



## COMMITTEE: HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD

11 FEBRUARY 2021

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### INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

Report of Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Guy Renner-Thompson

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#### Purpose of report

To inform members of the findings of this successful inspection and progress on the subsequent improvement plan.

#### Recommendations

To acknowledge the findings and progress made.

#### Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the Living priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021

#### Key issues

- The inspection of Northumberland children's services was undertaken by Ofsted between 20 and 31 January 2020.
- It judged the services to be Good in all areas inspected. This evidenced clear progress since the previous Ofsted inspection in 2016 which judged services to require improvement
- The ILACS framework requires local authorities who have been inspected to submit an action plan to Ofsted evidencing how they will address areas for improvement identified in the inspection. This was required and submitted in June 2020
- The areas for improvement identified through the inspection were:
  - The quality of written plans for all children.
  - The quality of analysis in some assessments of impact on children.
  - The quality of the recording of management oversight in supervision records.
  - Quality and sensitivity in the way later life letters are written for all children.

The improvement plan submitted to Ofsted detailed the actions and progress that have been made in relation to the identified areas for improvement at the time of submission. This includes noting the impact of Covid-19 where relevant. Progress is monitored on a monthly basis by senior managers in Children's Social Care as part of monitoring the overall Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP).

- Further to the areas formally identified for improvement in the Ofsted report as above, other elements of practice improvement given through verbal feedback during the inspection or noted in the report but not formally highlighted as above have been incorporated into the CIP to ensure we are maximising all learning to improve the quality of our services.

## **Background**

Northumberland children's services had previously been inspected under the single inspection framework (SIF) in 2016 with the overall judgement that services required improvement to be good.

Because of the judgement of requiring improvement from the SIF inspection, the inspection under the ILACS framework was undertaken by HM inspectors over a two-week period on site, with a week prior to this undertaken off site.

Northumberland had also received previously a focused visit under the ILACS framework in 2018 which concentrated on the front door, the progress from which was considered in this inspection.

The local safeguarding children board (NSCC) requests a 6 monthly update on this area of work and this report incorporates the content of January's update to NSCC.

The local authority have now reinstated and are further developing their overall quality assurance framework and processes through a dedicated senior management post. While key activities are undertaken remotely e.g. practice days, the LA are able to maintain an overview of the quality of practice, where progress has been made and where further improvements are required including in relation to the areas identified at the inspection as detailed below,

## **UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

Four areas for improvement arose from the ILACS inspection, focusing on: planning; assessment; management oversight; and later life letters (LLLs).

### **a. Plans - Quality of the written plans for all children.**

Actions identified to improve the written plans have been put in place, including virtual staff training although slowed by Covid and a key element of this is the further implementation of Signs of Safety with the module being fully in place from April 2021. The quality assurance work has identified further improvements in the quality of written plans, particularly in relation to CIN and LAC, those seen being clear on outcomes required, what actions are needed by whom and when, to support this. This however does remain an area where further improvement is required to deliver the consistent quality of written plans in all areas of work and the implementation of the Signs of Safety (SOS) module with the associated practice developments supported by dedicated SoS trainers is a key element of this.

[here](#)

### **b. Assessments - Quality of analysis in some assessments re impact on children.**

The identified actions to develop the consistent quality of practice in this area have been put in place through training and workshops and the ongoing development is further supported by the SoS described above.

The quality assurance work has consistently found that assessments are thorough, effectively capturing the views and experiences of children and that the analysis does balance risk and protective factors including impact on the child in most cases, but the development work and oversight needs to continue to ensure this happens in all cases.

c. **Management oversight** - Quality of the recording of management oversight in supervision records

As with the above sections, most actions are complete and implemented, including the delivery of development sessions to first line managers, and additional resources in the forms of models and tools having been rolled out. The quality assurance oversight has found regular and consistent management oversight of the work, with increasing evidence of a SoS structure to underpin the recording and supporting the timely progress of the case in the majority of instances. There is increasing evidence of reflection with the worker in the recording but this needs to be more consistently achieved, although when workers are spoken to as part of the QA work, they are very positive about the supervision and opportunities for reflection.

d. **Later Life Letters** - Quality and sensitivity in the way that later life letters are written for adopted children.

The planned development of the service where all children who are being placed for adoption are allocated to child permanency workers to bring more consistency to practice is now in place. The service has been trained and uses guidance for later life letters in line with national best practice and a themed audit is planned for February 2021 as, given the relatively small number of children involved, this will give sufficient numbers for a thorough overview of quality.

**Implications**

The effectiveness of the progress of the identified improvement areas will be considered by Ofsted in future contact with Northumberland under the ILACS framework.

<b>Policy</b>	The ILAC Inspection Framework is statutory and is part of government requirements for the regulation and scrutiny of children's services.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The inspection report identified the importance of resources invested as part of improving services.
<b>Legal</b>	As above, inspection framework is a statutory requirement.
<b>Procurement</b>	Not applicable.
<b>Human</b>	Recruiting and retaining experienced social workers is

<b>Resources</b>	critical to effective safeguarding practice.
<b>Property</b>	Not applicable.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	The inspection focuses on services to the most vulnerable children in Northumberland.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Not applicable
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Not applicable
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The experiences of children are important to the inspection findings.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Not applicable
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	The inspection scrutinised practice around supporting the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people.
<b>Wards</b>	All

### **Background papers**

For the Ofsted ILACS report, click [here](#)

### **Report sign off**

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Helen Lancaster
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hand
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

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