

## OfSTED Inspection Report

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022

Report of: The Director of Children and Families

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### What is this report about?

#### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report presents the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection of Leeds local authority children's services carried out between 21<sup>st</sup> February to 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The full inspection report was published on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022 and is attached in Appendix 1. The judgements are as follows:

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	<b>Outstanding</b>
The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection	<b>Good</b>
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness	<b>Outstanding</b>

- The judgement for overall effectiveness as outstanding has been maintained since the previous full inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services in 2018.
- The judgement for children in need of help and protection has moved from outstanding to good, however the judgement for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers has improved from good to outstanding.
- This judgement demonstrates continued improvements to services and outcomes for children and families in Leeds.

## Recommendations

Executive Board is recommended to:

- Note the contents of the report, in particular OfSTED's recognition that Leeds has maintained a relentless focus on prioritising services and support to children and families.
- Note Leeds has maintained its outstanding rating and will address the identified areas for improvement.
- Formally record the appreciation and thanks of the Board for:
  - Front line staff and managers who's often challenging day to day work has made such a difference to the lives of children and families in Leeds.
  - Elected Members and senior officers of the Council who have prioritised children despite significant challenges arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic and 12 years of austerity and cuts to local government funding.
  - The support of our partners, third sector colleagues, businesses and communities across the city who have supported this work through Child Friendly Leeds, which enters its tenth year in 2022.
- Note the officer responsible for implementation is the Director, Children & Families Services.

## 1. Why is the proposal being put forward?

There is no proposal resulting from this report, it is for information purposes only.

### 1.1 Background of previous OfSTED inspections

- In November and December 2009 an inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services in Leeds resulted in an inadequate rating and Leeds was subject to formal intervention.
- Since then, children's services in Leeds have shown significant and sustained improvement with a clear vision and strategy to be a child friendly city. OfSTED remarked that Leeds had made "remarkable and impressive improvement in the quality of the services inspected and the safety of children in the city" when re-inspected in 2011.
- By the time Leeds children's services were inspected again in January 2015, the Authority was judged to be 'good' overall, with 'outstanding' 'leadership, management and governance'.
- OfSTED returned to the city to inspect children's services in 2018. The inspection was conducted under the then new OfSTED 'ILACS' (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) framework that has a closer focus and a stronger emphasis on the quality of social work practice and outcomes for children. The Local Authority received the overall judgement of Outstanding for the first time, being the only Core City to have received this judgement to date.
- Between the 2018 and 2022 full ILACS inspections, Leeds was subject to the following inspection activity from OfSTED:
  - Joint Targeted Areas Inspection (JTAs) – Leeds was in preparation for a JTA on the theme of exploitation in March 2020, but the fieldwork was cancelled due to the first national lockdown.
  - Focused Visit – a shorter inspection on a theme of OfSTED's choosing e.g., Children looked after, Front Door, Child Protection etc. Leeds had a focused visit in July 2021 on the Front Door.
  - Annual conversations / Annual Engagement Meeting with the Director of Children and Families Services and other key senior leaders. This last took place in Leeds in April 2021.
- The inspection this year was a full three-week ILACS inspection that was described as a robust, deep dive into children's services practice and leadership by the lead inspector of the OfSTED inspection team.

### 1.2 Summary of the general findings

- The report demonstrates the relentless focus of children and families services in Leeds to be the best city in the UK for children to grow up in. The report states in the opening paragraph:

*"Since the last inspection of Leeds City Council in 2018, services for children have remained outstanding in their overall effectiveness. Children benefit from consistently strong and creative social work delivered to an exceptionally high standard. Senior leaders and council members are unstinting in their efforts and ambitions for children to achieve their full*

*potential. They harness highly effective partnership working and promote a culture across the city where children and young people are at its heart.”*

- The report specifically notes the immense challenges, Leeds as a large city, has faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, including an increase in families living in poverty, worsening health and well-being outcomes, and increased numbers of children in need of support. Inspectors commented on Leeds’s size and scale during their visit, for example noting that Leeds has three fostering panels where most other Local Authorities have one.
- There has also been a substantial increase in the number of children referred to children’s social care, at a time of increased staff sickness and vacancy levels. This has driven up social worker caseloads and the complexity of children’s needs and circumstances and the inspectors noted the quality of practice as outstanding despite these challenges.
- Inspectors noted that efficiency measures had impacted on specific areas of the service in the judgement for children in need of help and protection, however this had been identified and resolved by the time of the inspection.
- Additionally, although the council has had to make significant savings in recent years it has continued to prioritise front-line services and support to children and families.

