
To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

16 September 2021

Subject: Children's Services Ofsted Visit Outcome and Action Plan Progress

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the outcome of the Ofsted Focused assurance visit held on 12 and 13 May 2021 and progress against the Action plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) To note the current progress against the action plan at Appendix A
 - 2) Identify any areas the Board may want to add to their work programme to look at in more detail
 - 3) Identify any further recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 Ofsted re-inspected Children's Services on 6th - 30th March 2017, the outcome of the inspection was published on 13th June 2017, Children's Services were judged as "requires improvement to be good".
- 3.2 The Ofsted framework (ILACS) includes focused visits to local authorities who are judged to be 'requires improvement'. Children's Services have received two visits. The first visit was held on 30-31 January 2018. The visit focused on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The letter confirming the outcome of the visit was published on 22 February 2018.
- 3.3 A further focused visit was held on 26-27 February 2019. The visit focused on permanency planning and achieving permanency. The letter confirming the outcome of the visit was published on 21st March 2019.
- 3.4 In March 2020, Ofsted paused ILACS inspections due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's Services was anticipating a standard Inspection by September 2020. Ofsted published their interim plans to reflect the COVID-19 context for a phased return to routine inspections which commenced from September 2020. The Interim visits were paused again during the November 2020 lockdown.
- 3.5 On 5 January 2021 a further national lockdown was announced. Ofsted confirmed that interim assurance focused visits will be undertaken during the national lockdown period commencing from February 2021.
- 3.6 The interim focused visit, (COVID-19 assurance) was undertaken on 12 and 13 May 2021. Interim focused visit differs from the usual focused visits in that they have a broader scope with a particular focus on the quality of decision making for children.

4 The interim Focused visit (COVID-19 assurance)

4.1 The methodology for the visit was in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS). The methodology was adapted to reflect the COVID-19 context. The visit was carried out largely on site, although remotely for the School HMI.

4.2 The two-day visit was carried out by four Her Majesty's Inspectors and one School HMI

4.3 The scope of the visit included:

4.4 Help and protection scope

- The effectiveness of the front door, with specific reference to any rise in and response to referrals, section 47 enquires and strategy discussions
- The progress of children subject to child protection and child in need plans (those who have experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation)
- The progress of those recently stepped up or stepped down to early help and the exercise of thresholds
- Edge of care/pre-proceedings, particularly those subject to letter before proceedings

4.5 Children in care and care leavers scope

- The focus on physical/mental health of children in care and care leavers, including how the local authority has maintained contact with the child/care leaver and how they're facilitated contact with families
- Placement decisions, including the quality of matching, particularly when sufficiency is a challenge

4.6 Impact of Leaders scope

- The quality assurance of practice and 'line of sight' to the quality and impact of practice with children and families
- Management and workforce capacity, including responses to staff well-being
- The effectiveness of leaders in leading and contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective social work practice

5 Summary of the outcome of the visit

5.1 The letter confirming the outcome of the visit was published on 25th June 2021. The link to the report is available here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50165169>

5.2 The findings stated that there was strong, timely and effective political and corporate support for children's services which had enabled leaders to respond promptly to mitigate the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders have ensured the most vulnerable children have been seen in person, and staff were provided with personal protective equipment.

5.3 Children in care, both living in Coventry and those living outside of the city were provided with the technology and access to tuition and education where possible.

5.4 Inspectors stated that partnership working had strengthened during the pandemic with positive changes identified. Partners have maintained oversight of child safety and well-being. Decision making in the multi-agency safeguarding hub was timely and Strategy discussion held promptly.

5.5 Face to face visits have continued during the pandemic, subject to risk assessment.

5.6 Staff are positive about working in Coventry. They stated that their workload was manageable and that they valued the support and communication provided by leaders and managers at all levels during the pandemic.

5.7 Three areas were identified as areas for improvement:

- ***The timeliness of decision making for children to enter the Public Law Outline (PLO), and their circumstances being purposefully progressed once within it.***
- ***The quality of supervision, management oversight and case notes so that the rationale for decisions, made is clearly recorded.***
- ***Decision making and the recording of rationale with respect of children's placements***

6 Action Plan

An Action Plan (Appendix 1) was developed in response to the visit, the plan details the areas for improvement and the actions that are being progressed.

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