



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

DATE: 3 FEBRUARY 2022

OFSTED AND INSPECTION FRAMEWORKS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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

Cabinet Member: Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of Report

To inform elected members of the range of inspections and external scrutiny that Ofsted and other inspectorates provide to local authority children services departments.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended:

1. To acknowledge the scope of inspections described herein.

Link to Corporate Plan

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

Key Issues

- a. Children's Services is the most inspected and regulated department in the local authority.
- b. Ofsted undertakes graded inspections of the following services: early years settings; schools; adult learning; social care: (ie the ILACS) and children's

residential homes.

- c. It also provides external scrutiny in between social care inspections in the form of focused visits which are ungraded.
- d. Ofsted with the Care Quality Commission undertake multi agency inspections in the form of joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) and special educational needs and disabilities inspections (SEND); again these are ungraded.
- e. In addition to inspections from Ofsted, we also receive inspections of the Youth Justice Service coordinated by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.
- f. The table in the Background section details Northumberland's current position regarding these inspections and external scrutiny.
- g. Whilst inspections of early years settings and schools are ongoing, it is anticipated that the next activity that the Council's Children's Services will receive in 2022 will be an inspection of the Youth Justice Service and a Focused Visit for Social Care. It is also possible that there will be an Adult Learning inspection in 2022.

Background

The table below details the various types of inspection or external scrutiny that Children's Services experiences, along with the latest position and our estimate of what will happen next. Almost all inspection and regulatory activity in Children's Services is undertaken by Ofsted (the exception being the inspection of Youth Justice Services coordinated by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation [HMIP]).

TYPE OF INSPECTION / VISIT		GRADED?	LATEST POSITION	FUTURE
Early Yrs	Childcare / Childminders	Y	97% of providers rated Good or Outstanding compared to 97% nationally	Ongoing
Schools	Primary	Y	92% of primary schools rated Good or Outstanding compared to 88% nationally	Ongoing
	Secondary	Y	70% of secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding compared to 76% nationally	
	Special / Pupil Referral Unit	Y	70% of special schools rated Good or Outstanding compared to 90% nationally	
16+	Adult Learning	Y	The Learning & Skills service was graded as Good in 2018	2022 / 2023
SEND	Multi agency inspection	N	Northumberland as an area received a written statement of action (WSOA) in 2018	2023 / 2024
	Multi agency re-visit of the WSOA	N	Northumberland was judged to have made sufficient progress in all areas	Not applicable
Social Care	Inspection of LA Children's Services (ILACS)	Y	Northumberland was judged to be Good across all four areas	2023 / 2024
	Multi agency Joint Targeted Area Inspection	N	Northumberland have received one on child exploitation in 2019. There were no priority areas for action.	Not expected
	Focused Visit	N	Northumberland have received one on its Front Door in 2018. There were no priority areas for action.	Expected in 2022
	Residential homes	Y	There are five settings and two are judged to be Outstanding, two Good and one Requires Improvement	All 5 settings inspected each year
	Youth Justice	Y	Last judged to be Good in 2016 by the HMIP; the next inspection is overdue	Expected in 2022

Ofsted's role is to make sure that organisations providing education, training and care services in England do so to a high standard for children and students. It reports directly to Parliament and is independent and impartial. It is responsible for:

Inspecting

- Maintained schools and academies, some independent schools, and many other educational institutions and programmes outside of higher education
- Childcare, adoption and fostering agencies and initial teacher training

Regulating

A range of early years and children's social care services, making sure they are suitable for children and potentially vulnerable young people. As shown in the table above, inspections of early years settings, schools and residential homes are ongoing and these services are supported by the Council in ensuring they are aware of the requirements of the latest frameworks.

Children's Social Care

Northumberland Children's Social Care was last inspected under the ILACS framework in January 2020 and that took the form of a full standard inspection. It is usually at least another three years before the next such inspection and as Ofsted's approach is to remain in touch with local authorities to "catch before they fall", it is anticipated that the next activity that the Council's Children's Services will receive under this framework will be a Focused Visit at some point in 2022. Focused Visits give the local authority and Ofsted the opportunity to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next judgement inspection.

