

Cabinet

Supplementary Agenda

Date: Tuesday, 14th January, 2020
Time: 1.00 pm
Venue: Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

The following report is marked 'to follow' on the main agenda.

PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT

9. **Outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Cheshire East Local Authority Children's Services** (Pages 3 - 24)

To consider the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Cheshire East Local Authority Children's Services.

Membership: Councillors C Browne (Vice-Chairman), S Corcoran (Chairman), K Flavell, T Fox, L Jeuda, N Mannion, J Rhodes, B Roberts, A Stott and M Warren

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Key Decision N
Date First Published: N/A

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 14 January 2020

Report Title: Outcome of Cheshire East Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder - Children and Families

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

1.1 This report updates Cabinet on the outcome of the Ofsted Standard Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), undertaken between the 11th to the 29th November 2019, with the report being published by Ofsted on 9th January.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) note the contents of the Ofsted report at Appendix 1, both areas of strength and areas for development; and
- b) confirm the Council's continued ambition and commitment to our journey to achieve good or outstanding services for Cheshire East's children and young people.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The Council, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Cheshire East. It is important that Cabinet is apprised of the strengths and areas for improvement within Children's Services and is assured that

arrangements are in place to develop, implement and scrutinise plans that deliver improvements in the areas for improvement.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to confirm its ambition and commitment to achieving good or outstanding services for children and families.

5. Background

5.1 All Children's Services authorities are subject to regular inspection by Ofsted. Cheshire East Council's last major inspection was under the single inspection framework (SIF) in July 2015, which found us to be 'requires improvement' following an inadequate judgement in 2013.

5.2 Ofsted published the 'new' ILACS framework in November 2017 and implemented it from January 2018. It replaced the single inspection framework (SIF) for all inspections of Local Authorities providing services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. This again 'raised the bar' of what Ofsted expects to see as consistently good practice across all services.

5.3 Inspections under the ILACS framework evaluate the effectiveness of Local Authority services and arrangements, including:

- the help and protection of children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers.

5.4. ILACS inspections also evaluate:

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of professional practice.

5.5 Under the SIF, Ofsted delivered a standard four-week inspection to all Local Authority services. The current ILACS framework is a more complex system of inspection. The aim is to create a proportionate inspection process based on intelligence gathered throughout the year. There are three different types of inspections under the framework:

- **Standard inspection** – this covers all the services above across the levels of need and takes place over three weeks, with one week's notice and inspectors onsite for two weeks. At end of the inspection: a report is completed which gives a judgement on the quality of our

services, either outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good, or inadequate.

- **Focussed Visit** - these inspections focus on one area in particular. We had a focussed visit on cared for children and care leavers in October 2018. These inspections take place over two weeks and inspectors are onsite for two days. At end of the inspection: a letter is written which outlines strengths and areas for improvement; no overall judgement is given.
- **Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI)** - these inspections are multi-agency inspections that are carried out by inspectors from multi-agency inspectorates (including Ofsted, CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation). These inspections look at a particular topic, which changes on a regular basis. These inspections take place over three weeks and inspectors are onsite for one week. At end of the inspection: a letter is written which outlines strengths and areas for improvement, no overall judgement is given.

5.6 Cheshire East received a **Standard inspection** in November 2019. The Inspectors involved were:

- Shabana Abasi – Lead Inspector
- Alison Smale – Inspector
- John Roughton - Inspector
- Matt Reed - Inspector
- Stephen Bentham – Inspector for Education
- Mandy Williams – Social Care Regulatory Inspector
- Nick McMullen – Senior Inspector (Quality Assurance)
- Kathryn Grindrod- Inspector (designate) shadowing this inspection

5.7 The methodology adopted by the inspection team was detailed, thorough, and probing. It focussed on:

- Sampling a large number of children’s case records.
- Discussing individual cases in detail with practitioners.
- Meeting or phone calls with children, young people, care leavers, parents and carers, foster carers and adopters, schools and the Head of the Virtual School.
- Analysis of key documents and data (Annex A); over 600 documents were uploaded to Ofsted’s SharePoint site.

