

**Report of the Director of Children’s Services**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

**Subject: Update on recent inspections**



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. During the first three months of 2013, Leeds Children’s Services were visited and assessed by OfSTED for both a review of Independent Reviewing Officers and a pilot of a new inspection framework for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In addition Leeds asked to be evaluated by LILAC (Leading Improvements for Looked After Children – an organisation led by young people who have been in care).
2. Whilst these visits did not cover the range of issues of a full OfSTED inspection they did together provide a very robust examination of progress in the service and valuable feedback on progress and where further improvement is needed.
3. The main findings were:
  - *Independent Reviewing Officers:* OfSTED judged the service to be very effective overall. Areas highlighted for praise included: committed staff; a strong child focus; good arrangements for independent challenge but effective joint working with social workers. The arrangements for peer and manager observation will be cited as national best practice.
  - *Support for Looked After Children and Care Leavers:* OfSTED noted continuing improvement and progress in Leeds services for Looked After Children and Carer Leavers.. All children were judged to be safe and practice was seen as sound and improving. The service was praised for its ambitions,

and for its strong focus on children and permanence. Support for foster carers and adoption was seen as effective and improving.

- *LILAC*: the assessors judged that Leeds has met all seven standards for involving children and young people in improving their care and their lives.

4. The overall picture these inspections provide is a positive one; of an improving service, which is child focused, innovative and ambitious for its children. Both OfSTED and young people have praised the progress made in the past two years. Where these assessments have identified issues, capacity to improve is strong as these have already been identified by the service and plans are in place to improve.

### **Recommendations**

5. The Board is recommended to note the report.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update on recent external inspection and assessments.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 OfSTED continue to provide a high level of external scrutiny and challenge through their inspection of Local Authority children's services. Over the past year a significant number of councils have been judged to be 'inadequate' for their safeguarding arrangements.
- 2.2 OfSTED are reviewing their current inspection arrangements and are likely to move to a system of two separate main inspections: one for safeguarding and the other for services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- 2.3 Leeds has not had a full Local Authority inspection of children's services since Autumn 2011. At that time OfSTED noted the strong improvements in services in Leeds and judged the authority to be 'adequate' overall.
- 2.4 Whilst the Council has not had a full OfSTED inspection since 2011, there have been several other assessments undertaken in the past few months. In January OfSTED visited to examine the Leeds Independent Reviewing Officer service as part of a national thematic review. OfSTED returned in February to work with Leeds to pilot elements of their new inspection framework for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- 2.5 In addition to these OfSTED activities, the Council has also asked to be assessed by LILAC (Leading Improvement for Looked After Children), an organisation led by young people with experience of the care system that reviews how well council children's services are involving children and young people in their care. This assessment took place in February alongside the OfSTED visit.

## **3 Main issues**

### *Independent Reviewing Officer Thematic Review*

- 3.1 On the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2013 Ofsted carried out a thematic inspection into the quality of the Independent Reviewing Officer service. The inspection was one of ten IRO themed inspections across all Local Authorities. The inspection involved:
- A review of a sample of cases – some identified from a list of cases provided to the inspection team in advance, and others selected at random while the team were here.
  - Meetings with IROs, social workers, IRO managers, Looked After Children, foster carers and senior managers.
  - Consideration of key documents.

- 3.2 The inspection did not receive a grading; however the inspectors provided very positive feedback about the IRO service and social work practice. OfSTED were impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the IROs and Social Workers they met, and by the fact that both groups knew their children well and were clearly focused on delivering the best possible outcomes for them.
- 3.3 The inspectors identified no cases where they were concerned about practice, and in their feedback felt that in all cases interventions were purposeful, and that the IROs provide effective support and challenge to social workers which is recognised and valued.
- 3.4 The inspectors identified a number of positive features in the way we work in Leeds:
- The IRO service is independent of the children's social work service but has a strong link.
  - The dispute resolution process and Quality Assurance processes are well understood by social workers and IROs.
  - The IRO service is child-focussed and engages well with young people.
  - IROs are involved in Quality Assurance and case auditing, and this is used to inform practice development.
  - The inspectors saw evidence in cases of good communication between IROs and social workers.
  - They felt that social workers, IROs and senior managers worked well with CAFCASS.
- 3.5 The inspectors also noted our approach to peer and manager observation of practice as an example of good practice, and informed us that this will be written up as such when the thematic report is published.

*Pilot of Looked After Children and Care Leavers Inspection*

- 3.6 On the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> February OfSTED visited Leeds to work with the Council to test out their methodology in relation to the new arrangements for the inspection of services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- 3.7 Although this was not a full inspection the 9 inspectors were able to provide some feedback on what they had found as a result of their detailed analysis of 20 cases, case discussions with practitioners, focus groups, visits to the LAC health Team, MST, Therapeutic Social Work Team, meetings with foster carers and with the Head of the Virtual School. They stressed that these were the lines of inquiry that they would have tested in more detail with us had it been a full inspection.
- 3.8 The main findings were as follows:
- They found no cases where a child was unsafe or where they had concerns about practice.

