are monitoring trends and outcomes of referrals from children's homes, and where additional training or advice is required, this is provided. The outcomes of these referrals are reviewed monthly to ensure that responses are appropriate.'

For those young people leaving our care we can be assured that stringent LADO support and subsequent QA activity continues to identify and take appropriate safeguards to ensure those who work with children are suitable.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Not applicable.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 This report highlights the content of the Monitoring Visit and the full report is now available to the public.

5.2 What is clear in the report is that there are no safeguarding incidents and/or findings that identified any specific risks or issues for young people that are using the IFD and Bradford Children and Families Trust and Children's Services are working together for the benefit of all Bradford's children and young people. This is evidence that risks or previous Ofsted findings are reducing.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 There are no legal issues arising from this report.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The quality of children's services can have implications for a number of rights protected by The Human Rights Act 1998 including the right to respect for private and family life.

7.5 TRADE UNION

Not applicable.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

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

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE LOCALITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

All the implications in this report are concerned with children and young people. The Local Authority and The Trust with its respective officers should make themselves aware of the issues raised in the letter.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

Not applicable.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

8.1 Not applicable.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 Not applicable. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit held in July 2023.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 For continued oversight and monitoring of improvements across all aspects of children's services including support and oversight relating to all improvement activity, in line with the council's statutory duties and responsibilities, in partnership with Bradford Children's Trust.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 12.1 Not applicable.