5.8 The standard inspection made judgements as set out below:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

5.9 Areas of strength

- 5.9.1 Inspectors found that Cheshire East had made significant progress in a number of areas since the last inspection in 2015 and since the focussed visit in 2018. This included a strengthened front door and improvements in the scale and effectiveness of the early help offer. Our 'edge of care' team, @ct, works intensively and effectively with families to ensure children only come into care when they need to and children a risk of exploitation receive a robust service. Permanency planning is identified at an early stage and children are supported to live safely within their birth family. The voice of the child is a strength and evident across all services.
- 5.9.2 Areas of good practice included the wealth of support offered to children and families at risk from domestic abuse. Support for children with disabilities or a plan of adoption were also identified as strengths. We have also improved our response to children who go missing or are at risk of exploitation.
- 5.9.3 There are well embedded systems for assessing, tracking and safeguarding children missing from education and those electively home educated. The Virtual School provides strong leadership, which is leading to improving outcomes for most cared for children.
- 5.9.4 Most cared for children live in homes that meet their needs and help them to make progress. Social workers and carers are attuned to their physical and emotional health.
- 5.9.5 Care Leavers know their Personal Advisors well, they are supported to learn and practice their independence skills. Their mental health and emotional wellbeing needs are effectively supported.
- 5.9.6 Social Workers know their children well and engage in creative direct work that informs their assessments and plans.

- 5.9.7 There is a strong training and development package and specific funding for additional staff. This has reduced reliance on temporary staff. Children are benefitting from consistent and committed social workers, who know them well.
- 5.9.8 Strategic partnerships are mature and responsive to changing needs in operational conditions demonstrated through areas of strong and collaborative partnership working in the front door, early help and contextual safeguarding.
- 5.9.9 There is a whole-council commitment to driving improvement for children and families. The Corporate Parenting Committee, safeguarding partnership and scrutiny function provide appropriate challenge to operational services where deficiencies are highlighted. This means senior leaders are accountable for the performance of services and experiences of children.

5.10 Areas for improvement

The areas for improvement noted by the inspectors are highlighted below alongside planned actions to ensure timely improvements are made.

The quality, consistency and analysis of assessments and child focus of plans

- 5.10.1 Over the last 18 months Cheshire East has been introducing a new evidence based social work model, "Signs of safety". In the short term this has led to some inconsistency in the quality of assessments and plans as early help workers, social workers and managers begin to use the new approach. Significant progress has been made in embedding the model, particularly in building trusting relationships and the quality of direct work with children and families. Implementing Signs of Safety is a journey of 4-5 years to fully implement, however this will provide the foundations of a good social work service for vulnerable children.
- 5.10.2 Further work is required to improve the consistency and quality of social work assessments and plans. This will be led by the Signs of Safety Board and improvements measured through a strengthened quality assurance framework and auditing programme.

Management oversight of cases in pre-proceedings, to avoid drift and delay for children

- 5.10.3 A small number of children suffering chronic neglect experienced delay in ensuring they were protected from the cumulative impact of neglect. They are time limited with a clear plan of assessment, support and actions required by parents/ cares to reduce risk for children. During the inspection a review of each child took place and senior managers

have agreed actions to ensure timely progress is achieved. A joint evaluation with legal services will take place by February 2020 to determine what further work is required.

The response to children in private fostering arrangements, children who are homeless aged 16 and 17 years old and care leavers who need emergency accommodation

- 5.10.4 All children and young people within this small but significant cohort have been reviewed by senior managers and we are confident that appropriate plans are in place. The accommodation offer for care leavers will be recommissioned, with the new services in place from July 2020. The specification has been amended to reflect the findings from the recent inspection.

The quality and consistency of support and engagement with foster carers

- 5.10.5 An independent review regarding the recruitment, retention, development and support of foster carers will be completed by the end of January 2020. The recommendations from this review will then be overseen and progressed by the recently established fostering review board. The review and development work will be co-produced with foster carers and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Management oversight and supervision in the organisation to ensure that consistent, good quality social work practice is in place

- 5.10.6 A review of how performance management information is scrutinised and understood has taken place. An evaluation of supervision arrangements, following the introduction of Signs of Safety has also been completed and recommendations will be progressed through the Signs of Safety Board. There is a plan in place to fully embed our revised quality assurance framework. This includes additional training and support for managers at all levels. The review of proceedings will also include a specific focus on the role of team managers and service managers in timely progress for children, whilst ensuring all help and support has been offered to families to care safely for their children.
- 5.10.7 A more detailed action plan is under development and will be considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and will also be monitored and scrutinised by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.1.1 A review of legal services is planned. Part of the review will look at how best to meet the needs of children's social care to ensure that there is sufficient capacity and expertise to ensure timely planning for children who are subject to the Public Law process.

