

**Report of** Director of Children and Families

**Report to** Executive Board

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018

**Subject:** Children and Families inspections update including outcome of the Ofsted focused visit on services for children looked after



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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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. The Children and Families directorate is subject to a number of inspection frameworks, and there are reputational – and potential financial - risks associated with poor outcomes for any related inspections.
2. The Children and Families directorate has been judged favourably in all inspections since January 2015, including the most recent focused visit under the new Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS) framework which concluded that social work is flourishing in Leeds (see outcomes letter – Appendix A).
3. In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we recognise that there is work still to do in order to ensure that every looked after child or young person in Leeds is supported to achieve their potential.

### Recommendations

- 1 Executive Board is recommended to acknowledge the unique pressures of the inspection regimes that the Children and Families directorate is subject to, and the potential reputational and financial risks inherent in every inspection.

- 2 Executive Board is recommended to note the positive findings of our most recent Ofsted ILACS focused visit on services and support for children looked after, as a further contribution to the positive national and international reputation of Leeds within the children's social work sector.
- 3 Executive Board is recommended to endorse the proposed direction of travel for further review of and improvements to services for children looked after and care leavers, to be led by the Head of Service for Children Looked After.
- 4 Executive Board is recommended to support the development of the new strategy under the leadership of the Head of Service for Children Looked After, and for Corporate Parenting Board to lead the work to ensure its successful implementation.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the process and positive outcome of the most recent Ofsted focused visit to Leeds under the new Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS) framework (see outcomes letter – Appendix A).
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of all inspection frameworks that the Children and Families directorate and partners are currently subject to, and notes further areas of development for services and support to our children looked after and care leavers.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 Children's Services across the country remain subject to a range of inspection frameworks carried out by the Ofsted inspectorate and regulator. All Ofsted inspection outcomes are published, and thus the inspection regime represents a potential reputational risk to any local authority.
- 2.2 In Leeds City Council, the Children and Families directorate remains the only directorate to be subject to high profile unannounced inspections, and any poor inspection outcome would carry with it potential financial consequences, for example in relation to Leeds's Partner in Practice status, awarded as a result of our Ofsted inspection in 2015 where the authority was judged to be good with outstanding leadership, management and governance.
- 2.3 Ofsted recently introduced a new inspection framework from January 2018, the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Leeds was in the first cohort of local authorities to receive a focused visit under this new framework, which looked at the experiences of children looked after. Whilst focused visits do not attract a judgement (i.e. outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate) there is a narrative outcomes letter which is published on the local authority's Ofsted page. The outcomes letter for Leeds was very positive, with comments that social work is flourishing in Leeds, staff know the children on their caseloads well and that social worker turnover and use of agency workers is at an all-time low (see outcomes letter – Appendix A).
- 2.4 The latest visit from Ofsted contributes to a positive picture from inspections over the last three years, which reflects the successful improvement trajectory that the directorate has been on since 2010. However, the directorate is not complacent, and has plans to further improve the services and support available to children looked after and their families.

## **3 Main issues**

- 3.1 Ofsted, the inspectorate and regulatory agency with responsibility for carrying out inspections of local authority children's services, has recently concluded its programme of inspections under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF). Leeds

was inspected under the SIF in January 2015 and was judged to be good with outstanding leadership, management and governance. Leeds was the only core city to be judged as good under the SIF, and was one of only twelve local authorities across the country to receive an outstanding judgement for leadership.

- 3.2 As a result of the good outcome in our 2015 inspection, Leeds became one of a handful of local authorities chosen by the Department for Education as Partners in Practice (PiP). This designation has given Leeds the opportunity to support other local authorities such as Sunderland, Darlington and Manchester on their own improvement journeys, and set the foundations for the innovative improvement partnership work that Leeds is carrying out with our neighbours in Kirklees. Colleagues from Leeds have also been invited to speak at a number of high profile events, sharing what we have learned from our own improvement journey since the inadequate inspection judgement of 2010.
- 3.3 Additional funding is available from the Department for Education for Partners in Practice, and in 2016 Leeds submitted a combined bid for Innovations and Partners in Practice funding. This bid was successful, and Leeds was awarded £9.6m over three years, the highest award of any single local authority across the country.
- 3.4 This funding has allowed us to: invest in closer working arrangements between cluster services and social work teams through the establishment of Restorative Early Support (RES) teams in priority need clusters; develop the Leeds Practice Model which includes the rollout of Re-Think Formulation to allow practitioners to analyse information about children, young people and families more effectively; develop the Futures service to support young parents who have experienced the removal of a child into care; and the establishment of the Leeds Relational Practice Centre (LRPC) to lead our sector-led improvement work with other local authorities, through sharing best practice and messages about the value of relational and restorative practices.
- 3.5 Our ability to undertake improvement work with other local authorities and to secure the level of funding we received through our Innovations/ PiP bid is predicated, and continues to depend, on our rating as a good local authority. Children and Families remains the only Leeds City Council directorate to be subject to numerous unannounced inspection frameworks, each of which carry significant reputational risks; which would translate into financial risks for the directorate and the local authority if our PiP status were to be threatened.
- 3.6 Ofsted have a number of inspection frameworks currently in place under which local authority children's services can receive unannounced or short notice inspections, as follows:
- 3.7 *Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI)*