### **1.3 Summary of more specific findings**

It is important to note some particularly important comments and findings:

- *Children’s social work is overseen by committed and knowledgeable leaders:*

The senior leadership team are ambitious and influential, and remain approachable and supportive to workers, families, and children. Political oversight through scrutiny is described as robust and challenging. The executive member for children and the chief executive of the council are considered to have an excellent insight and understanding of children’s social work, including an impressive operational knowledge.

- *Strategic partnerships are strong and effective:*

Strategic partnerships with health are well embedded and particularly strong in the early help services. Partnerships with schools have in fact strengthened during the pandemic response and are embedded within the Leeds cluster arrangements. Schools spoken to by Inspectors were unanimously positive about partnerships with children’s social care, both strategically and on an operational level between individual professionals.

- *The restorative and relational practice model:*

Restorative practice is wholly and authentically embedded within the strategic leadership group as much as it is within the operational layers of the service. It is reinforced under the banner of ‘child-friendly Leeds’, with corporate support and investment that recognise that children living in Leeds are of the highest priority. It is coherent and palpable throughout the services offered to children. Social workers develop meaningful relationships with children and use the strength of the restorative, relational approach to really get to know their children and develop enduring relationships with them. Partners embrace the model of restorative practice and genuinely hold the model in high regard.

- *Leaders are tenacious in identifying and locating children who are missing education:*

Staff contact schools and other agencies to make sure that these children are back on a school roll as soon as possible. This is resulting in increased numbers of children returning to education and a reduction in the number of children missing and whose whereabouts are unknown. This shows a clear demonstration of the Children and Young People's Partnership Plan (CYPP) priority of increasing the number of children and young people participating and engaging in learning

- *Children's identity and cultural needs are well considered:*

For example, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children benefit from a specialist service where workers have a comprehensive understanding of their needs. Young people are frequently excelling in respect of their emotional well-being and educational achievements. Inspectors met and spoke to a group of unaccompanied young people who reported very positively about the support received on arrival in the UK, such as the welcome pack, which supports integration into the city and helps them understand their rights and entitlements. This was an area identified for improvement in the 2018 ILACS report and demonstrates a clear dedication from children's services to act effectively on areas needing change for the better.

- *Children's plans are appropriately focused on good health outcomes:*

The report found that children's plans are appropriately focused on good health outcomes. In one example Inspectors commented on a social worker showing "*good understanding of barriers to accessing health appointments, securing support from a variety of services including direct payments [and] respite close to home*". Additionally, Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires are used effectively to identify needs, and the therapeutic social work service provides tailored support to address underlying emotional issues linked to trauma.

- *Children's voices are strong, and they have influence:*

Services are shaped around the needs of the people who experience them. With regards to children in care, their wishes and feelings and those of their parents are clearly set out in good-quality assessments and applications to court. There are two vocal, inclusive, and influential groups for both those in care and care leavers. Young people told inspectors that they feel valued, listened to, and respected by senior leaders. They genuinely feel that their role makes a difference. Celebration awards are routinely organised, planned and enjoyed by young people.

