



Northumberland County Council

Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

5th March 2020

Ofsted: Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

Report of Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Wayne Daley

Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) which took place between 20th and 31st January 2020.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

1. Note the content of the report and the findings of the associated Ofsted report.
2. Identify any areas for further scrutiny related to the findings of the report.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the Living and Learning priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

Key Issues

1. Northumberland Children's Services were subject to an inspection under the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Social Care Services' framework between 20th and 31st January 2020. (ILACS)
2. The outcome of this inspection was as follows:
 - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: GOOD
 - The experience and progress of children who need help and protection: GOOD
 - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: GOOD

- Overall effectiveness: GOOD
3. The inspection took place over a three week period:
 - 13/1/20: off site evaluation of documents and telephone interviews with key lead and elected members as well as the family court judge and CAFCASS.
 - 20/1/20 to 31/1/20: on site direct inspection of services delivered from Early Help, Front Door, Locality Teams and Care Leavers services.
 4. The outcome is shared provisionally on the last day of the inspection but subject to confidentiality due to the fact that the report and judgements undergo stringent quality assurance processes.
 5. The full report is published on the Ofsted website on 2nd March 2020, with the local authority receiving an embargoed copy two working days prior to the formal publication.
 6. The areas of strength identified by Ofsted during the inspection include:
 - The Local Authority has successfully delivered improved and good quality operational practice in most areas of service provision, by means of thoughtful strategic planning and determined focus. As a result children are helped, protected and cared for to a good standard.
 - Elected members and senior leaders have ensured children receive a robust and consistent response that meets their needs when concerns are raised.
 - Good partnership work and a wide range of effective resources provide early help services that are a strength.
 - Children are well protected and engaged in effective direct work with social workers.
 - Managers and social workers have been successful in ensuring that children's voices can be clearly heard.
 - For children with additional needs, practice is child focused and of a good quality.
 - Edge of care services are effective, meaning that children only come into care when they need to.
 - Children looked after benefit from good standards of care, are well supported in their education and live with carers who look after them well.
 - Significant financial investment by the Council has resulted in an increase in social work capacity, ensuring that social workers have more time to spend with children.
 7. Ofsted identified some areas of improvement, most of which were identified within

the self-assessment that was provided to Ofsted at the start of the inspection:

- Children's Plans: individual written plans for children need to be streamlined and more focused although there was an acknowledgment that plans for children do progress.
 - Assessments: impact of the child's lived experience needs to be evaluated more effectively in assessments.
 - Recording of supervision and management oversight: Ofsted identified that supervision and management oversight takes place regularly but that the written record of this does not always reflect the full discussions that take place.
 - Later Life Letters: improving the quality of Later Life Letters for children who are adopted in line with the quality of the Life Story Books that is provided to children.
8. These areas have already been addressed within the Continuous Improvement Plan that is updated in line with our self-assessment.
 9. The frontline practitioners who were involved in the inspection either directly or indirectly have helped shape and deliver on the improvements within the Authority and the outcome of this inspection is testament to their ongoing commitment and hard work with our children and families in the county.
 10. This inspection will be used to influence improvements going forward in order to further strengthen our services for the future.
 11. A copy of the full report is contained within the Appendix.

Background

1. The Ofsted ILACS framework was introduced in 2017 and followed the Single Inspection Framework, (SIF), which had been in place prior to this.
2. Under the last inspection framework, Northumberland was found to be 'requires improvement to be good'. As a result a comprehensive and focused improvement programme was embarked upon in order to improve the services that are delivered. This improvement plan has been regularly reported at various meetings including FACS and the Children's Safeguarding Board where challenge and scrutiny has been offered in order to help improve services.
3. Some of the resource challenges in the last inspection have been addressed and now mandated by the outcome of the inspection including:
 - Social work caseloads
 - Capacity within the legal services
 - Independent Review Officers numbers
4. In addition, there have been some key areas of practice that have been recognised as having improved significantly from the last inspection:
 - Court work and legal proceedings
 - Direct work with children and social workers who know their children well
 - Planning for permanency for children who are looked after
5. The ILACS inspection framework legislates for Ofsted to have additional oversight of Local Authority Children's Services and since the last inspection within Northumberland this has included:
 - Focused Visit: Front Door arrangements: February 2018
 - Annual Conversation: March 2018
 - SEND Inspection: October 2018
 - Annual Conversation: March 2019
 - Joint Targeted Area Inspection: Child Sexual Exploitation and Criminal Exploitation: June 2019
6. A further Annual Conversation is due to take place in June 2020.

Implications

Policy	Ofsted inspections are part of Government policy in relation to Children's Services.
Finance and value for money	No additional resources needed but recognition that investment in some areas may be needed in the future
Legal	Local Authorities are required to comply with inspection requests.
Procurement	No implications.
Human Resources	No implications.
Property	No implications.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes / No X / N/A NO	
Risk Assessment	The outcome of the inspection contributes to the overall Council risk assessment process.
Crime & Disorder	No implications.
Customer Consideration	The inspection considered the impact on children and families within the county
Carbon reduction	No implications.
Wards	No implications.

Background Papers

- Inspection of Northumberland Children's Social Care Services 2020.
- Northumberland County Council Single Inspection of Children's Services 2016.

Report sign off

Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hand
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Wayne Daley

Author and Contact Details

Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services
cath.mcevoy-carr@northumberland.gov.uk 01670 624034