Joint Targeted Area Inspections involve Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, the Inspectorate of Probation and the Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, with a view to looking at the effectiveness of a range of

statutory agencies in each local area in relation to a particular theme. Inspections under each theme generally take place across a six-month period, with one local area being inspected each month. The themes of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing, Domestic Abuse and Neglect have already been explored.

JTAI inspections do not confer a judgement (i.e. outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate) on a local authority, but they do result in a narrative letter to senior leaders across all partner agencies which lists the local areas strengths and areas for development for various aspects of each theme. This is published in full on the Ofsted website.

Whilst there is no routine judgement, it is possible to 'fail' a JTAI inspection; Liverpool received an inspection of their CSE and missing arrangements in June 2016 which identified 'serious and widespread deficits across the partnership'. Liverpool has since been subject to regular monitoring visits from Ofsted, a process which is usually instigated for authorities found to be inadequate through the full SIF inspection.

Leeds has not yet been subject to a JTAI inspection, but colleagues across the Children and Families partnership are engaged in preparations for a possible inspection.

### 3.8 *Local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspections*

Local area SEND inspections are carried out jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and disability reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

Leeds was among the first local areas to be inspected under this framework in December 2016 and the outcome was positive, particularly in relation to the voice and influence of children and young people with SEND, with inspectors commenting that:

*Children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are proud to be citizens of Leeds.*

As with JTAI inspections, there are no judgements attached to SEND inspections; though again, it is possible to 'fail' an inspection. Inspections in a number of local areas have identified significant concerns about the effectiveness of the local area, and local areas have been required to produce and submit Written Statements of Action to Ofsted to explain how the local area will tackle the areas of significant weakness identified, which are listed in the outcome letters. These outcome letters are publically available on the local authority Ofsted page.

Local analysis carried out in Leeds indicates that of the 47 SEND inspection outcome letters published to date, 19 (40%) have identified significant weaknesses requiring Written Statements of Action.

- 3.9 It is commonly understood across the children's services sector – though not directly articulated in inspection frameworks – that poor outcomes in these more focused inspections can trigger additional full inspections for local authorities.

#### *Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)*

- 3.10 The ILACS framework was introduced by Ofsted in January 2018 to replace the Single Inspection Framework (SIF). This framework is designed to be a more proportionate, whole-systems approach that is less intensive than the SIF, but involves more contact with each local authority. In addition to onsite inspection activity, this new way of working is informed by:
- The submission of an annual self-evaluation by the local authority;
  - An annual conversation between the DCS and the relevant regional director, based on the local authority's self-assessment (scheduled for Leeds in April 2018);
  - Up to two focused visits between the three-yearly judgement inspection, one of which may be a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI); and
  - Ofsted's local authority intelligence system.
- 3.11 Authorities such as Leeds which were judged as good under the SIF framework should expect: a short inspection (once in a three year period, one week of notification and one week of fieldwork); up to two focused visits in between inspections (or a JTAI); an annual conversation; and a shared self-assessment.