The links to the detailed guidance of how these inspections work are provided in the section on background papers and Appendix A shows an example of the timetable for a focused visit. Focused visits could be on one of the following areas:

- arrangements at the front door
- children in need of help or protection
- extra familial risk
- arrangements for achieving permanency
- meeting the needs of children who are looked after
- arrangements for care leavers
- unregulated or unregistered children's homes

Youth Justice Service

As mentioned in the table above, an inspection of the Youth Justice Service is expected in 2022. The inspection consists of three phases: Phase I: Pre-fieldwork planning and preparation; Phase II: Fieldwork; Phase III: Post-fieldwork. The pre-fieldwork phase normally commences five weeks before the fieldwork with the announcement of the inspection and the issue of documentation to assist planning and preparation. A telephone planning meeting takes place the week following the announcement (normally week -3). For single inspections, there is one week of fieldwork, during which case inspections and meetings take place and for joint inspections, the first fieldwork week comprises case inspections only and it is followed by an off-site review week and then a second fieldwork week comprising the majority of meetings and issues arising out of cases inspected. On completion of the fieldwork phase, the lead and deputy lead inspector prepare draft ratings proposals and summarise evidence and key findings for an internal 'ratings panel' meeting, held the week after fieldwork is completed. The panel ensures that ratings fully reflect the balance of the evidence, and that they are sufficiently consistent across inspections. A summary of the ratings panel decision is sent to the inspected body on the Friday after the meeting has been held and the draft report is then prepared.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Whilst the inspection of SEND in 2018 was not graded, it did result in Northumberland being required to produce a Written Statement of Action (WSOA). The delivery of this was in relation to three areas (Joint Commissioning; Graduated Approach and Outcomes), and was subject to quarterly monitoring by the Department for Education and NHS England. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission re-visited Northumberland in May 2021 to assess progress on the WSOA and concluded there had been sufficient progress in all three areas.

Implications

Policy	The inspection framework is an element of Children's Services performance management and quality assurance arrangements.
Finance and value for money	The inspection framework provides external scrutiny to assess if Children Services is providing good value in meeting the needs of children within the county.
Legal	Elements of the inspection framework review Children Service's legal work in relation to, for example, care proceedings.
Procurement	Not applicable
Human Resources	Workforce development and the sufficiency of skilled and experienced staff are assessed under this inspection framework.
Property	Not applicable
Equalities Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No children or young people could be disadvantaged as a result of this report.
Risk Assessment	Graded inspections and external scrutiny have an element of risk to the local authority's reputation.
Crime & Disorder	The inspection of the Youth Justice Service reviews cases where children or young people have been involved with the criminal justice system.
Customer Consideration	Children and young people are spoken to as part of focused visits and inspections and their views are taken into consideration when forming the findings.
Carbon reduction	Not applicable
Health and Wellbeing	The health and well being of children and young people is an element of the inspection framework. For example, Ofsted requires the local authority to share the local strategy for child and adolescent mental health as part of ILACS inspections and focused visits.
Wards	All

Background Papers

The links to the various inspection frameworks described herein are provided below:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif/early-years-inspection-handbook-for-ofsted-registered-provision-for-september-2021>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services>
- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/05/Youth-Guidance-Manual-External-v5.2-May-2021.pdf>

Report Sign Off

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APPENDIX A – EXAMPLE OF A FOCUSED VISIT TIMETABLE

Example day of the week	Activities
Monday	Lead inspector off-site evaluation of evidence
Tuesday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the focused visit Afternoon 'set-up' telephone conference – lead inspector and DCS (Notification and set up will happen on Tuesday in the previous week, if extra time is needed to support remote inspection activity)
Wednesday	Local authority shares child-level data, information about audits and performance and management information
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting

Week 2: fieldwork

Example day of the week	Activities
Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
Tuesday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback