

Ofsted Inspection Report

Date: 6 July 2022

Report of: Director of Children and Families

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

- Ofsted undertook a two-day Ofsted Focussed Visit to the Leeds Children and Families Front Door on the 20th and 21st July 2021. An action plan has been in place to address the recommendations from this visit. The children and families scrutiny board has had regular updates on this action plan to date. The areas of focus have been:
 - A. The quality and consistency of assessments to ensure that key information and family history is gathered and analysed to inform decision-making, and the quality of children's plans.
 - B. The quality and impact of management oversight and supervision to ensure that decisions are timely and well recorded.
 - C. The quality and independence of audits to ensure that they provide learning to support improvement in social work practice and provide senior managers with an understanding of the quality of that practice.
- Between Monday 21st February and Friday 4th March 2022, Ofsted undertook a full inspection of children's services in Leeds. This inspection was undertaken under the 'ILACS' (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) framework. The outcome letter was published on Monday 9th May 2022.
- The purpose of this report is to:
 - a) Update the Children and Families Scrutiny Board on the outcomes of the ILACS inspection that relate to the front door focused visit recommendations.
 - b) Inform the Children and Families Scrutiny Board of the planned actions to respond to the recommendations of the ILACS inspection 2022. The actions will form part of the children and families transition plan.

Recommendations

- a) Members are asked to note progress on recommendations from the front door focused inspection and to approve completion of the actions taken.
- b) Note the recommendations from the further ILACS inspection and the actions set out in relation to these.

What is this report about?

1. The action plan from Ofsted's front door focussed visit has been implemented and accepted as complete during the most recent ILACS inspection.
2. A further inspection was undertaken under the Ofsted 'ILACS' (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) framework between Monday 21st February and Friday 4th March 2022.
3. Ofsted describes the ILACS approach as a whole system of inspection which aims to apply a proportionate and risk-based approach. Ofsted use intelligence and information to decide how best to inspect each local authority.
4. The Ofsted outcome letter was published on 9th May 2022 and can be found here [50182665 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publication/50182665)
5. The inspection has found Leeds Children and Family Services to be outstanding overall with outstanding services for children looked after and care leavers, outstanding for the effectiveness of leaders and good for the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.
6. Additionally, the letter highlights the progress children's social care has made since the Ofsted inspection of the front door in July 2021, stating: *"An action plan was promptly put in place to address the areas for improvement identified at the last focused visit. This inspection has found that all of these areas have now improved through this planning. The local authority's self-assessment provides an accurate picture of key areas of improvement work and areas for development. In the self-assessment and during the inspection, leaders have been open about the key challenges that have driven a higher rate of referrals and increased numbers of children open to the service. Despite these challenges, the vast majority of children receive a high-quality service and have good relationships with their social workers, which is leading to improvements in their individual circumstances."*
7. **Recommendation A, the quality and consistency of assessments to ensure that key information and family history is gathered and analysed to inform decision-making, and the quality of children's plans-** The letter at page 3 highlights the quality of assessments stating: "Children's assessments are thorough and comprehensive. They are mostly timely, although there is acknowledgement from leaders that some assessments could be completed more quickly if they were briefer. Social workers understand the risks and protective factors for the child. Children's culture and identity are very well understood by social workers. This ensures that sensitive and tailored support and interventions are offered."
8. **Recommendation B, the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision to ensure that decisions are timely and well recorded-** Page 2 of the letter notes the progress in respect of timeliness of contacts being responded to at the front door- *"Children's needs and risks are identified promptly, and for most children there are timely actions that aim to support the reduction of risks to children. Management oversight of timeliness of response to referrals has been improved since the last focused visit, which identified this as an area for improvement. There is strong management oversight of referrals. Social workers are skilled and knowledgeable about what actions they need to take to ensure that they gather the right information to inform decision-making."*
9. Supervision, the cornerstone of good social work practice, is noted in the letter to be of a high standard with social workers benefiting from robust management support. *"Social workers benefit from high-quality supervision from experienced managers. Workers spoke*

highly about supervision and about their team managers. The management support they receive is highly valued and is helping workers to develop solutions to complex situations, and as a result, this helps children's circumstances to improve."