#### *ILACS focused visit to Leeds, Tuesday 30th – Wednesday 31st January 2018*

- 3.12 Focused visits concentrate on an area of anticipated good practice or possible concern. The self-evaluation and the annual conversation both feed into the process of identifying areas of focus. Each visit, led by two inspectors, covers a service area or cohort of children, e.g. the front door or the protection of vulnerable adolescents, whilst taking in the impact of leadership and management.
- 3.13 On 23rd January, Leeds received notification that we would receive a focused visit on 30th - 31st January. We were amongst the first cohort of local authorities to receive focused visits under the new framework.
- 3.14 This visit looked at children in care with specific reference to the quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care including, for example, the quality of planning and the identification and management of risks. The focus was on children with particular vulnerabilities including those experiencing mental health or emotional wellbeing difficulties, those involved in offending behaviour and/ or substance misuse, those at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and those with repeated missing episodes. Inspectors noted that they would also consider the effectiveness of management oversight including performance information and quality assurance systems, the quality of corporate parenting and the capacity of in-house and commissioned services. Inspectors were explicit that the timing and focus of the visit was related to recent

concerns about the quality of residential provision. Inspectors noted in the outcomes letter that the swift and decisive action taken by senior managers in response to these concerns was further evidence of the authority's tangible commitment to continuous improvement.

- 3.15 During their two days in Leeds, inspectors selected six looked after children and young people's cases to review in detail, and arranged to spend time in area offices where they spoke to individual social workers and asked them to talk through a case on their caseload. Inspectors also interviewed managers of relevant services, including the Placements Team and the Therapeutic Social Work Team. At the request of senior officers in Leeds, the lead inspector met with the Have a Voice Council of children looked after.
- 3.16 The experience of the focused visit in Leeds echoed the stated aim of the ILACS to focus on social work practice; inspectors were more focused on practice than they have been in previous inspections, favouring conversations with social workers and basing themselves in social work offices rather than carrying out focus group discussions with senior leaders and partners on specified topics.
- 3.17 As with JTAs and SEND inspections, ILACS focused visits do not result in a graded judgement but in a narrative outcomes letter to the DCS which is published on the Ofsted website. The outcomes letter for the focused visit was very positive (see Appendix A); the following text is taken from the 'overview' section of the letter:

*Most children are being cared for in stable family placements that meet their needs. Social workers know the children well. Practice is child-centred. Social work assessments reflect the wishes and feelings of children and young people. Children's plans are clear and coherent. There is evidence of a strong focus on achieving permanence for children and young people. Regular reviews and effective management oversight help to ensure minimum drift or delay in meeting children's needs.*

*The local authority clearly understands its strengths and areas for development. It takes its corporate parenting responsibilities very seriously. Senior leaders have created an environment in which social work is flourishing. Children, young people and their carers are benefiting from an increasingly stable workforce. The local authority's commitment to continuous improvement is tangible, as evidenced, for example, by the swift and decisive action taken by senior managers in response to recent concerns about the quality of some residential provision.*

- 3.18 The outcome of the Leeds ILACS visit has resulted in positive coverage in a number of sector publications, including Children and Young People Now, Community Care and the Management Journal. Community Care were particularly interested in the finding from inspectors that Leeds has invested wisely in workforce development, recruitment and retention, and that social work turnover and the use of agency staff is at an all-time low. The outcome of the focused visit has, therefore, further enhanced Leeds's reputation as a sector leader in children's services and social work.

*Areas for further development – services for children looked after and care leavers*

3.19 Despite the positive inspection outcomes of the last three years and the strong reputation that Leeds has built both nationally and internationally, the directorate is not complacent. We remain committed to continuous improvement and, under the leadership of our recently appointed Head of Service for Children Looked After, intend to embark on the following further reviews and improvements to the services and support we offer to some of the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Leeds:

- Reinvigoration of the leadership role played by the Corporate Parenting Board, to develop a stronger strategic and scrutiny role;
- Corporate Parenting board to lead the development of a new strategy for corporate parenting, care and care leavers, to include:
  - A review of, and new vision for, residential care for children looked after;
  - A review of, and new vision for, care leavers, including the development of a model of life-long support that more adequately replicates the support that non-looked after young people can expect from their families, which does not end at the arbitrary age of twenty-five; and
  - Improving the educational experience of children looked after and care leavers, to ensure that these vulnerable learners are supported in relation to the ‘three As’ of: attendance at schools or learning settings; attainment in formal examinations and qualifications; and achievement through the social and extra-curricular aspects of education, i.e. in their relationships with peers and teachers, and access to activities that support their interests outside of learning.
  - New integrated approaches to working with adolescents on the edge of care and those who are looked after.

3.20 The Children and Families directorate is seeking the support of Executive Board for these proposals to further improve what we offer to children looked after and care leavers. These young people can be some of the most vulnerable in the city, and as their corporate parents we have a responsibility to ensure that we do everything in our power to secure the brightest futures for them.