- The team were agreed that services for looked after children and care leavers in Leeds were improving.
- Front line practitioners knew and understood the strategic direction of and objectives for services.
- There was a clear emphasis on supporting children to achieve permanence
- Leeds had high ambitions for looked after children and care leavers and for services to support them

3.9 The team went on to provide some more detailed feedback on the areas of strength they had identified in services provided through Children's Services and partners:

- They reported that following their case discussions with social workers and others it was clear that practice is much stronger than is recorded in the electronic case files. Social workers and managers knew their cases well.
- Foster Carers are well supported. Carers were very positive about the Therapeutic Social Work Team and inspectors reported they were able to find evidence, through tracked cases, that the team was having a positive impact on placement stability.
- They thought that Leeds was somewhere that embraced and encouraged innovative practice such as MST, Family Group Conferences and Early Start Centres.
- Inspectors fed back that the health of looked after children was a high priority for services, and that Initial Health Assessments were of very good quality.
- They also noted the significant improvement over the past three years of educational outcomes for looked after children.
- They found effective commissioning of services for looked after children.
- They highlighted that there was a high level of good quality direct work taking place with looked after children, and thought that this was related to the feedback they received from practitioners that the re-structuring had improved capacity in the service.
- They noted an increase in the use of Special Guardianship and felt that this reflected the strong focus on providing children with permanence.
- There was increasing capacity in Adoption.

3.10 Inspectors also identified a number of areas for improvement. It was reassuring that none of these came as a surprise to the service and the Senior Management Team, and in many cases we have plans in place to take forward services and support practice.

- They noted that care plans were not always Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timely.
- Some plans were focused on the key issue for the child, but to the extent that other needs were overlooked.

- Many of the Pathway Plans and Personal Education Plans they reviewed did not evidence the involvement of and ownership by children.
- Not all plans had a contingency plan.
- Inspectors would have wanted to look in more detail at how supervision was being used to monitor and challenge practice and to drive care planning for looked after children as there were some inconsistencies in some of the files that they looked at.
- They also wanted to explore whether care plans where there had been a lengthy involvement were based on a good analysis of the impact of the child's history and experiences.
- Inspectors had noted that some young people had gone on to university from foster care and therefore said they would have wanted to look in more detail at how children leaving children's homes were being supported onto further education.

### *LILAC Assessment*

- 3.11 LILAC (Leading Improvements for Looked After Children) is an organisation led by care experienced young people that assesses the effectiveness of Local Authorities involvement of children and young people in their care. LILAC visited Leeds in February to assess the progress of children's services in involving children and young people in improving their care.
- 3.12 LILAC have developed their own good practice standards for services and are trained to assess the performance of local providers against these LILAC standards. The seven LILAC standards are based on the well-known 'Hear By Right' approach to participation but they have been developed to closely reflect the nature of the Care system. The seven standards are explained below.
- *Shared Values*: The Local Authority or agency adopts shared values that enable children and young people to be actively involved in services that directly affect them, including honesty about what can and cannot be changed and any limitations due to the organisation's responsibilities.
  - *Style of Leadership*: Senior managers and elected members adopt a style of leadership that champions and promotes the involvement of children and young people at all levels of the Local Authority or agency. They demonstrate the need to work in partnership with children and young people.
  - *Structures*: Structures are in place to ensure that children and young people are involved in the planning *and* evaluation of services and that these structures are flexible. They do not rely on the involvement of a small articulate group of children and young people, but take into account different abilities, experiences and skills.
  - *Staff*: Staff are expected to support and contribute to practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people in services that affect them.

- *Recruitment and Selection*: Children and young people should be involved in the recruitment and selection of all staff and carers who will work with them or be responsible for them.
- *Care Planning and Review*: Children and young people should feel involved in the decision making that affects their lives and all decisions about them should be fully explained. All decision making, planning and review processes should be easily understood.
- *Complaints and Advocacy*: Children and young people should know what to do if they are not happy with the way they are being treated and feel that their complaint will be listened to and treated seriously. Children and young people should have access to an advocate if they wish and the Authority or agency should promote the advocacy service. They should receive feedback on the process and outcome of their complaint and support in coming to terms with the decision.

3.13 The assessment of LILAC is important because the judgement is made by young people who have been in care themselves, and because the findings are based on interviews with children, young people, foster carers and staff. Future OfSTED inspections will similarly base their inspections on interviews with children and carers so success in this assessment gives some more confidence that improvements are making a difference and being recognised by children and carers.

3.14 The final report is not yet complete but initial feedback from LILAC is that Leeds has fully met all seven standards.

3.15 Initial comments from the LILAC team are very positive about the commitment of Leeds to involving children and young people in improving their care and their lives. Comments include:

- “I was happy to see the council realising their role as the parent, often something forgotten about in other LA’s”
- “Overall I was confident Leeds was moving in the correct direction with a lot of progress made ... [we] feel Leeds were deserving of all 7 Standards with some very enthusiastic members of staff which was encouraging”

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 Young people were consulted directly as part of the inspection process. Questionnaires were also used to obtain young people’s views.

4.1.2 The LILAC inspection heavily relies on information from young people and care leavers in developing its assessment.

## 4.2 **Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 Equality and diversity screening was not required as part of this update report.

## 4.3 **Council policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 Safely and appropriately reducing the number of children in care is one of the Children's Services obsessions and a key priority for the Council.

## 4.4 **Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

## 4.5 **Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 There are no legal implications in accepting this update on recent inspections.

## 4.6 **Risk Management**

4.6.1 No risks have been identified.

## 5 **Conclusions**

5.1 The overall picture these inspections provide is a positive one; of an improving service, which is child focused, innovative and ambitious for its children. Both OfSTED and young people have praised the progress made in the past two years. Where these assessments have identified issues, capacity to improve is strong as these have already been identified by the service and plans are in place to improve.

## 6 **Recommendations**

6.1 The Board is recommended to note this report.

## 7 **Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

7.1 There are no background documents.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.