6.2 Finance Implications

- 6.2.1 The ambition to ensure that children's services deliver services which are good and outstanding requires an ongoing financial commitment from the Council. Fostering allowance rates for Cheshire East foster carers are currently being considered as part of the wider fostering review. Nationally there are budget pressures around cared for children placements. This is due to the rising costs of children's homes and insufficient foster placements to meet the rising numbers of children in care.
- 6.2.2 In Cheshire East we are facing similar challenges, however the rising costs will be mitigated through the work planned to increase the number of Cheshire East foster carers, driving individual permanency plans for children and mobilisation of our commissioned Children's Homes.

6.3 Policy Implications

- 6.3.1 Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young and every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

6.4 Equality Implications

- 6.4.1 The proposals within this report are intended to improve equality for children and families.

6.5 Human Resources Implications

- 6.5.1 Ensuring the ongoing recruitment and retention of high quality Social Workers and managers will continue to be a priority for the local authority and will require the support from HR colleagues to deliver the strategy in relation to this. Further work is planned to review the support

package for our newly qualified social workers to ensure we are strongly placed to attract the very best student social workers.

6.6 Risk Management Implications

6.6.1 There are reputational and financial risks of not providing good children's services. These risks are currently also included as risks for the Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Council, as the lead agency, must continue to ensure that these risks are minimised by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve where areas for development are identified.

6.7 Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1 Our plans intend to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people across the borough, in particular, those who are the most vulnerable.

6.9 Public Health Implications

6.9.1 Health inequalities are linked directly to the wider determinates which will have implications for public health. The work on the indices of deprivation will support the improvement of outcomes for children and young people.

6.10 Climate Change Implications

6.10.1 There is a commitment to ensuring that Cheshire East cared for children live as close to their home community as possible, wherever this is safe. This will ensure that children can continue to feel connected to their families and local community. It also reduces the geographical footprint of children, families and staff as travel is reduced.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1 The recommendations will affect children and young people across all areas of Cheshire East, mostly our most vulnerable.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1 We will continue to consult and engage with all our key stakeholders as we develop and implement our plans for improvement.

9. Access to Information

9.1 The published report can be found on the following Ofsted page:

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80447>

10. Access to Information

10.1 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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Cheshire East Council

Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 18 November 2019 to 29 November 2019

Lead inspector: Shabana Abasi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

Since the single inspection framework (SIF) inspection in 2015, and the focused visit in October 2018, the local authority has made significant progress in some service areas. Arrangements in the integrated front door have been strengthened, ensuring that referrals about children for whom there are safeguarding concerns are almost always dealt with quickly and appropriately. The scale and effectiveness of the early help services has improved, enabling more children and families to access timely and appropriate support. An 'edge of care' team works intensively with families to ensure that children only come into care when they need to, and that children at risk of exploitation receive a robust service. The voice of the child is a strength. Social workers are creative in their direct work with children.

However, improvement is needed in other services to ensure that children receive a consistently good service. While initial concerns are dealt with effectively and families receive a service at the right level of intervention, the subsequent interventions are not consistently good. Some vulnerable children's situations are not improving quickly enough. Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded in all service areas, and the quality of social work practice is too

inconsistent. There are avoidable delays in determining and implementing plans for some children, and not all vulnerabilities are fully recognised and addressed. Some children wait too long to enter care and experience a sense of permanence.

Children experiencing chronic long-term neglect, children who are privately fostered, and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are not always receiving appropriate help. Care leavers needing emergency accommodation are not always placed in accommodation where they feel safe and have their needs met. Senior leaders and managers were not fully aware of some of these shortfalls until the inspection. Efforts to improve foster carer recruitment have not had sufficient impact and some foster carers feel poorly supported.

What needs to improve

- The quality, consistency and analysis of assessments, and the child focus of plans.
- Management oversight of cases in pre-proceedings, to avoid drift and delay for children.
- The response to children in private fostering arrangements, children who are homeless aged 16 and 17 years old, and care leavers who need emergency accommodation.
- The quality and consistency of support and engagement with foster carers.
- Consistent management oversight and supervision in the organisation to ensure that consistent, good-quality social work practice is in place.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: requires improvement to be good.