#### **1.4 Areas identified for improvement**

Although overall positive, the report identified two areas that need to improve:

- Contingency planning in children's written plans, though it should be noted that the full context for this states that:

*"Plans are based on thorough information and developed alongside families provide good levels of support and interventions. Children and families receive a wide variety of support to mitigate against harm and risk, including input from domestic abuse services and parental mental health and substance and alcohol services, combined with a wealth of family support. This helps families to make and sustain changes so that children's circumstances improve. While social workers are able to describe contingency plans well, written plans do not reflect this detail."*

- Consistent decision-making for strategy discussions, the full context for which is below:

*“When risks to children escalate, most children’s needs are considered in multi-agency strategy meetings. Attendance of partner agencies has improved since the last focused visit and there is detailed information-sharing and appropriate decision-making in these meetings. Subsequent child protection enquiries are thorough, with a clear assessment of risk which then informs the next steps. For a small number of children, strategy meetings had not taken place, and although children had been seen by social workers, there was a delay in multi-agency information-sharing and progressing child protection enquiries. This inconsistent decision-making means that not all children benefit from prompt multi-agency consideration of their immediate safeguarding needs.”*

- It is also worth noting that following a focused visit in July 2021 an action plan was promptly put in place to address the areas identified for improvement and all the areas had now been described as improved through this planning. The local authority’s self-assessment was described as providing an accurate picture of key areas of improvement work and areas for development.
- The officer responsible for implementation is the Director for Children and Families social services.

## 2. What impact will this proposal have?

**Wards Affected: None**

Have ward members been consulted?      Yes      No

## 3. What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- It should be noted that ILACS inspections are conducted once per three-year period however for Local Authorities with an outstanding rating the inspection is customarily shorter, comprising of only one-week. The inspection between 21 February to 4 March 2022 was instead a full ‘standard’ inspection. Leeds is the first Core City to have had two standard inspections under this framework.
- During the two weeks Inspectors spoke with:
  - 15 senior leaders
  - 27 team managers and service delivery managers
  - 93 practitioners
  - At least 14 parents/ carers/ family members, plus additional phone calls independently scheduled by inspectors.
  - 6 foster carers
  - Two groups of young people (total 12 young people and 5 members of staff), plus face-to-face meetings with two young people, along with phone calls to others independently scheduled by the inspectors.
  - At least 12 education colleagues including 3 Area Inclusion Partnership chairs and 2 headteachers, plus representatives from 7 schools.

- Attended 3 multi-agency meetings: Contextual Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE), Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) panel and Weekly Referral Review
- Inspectors also spoke to the Designated Family Judge for West Yorkshire
- With regard to cases:
  - Inspectors' approach when meeting with social workers/ other practitioners was to ask them to talk through two cases, one they selected themselves and one the inspectors selected. A total of 140 cases were discussed with inspectors in this way.
  - Inspectors also had access to our Mosaic case management system to do their own sampling of cases. In total, they looked at the cases of 152 children, viewing 604 documents in total (487 documents and 117 case notes).
  - At the front door, inspectors looked at 26 contacts with social workers and team managers. In addition, at the domestic violence daily discussion they looked at 11 cases and at a daily risk assessment meeting they observed all 16 cases
- OfSTED staff involved:
  - There were a total of 7 inspectors and one Quality Assurance Manager
  - 308 hours spent on site over the two weeks of field work
- Documents uploaded to bookcase:
  - Total – 247
  - 97 documents in the impact of leaders section
  - 24 documents in the help and protection section
  - 126 documents in the CLA and care leavers section

#### **4. What are the resource implications?**

- No relevant implications.

#### **5. What are the legal implications?**

- No legal implications.

#### **6. What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- The areas for development will be incorporated into existing service plans and actions taken at a strategic and operational level to address them. The officer responsible for implementation is the deputy director children and families social work service.

#### **7. Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

The OfSTED process is supportive of the key pillar of Health and Wellbeing as it assesses how Leeds City Council is meeting the needs of its Children and young people and their families. In

particular OfSTED investigate how children and young people's wellbeing needs are being met, and this result of outstanding shows that Leeds is effectively doing so.

## **8. Options, timescales and measuring success**

- As outlined above, Leeds will continue to be subject to an ongoing programme of OfSTED inspection activity and the directorate will bring further updates to Executive Board as appropriate.

## **Appendices**

1. Full report: Inspection of Leeds local authority children's services
2. Letter from Yvette Stanley, OfSTED's National Director for Social Care

## **Background papers**

None