10. **Recommendation C, the quality and independence of audits to ensure that they provide learning to support improvement in social work practice and provide senior managers with an understanding of the quality of that practice-** *Regarding the quality assurance framework and audit work, Ofsted states that "Since the focused visit, the quality assurance framework and audit process have been reviewed and refreshed. Audits are now completed by team managers independent from the child's social work team, leading to greater oversight and independent scrutiny of the quality of practice. Moderation panels have been built into the process to ensure consistency. There are numerous robust panels chaired by managers and quality processes across the service which ensure that the quality of practice remains of a high standard."*
11. In relation to multiagency attendance at strategy meetings, page 3 of the letter comments on the improvements in partner attendance at multiagency strategy meetings- *"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."*
12. There are two further recommendations set out in the ILACS report:
 - Contingency planning in children's written plans
 - Consistent decision-making for strategy discussions
13. **Consistent decision making for strategy discussions** - Where information gathered during a Referral or Assessment results in a social worker suspecting that the child is suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm, a Strategy Discussion/Meeting should be held to decide whether to initiate enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
14. These referrals can be new referrals to the service or be made following an incident or information emerging about a child/ren already known to the service.
15. In Leeds, these referrals are quality assured through a weekly referral and review meeting to provide scrutiny of decision making and offering feedback to managers to improve practice. The meeting is a multiagency meeting chaired by the Principal Social Worker and attended by senior managers in health, Police and social work. Social work team managers attend this meeting as part of their own learning and development.
16. During the ILACS inspection, Ofsted inspectors observed the live meeting that was taking place that week. The participants in the meeting identified a small number of decisions that they raised queries about in line with their usual practice. Ofsted agreed with the challenge and as such have put forward this recommendation.
17. The quality of strategy discussions is an area of practice that requires continuous monitoring and development. The monitoring is undertaken weekly on a multiagency basis as described and through dip sampling as part of our audit framework.
18. To support practice development, a strategy discussion practice guide was developed for managers in 2021. A second practice guide is currently being written, to focus specifically on undertaking strategy discussions when a child or young person is already open to

children's social work. This will be completed by July 2022 and relevant training will be developed to embed practice in this very specific area of practice.

19. Revised Section 47 training has been developed and launched for all social workers as part of social work progression, this includes detail on strategy discussions.
20. The social work service and workforce development lead are reviewing and will enrich where appropriate, the training offer for strategy discussions and contingency planning- any changes will be implemented by September 2022.
21. From July 2022 the Principal Social Worker will be offering peer support, mentoring and guidance specifically for all social work managers when she will be based for periods of the week in social work teams.
22. **Contingency planning in children's written plans** – During the ILACS inspection and as part of the examination of case files Ofsted inspectors identified that while social workers could describe the contingency plans for children and young people effectively, the written records of these plans could be improved.
23. The service has set up a task and finish group to develop a program of practice improvement in relation to contingency planning. The overall aim will be to ensure all social workers and managers have a good understanding of contingency planning and that all children subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan have a contingency plan built into their overall plan. This work will include a review of the electronic record that is used to record children's plans to ensure there is a clear and usable section for contingency planning.
24. There will be a review of the interactive learning audit form to ensure contingency planning is an area of consideration in the audit of case work.
25. The service delivery manager for the integrated safeguarding unit has begun a piece of development work with the child protection chairs to improve the use of contingency planning in child protection planning. This will be completed by September 2022.
26. Both areas of practice are included in the annual schedule of thematic audit to ensure robust review and scrutiny of progress against agreed outcomes. In addition, there will be quarterly dip sampling of children's plans to ensure contingency planning is evident in case records. This will be an ongoing process and reviewed via the monthly quality assurance meeting.

What impact will this proposal have?

27. This report updates the Children and Families Scrutiny Board on the outcomes of the ILACS inspection that relate to the front door focused visit recommendations. It also informs the Children and Families Scrutiny Board of the planned actions to respond to the recommendations of the ILACS inspection 2022. The actions will form part of the children and families transition plan.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

28. This report relates to the Council's priority to make Leeds a Child Friendly City.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

29. The Children and Families directorate undertakes regular day to day consultation and more formal focussed consultation and engagement activity with a range of children, young people and families.
30. The directorate has an active Voice and Influence team who facilitate and enable the voice of children and families to shape and influence service delivery and development.
31. The directorate has developed a 'Let's Talk' programme that has enabled families with lived experience of the directorate and its services to shape and influence services in the here and now and in planning for the future.

What are the resource implications?

32. This report has no specific resource implications. The Children and Families directorate will implement the actions within current resource and capacity.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

33. The key risk is inconsistency in practice and service delivery that may result in poorer outcomes for children and families. The directorate has developed a Transition Plan. Progress against the Transition Plan is closely monitored by the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team through its performance management and quality assurance framework.

What are the legal implications?

34. The Children and Families Social Work Service has a range of statutory functions, the actions noted in this report which will be incorporated into the transition will ensure that legal duties and responsibilities are fulfilled through the delivery of consistent high-quality child and family led practice and services.

Appendices

- None

Background papers

- None