1. Children and families benefit from a comprehensive and well-developed early help offer. The early help brokerage service based in the integrated front door is effective at identifying support for children and families at the right level of intervention. The quality of help and support provided builds families' resilience and improves the experiences of children.
2. When needs or risks increase, cases are stepped up appropriately from early help to children's social care. This escalation is timely and ensures that children receive more specialist support when needed. When professionals from partner agencies have concerns about children, they make appropriate contacts to children's social care.
3. The arrangements in the integrated front door are well embedded, and thresholds are consistently applied. Most contacts are dealt with effectively, but, for some, the response is not timely enough. Experienced social workers, supported by effective and prompt information-sharing by partner agencies, ensure that safeguarding concerns are responded to well. Children at immediate risk of significant harm are identified swiftly, and action is taken to safeguard and protect them. Work completed out of hours is picked up in a timely way by the day services. Parental consent issues are well understood, but are not always well recorded.
4. Where children and families may be at risk because of domestic abuse, the Cheshire East domestic abuse hub provides an effective 24-hour, seven-days-a-

week response, underpinned by access to a wealth of intervention and support services. This has led to a decrease in families needing to be referred to MARAC.

5. Most strategy meetings are timely, and information-sharing from relevant partners is considered carefully. This leads to appropriate decisions and actions to protect children. Child protection investigations are timely, thorough, demonstrate clear information-sharing and focus on risk. Designated officer arrangements ensure that concerns and allegations regarding staff and volunteers working with children are managed effectively.
6. Social workers are making good use of the local authority's preferred model of social work to identify risks and protective factors. However, assessments are not of a consistent quality. While the majority are detailed and identify risk, in some cases this is not rigorously analysed, and the impact on the child is not fully considered. This lack of sharpness in assessments results in child in need and child protection plans that lack specificity. Plans are not always clear about the outcome desired or timescales for their completion, and some plans are overly focused on adult need. This means that actions to address risk and improve children's welfare are not always as effective as they should be.
7. Multi-agency reviews take place regularly for children subject to child in need and child protection processes. They are well attended by partners, who collaborate effectively to evaluate progress.
8. When children in need, including those in need of protection, are identified as being at increased need or risk, they are appropriately stepped up to higher levels of intervention. However, in some cases, there is a delay in reaching this decision due to social workers and managers over-estimating parents' capacity to change. In some instances, social workers' and managers' decisions to step down cases are based on an over-optimism regarding parental change that is informed by perceptions of improved compliance, rather than any significant or sustained change for the child.
9. Pre-proceedings work to try to achieve positive change for children and to avoid the need for them to come into care is not consistently timely. Some children's cases are managed within public law outline processes for too long without sufficient management oversight and review to decide whether alternative action needs to be taken to protect them. While no children were found to be at immediate risk, a small number of children were left in neglectful situations for too long.
10. Children are seen regularly, and social workers speak knowledgeably about their children and understand them very well. Social workers are creative in their direct work with children, using pictures and play to develop meaningful relationships to understand their world.

11. Management oversight of frontline practice is not consistently effective. It does not always demonstrate that it is driving plans to ensure that actions are timely and that children's life experiences improve within a timescale that is right for them. While most social workers receive regular supervision, this is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective.
12. The quality of help and protection offered to children by the disabled children's team is a strength. Social workers use a wide variety of communication methods to ensure that children's needs inform assessments. This leads to strong planning and bespoke packages of support for children and families.
13. The response to vulnerable children is not consistent for all groups of children. When young people present as homeless, there is not a sufficiently robust response to ensure that their needs are fully identified, that they are appropriately supported, or that they are made aware of their right to become looked after. Consequently, a small number of young people remain in situations of vulnerability. The response to children privately fostered is variable. Their needs are not always thoroughly assessed, and a lack of planning does not ensure that their need for permanence is addressed promptly or that they are appropriately safeguarded and supported.
14. Children at home or in care who go missing, or who are at risk of exploitation, receive robust, well-coordinated multi-agency responses that reduce risks and help protect them. The weekly missing from home and exploitation meeting is used to coordinate effective intelligence sharing, which enables swift identification of young people at risk of exploitation. When children go missing, return home interviews offered by a commissioned service are detailed and carefully consider push and pull factors. The information gathered is used effectively to inform safety planning.
15. There are well-embedded systems for tracking, assessing and safeguarding children missing education and those electively home educated. The local authority has plans to further develop relationships with parents within the electively home educated community. The Cornerstone behaviour provision is an effective early intervention model which has resulted in no primary exclusions.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: requires improvement to be good.