3.21 Leeds has an established reputation of cross-party and cross-directorate support for this vulnerable group of children and young people, and to achieve these next steps we will continue to need the support of the whole council and our partners. This is not only a moral imperative but also a reputational and financial one, with the risks inherent in the range of Ofsted inspection frameworks alongside the costs to various statutory agencies across the city of young people leaving care at risk of poor outcomes such as long-term unemployment, poor mental health or involvement in the criminal justice system.



- 3.22 We know there is more to do to ensure that every child or young person who leaves care via any route is supported to achieve their potential. The outcome of the focused visit is very encouraging, and appears to be the most positive of any of the focused visit outcomes letters published so far, but the Leeds improvement journey is predicated on continuous improvement without complacency, and the pressures of multiple high-profile inspection frameworks confirm the need to constantly maintain our existing good practice, exploring where and how we can do more for the children, young people and families of Leeds.
- 3.23 Leeds Children and Families Services have continued to receive the support of the Council in providing support and services to those children, young people and their families most in need, including children looked after and care leavers. This level of support, despite the need to make significant savings across the Council, has been essential for Leeds's success in the three inspections we have been subject to over recent years.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 The proposed programme of continuous improvement for our looked after and care leaver services will be planned in conjunction with the Have a Voice and Care Leavers Council, in line with the commitment to voice and influence that Ofsted have found on their last three visits to Leeds.

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

- 4.2.1 The proposed programme of continuous improvement for our looked after and care leaver services will ensure that some of the most vulnerable children, young people and families in the city are supported to achieve positive outcomes (screening form attached at appendix B).

### **4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The outcomes of recent Ofsted inspections in Leeds are in line with the stated ambition to be a child friendly city, and to make Leeds the best city in the UK to grow up in. This supports the aims of the Children and Young People's Plan, and the Best City plan.

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

- 4.4.1 The outcomes letter from the ILACS focused visit noted that Leeds has invested well in workforce development, recruitment and retention. As a result, social worker turnover and use of agency staff is at an all-time low, which has seen the directorate make significant savings in its staffing budget and allowed further investment in quality services for children looked after and care leavers.
- 4.4.2 As explained above, the range of inspections that the local authority is subject to requires an ongoing commitment to improvement in order to maintain our 'good' rating and our positive reputation. A poor inspection outcome could jeopardise

our Partner in Practice status, which could have a negative impact on the funding we receive to support other local authorities to improve.

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

4.5.1 None

## **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 As noted above, each inspection that the Children and Families directorate in Leeds is subject to presents a potential risk to our positive national and international reputation, the reputation of the local authority as a whole, and access to funding predicated on Leeds retaining our Partner in Practice status. The inspection frameworks represent a level of public scrutiny that other directorates are not subject to. To mitigate against these risks, senior leaders in the Children and Families directorate remain committed to continuous improvement and reject complacency.

4.6.2 The council's corporate risk register includes a risk on Children and Families Inspection Failure - Risk of Ofsted inspection highlighting failure in Leeds City Council Children and Families functions.

## **5 Conclusions**

5.1 The Children and Families directorate is subject to a level of high-profile public scrutiny not experienced by other directorates, through a range of inspection frameworks led by Ofsted. Each inspection the directorate goes through carries with it an inherent risk to the local authority's reputation, and subsequently to the funding available through our Partners in Practice status.

5.2 Despite the pressure of the inspection regime, Leeds has further enhanced its national and international reputation with each inspection since 2015, including the most recent focused visit on services and support for children looked after.

5.3 This success is a result of our strong commitment to continuous improvement across the Children and Families partnership, as evidenced by our desire to embark on further review and improvement work under our recently appointed Head of Service for Looked After Children. We welcome Ofsted's positive findings in relation to our services, and will seek to build further on the flourishing social work that inspectors found during their visit.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 Executive Board are recommended to acknowledge the unique pressures of the inspection regimes that the Children and Families directorate is subject to, and the potential reputational and financial risks inherent in every inspection.
- 6.2 Executive Board is recommended to note the positive findings of our most recent Ofsted ILACS focused visit on services and support for children looked after, as a further contribution to the positive national and international reputation of Leeds within the children's social work sector.
- 6.3 Executive Board is recommended to endorse the proposed direction of travel for further review of and improvements to services for children looked after and care leavers, to be led by the Head of Service for Children Looked After.
- 6.4 Executive Board is recommended to support the development of the new strategy under the leadership of the Head of Service for Children Looked After, and for Corporate Parenting Board to lead the work to ensure its successful implementation.

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

- 7.1 None

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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.