16. When there are immediate safeguarding concerns or risks, the local authority makes good use of its legal powers to safeguard and protect children. However, when risks are chronic rather than acute, the identification of risk and decisions to take children into care are sometimes too slow. This means that a few children remain in harmful

situations longer than they should and can enter care in an unplanned manner.

17. Where children are placed with parents under a care order, assessments and support plans are appropriate. However, some children remain on care orders at home for too long. Delays in discharging care orders mean that children are subject to statutory involvement longer than they need to be. The local authority is addressing this by tracking all children subject to care orders at home to support appropriate and timely discharge applications to court.
18. Children and families benefit from a responsive and intensive edge of care service, provided by the @act team. The team works creatively and flexibly in building on strengths to support families to improve outcomes for children, reduce risks and enable families to remain together. Where children are unable to remain in the care of their parents, family network meetings are held promptly to identify potential carers. Children who are unable to return to their birth families are supported to live with kinship carers or connected persons, including under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).
19. Children in care are seen regularly and alone by their social workers. Social workers can clearly articulate children's needs, identify their risks and vulnerabilities and describe their personalities. Children are supported by purposeful and creative direct work, which informs assessments and plans.
20. The quality of assessments and care plans is not yet consistently good. Assessments are not routinely updated to reflect changes in children's circumstances, and needs are not fully informing care planning. Written plans are not always sufficiently specific in identifying the child's needs and the support necessary. However, when spoken to, social workers are better able to articulate the focus of the support.
21. Children are well supported to make meaningful contribution to their reviews; advocacy and the need for independent visitors is considered within the reviews. Reviews are child focused and well attended and they measure the progress of children's plans. However, challenge by the independent reviewing officers (IROs) is not consistently effective. It does not always provide the level of critical evaluation required to progress children's cases with clarity and pace.
22. Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning from an early stage. However, in some cases this is not facilitated within timescales that are right for the child. Some children's cases are not presented to court at the earliest opportunity. For some children, proceedings are taking too long to be completed, because of the local authority either not complying

with court directions or with court-directed independent expert reports. Consequently, permanence is not achieved quickly enough for some children.

23. The local authority is a member of Adoption Counts, the regional adoption agency, and is being well served by these arrangements. It is benefiting from a steady increase in the number of approved adopters, which is supporting effective and timely family finding and matching. For most children whose plan is adoption, permanence is achieved in a timely manner. Decision-making for adoption is thorough and well documented. Post-adoption support for children is strong, and effective use is made of the adoption support fund to identify packages of support for children's individual needs. Most child permanence reports and life-story work are of a good standard.
24. Most children are living in placements that are meeting their needs and helping them to make good progress, including those children placed out of area and in specialist provision. When placements become fragile, stability meetings are held promptly to identify what further support and intervention is needed for children and their carers. Young people are supported to stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthdays when this meets their needs and wishes.
25. Social workers and carers are attuned to children's physical and emotional health and well-being. Children can access therapeutic support via CAMHS or other specialist providers. There are good multi-agency services to respond to child exploitation and children who go missing. Transgender children are very well supported to ensure their physical and emotional needs are met.
26. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a known service challenge. The number of approved fostering households has reduced and recent attempts to improve recruitment has not had the impact the local authority had hoped for. The quality of foster carer assessment is good. The IRO for fostering is providing an effective level of challenge to ensure that carers continue to meet the fostering standards. Foster carers reported that they have access to a range of good training, which supports them in caring for the children in their care.
27. A significant group of foster carers have raised a series of concerns over a period of time and during the inspection about the support they receive from the local authority. Inspectors found that foster carers were not always well supported and that, in some cases, working relationships were at risk of breaking down. Senior leaders are aware of the issues, and a much needed independent review of the fostering service planned prior to the inspection is underway.

28. The virtual school provides strong leadership, which is leading to improving outcomes for most children. The virtual school's focus on the attendance of children in care has led to improvements in both primary and secondary. The virtual school has an accurate understanding of the work needed to ensure that children's outcomes at key stages 2 and 4 are improved. Personal education plans are variable, and some lack specific targets for improvement, and, therefore, do not effectively support educational planning.
29. Care leavers are supported by personal advisers (PAs) who know them well and see them regularly, but the frequency of visits is not tailored to individual needs. Transitions between teams are sensitively managed. All care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans which are reviewed regularly. However, the involvement of care leavers in the development of their plans is inconsistent. Young people are supported to learn and practise independence skills. Young people's health, including mental health and emotional well-being needs, is supported effectively through a variety of health professionals, universal and specialist commissioned services. Care leavers do not routinely receive copies of their health histories. PAs and the specialist NEET worker support young people to access education, employment and training. The number of young people aged 17 to 18 in education, employment and training is in line with national figures. For those aged 19 to 21, the figure is better than the national average.
30. The local authority has strengthened its accommodation offer for care leavers. Young people who wish to move to independence benefit from attendance at the Ignition panel, and they have the opportunity to discuss their individual accommodation needs. Most care leavers live in suitable accommodation. However, a very small but significant cohort of the most vulnerable care leavers could be exposed to risks when placed in the local authority's chosen temporary accommodation. Care leavers who spoke with inspectors had poor experiences of being placed in emergency accommodation and described not feeling safe. Senior leaders already have credible plans to address the issues raised.
31. Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is effective. Immediate action is taken to safeguard and protect them. Practice with these young people shows good cultural awareness in finding suitable accommodation and wider support networks.
32. The contribution of the children in care council to service design and development includes corporate parenting strategy, the care leaver survey, and new services such as sexual health and residential services. Children in care and care leavers have contributed to the development of the pledges to children in care and care leavers.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: requires improvement to be good.

33. There has been significant improvement in practice in some but not all areas identified in the SIF inspection and the 2018 focused visit. Core areas of social work practice still require further improvement following the introduction of the local authority's chosen social work model to ensure that children and families get a consistently good response. These include children's assessments, plans, recording of decision-making, management oversight, and case supervision.
34. There is a whole-council commitment to driving improvement for children and their families, and this is demonstrated through the significant investment in increasing workforce capacity, the early help offer, commissioned services and edge of care support.
35. The corporate parenting committee, safeguarding partnership, and scrutiny function provide appropriate challenge to operational services where deficiencies are highlighted. This means that senior leaders are held accountable for the performances of services and the experiences of children.
36. Strategic partnerships are mature and responsive to changing needs in operational conditions. This is demonstrated in: strong and collaborative multi-agency work; early help services; the integrated front door; the edge of care service; and strong contextual safeguarding arrangements.
37. Senior leaders are open to external scrutiny and respond positively to critical challenge. They use this to inform and direct improvement activity. However, this approach has not been comprehensive, meaning that some required improvements have not been identified or addressed. The senior leadership is aware of the variability of social work practice and has plans in place to address this through the implementation of their practice model. The impact of this variability for some children means that their needs are not fully identified or effectively met.
38. The local authority's self-evaluation recognised some of the strengths and areas of improvement identified during this inspection. However, some areas of weaker practice found during the inspection were not identified in the self-evaluation. Senior leaders were not fully aware of, for example, the quality of oversight of children within pre-proceedings, response to private fostering arrangements, or 16- and 17-year-old homeless and care leavers needing emergency accommodation. Checks and balances that are currently in place have not always 'caught' this weaker practice.
39. The local authority undertakes regular audit activity, and an audit tracker enables senior managers to have oversight of the findings, learning and progress of identified actions to improve practice. Leaders recognise that audits are over-optimistic and are not sufficiently evaluative in balancing the importance of

compliance with an analysis of the quality of social work practice and impact for children. The moderation process is not embedded and does not provide a realistic appraisal of the quality of practice.

40. Management oversight and supervision in the organisation does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to enable staff to recognise deficits in practice and improve social work practice.
41. Senior leaders and managers have access to an array of comprehensive performance information. Monthly and quarterly reports provide analysis of performance and identify areas of focus. This has improved compliance in most areas of performance. However, performance information is not always scrutinised sufficiently to provide critical challenge of all services.
42. A strong training and development package and specific funding for additional staffing have enabled the local authority to increase workforce capacity and stability, reducing reliance on temporary agency staff. Children benefit from consistent and committed social workers who know them well. Social workers develop strong and trusted relationships with children and their parents.
43. Some social workers have higher caseloads than the local authority would want. These are monitored regularly by managers. For a small number of social workers, the volume and complexity of their workloads has meant that they have to prioritise work, resulting in drift in progress for some children.
44. The local authority's approach to increasing the skills of its workforce is well established. Training is strong and valued by staff, and there is a clear and well-supported career pathway.



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

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