

## **Children and Families Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13 Feb 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Update report on the 2021/2022 Action Plan to address the ILACS recommendations
<b>Report of:</b>	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	CF/34/22-23
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All wards

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1.** This report will provide the Children and Families Committee with an update on progress on the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in November 2019. This report will focus on progress made since the action plan was presented to committee in May 2022, and includes the recommendations from the ILACS focussed visit in November 2021. The Children and Families Committee have received (January 2023) the improvement plan subsequent to the Joint Targeted area Inspection in relation to contextual safeguarding, which is a partnership development plan and is not replicated within this action plan.
- 1.2.** Ofsted ILACS inspections review the quality of our services and how well we support, protect and safeguard children and young people, and how well we support our cared for and care experienced children and young people. Therefore, our work to continue to develop services in response to the recommendations from these inspections contributes to achieving our aims in the Corporate Plan to:
- Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
  - Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1.** Continued focus on the areas for improvement post inspection are key to our improvement journey. Senior leaders must ensure Children's Social Care are continually working towards, and accountable for the required actions to support improvement towards the identified recommendations from the ILACS inspections in November 2019 and November 2021. The senior leadership team anticipate that a full inspection will take place in 2023 however these are not scheduled or planned inspections and therefore no certainty can be offered at this stage.
- 2.2.** The Joint Targeted area Inspection in July 2022 offered an opportunity for external scrutiny of the effectiveness of partnership practice to safeguard children at risk of exploitation, including missing. In January 2023 the local authority welcomed a department of education (DfE) improvement advisor to support the partnership on their improvement journey. T. The senior leadership team have reflected on our improvement journey and our aspiration for deeper integration across our structures and seek to make further changes to our approach to improvement to continue our relentless drive to excellence for our children and young people.

## **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The Children and Families Committee is recommended to receive the update on the progress to date against the recommendations, and the impact for children and young people, recognising the areas for continued development as well as progress made.
- 3.2.** The Children and Families Committee to approve the proposal to undertake a review and refresh of the ILAC improvement plan. The decision to replace the existing plan with a broader more ambitious plan reflecting the improvement journey to date, the impact and learning achieved from the and the collective thinking of the senior leadership team, with support from the DfE improvement advisor.
- 3.3.** Committee to agree that the plan be presented to the committee in July 2023 in order to provide an opportunity for scrutiny against outcomes for children and young people and reviewed at 6 monthly intervals.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1.** The council, working with statutory partners, has legal duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people in Cheshire East. It is important that the Children and Families Committee has the opportunity to consider the achievements, progress to date, and the improvements planned ahead to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is prioritised.

## **5. Other Options Considered**

- 5.1.** Not applicable.

## **6. Background**

- 6.1. All Children's Services are subject to regular inspection by the regulator body Ofsted. Cheshire East Council's last full inspection under the ILACS framework was in November 2019. Cheshire East Children's Services were judged as 'requires improvement to be good' in this inspection. The inspection recognised that significant progress had been made in a number of areas since the previous inspection in 2015.
- 6.2. Cheshire East Council received a focused visit in November 2021 from Ofsted. This focused on our Children in Need and Child Protection (CIN/CP) service and also evaluated the impact of leaders on frontline practice and outcomes for children.
- 6.3. Cheshire East Safeguarding partnership were inspected in July 2023 in relation to the effectiveness of the partnership in safeguarding children at risk of exploitation including missing. This was a Joint Targeted Area Inspection with inspectors from HMI, CQC and Ofsted. This inspection identified priority areas for action and areas for further improvement and the partnership now have an improvement plan and board, which is chaired by the DfE improvement advisor, to ensure that improvements are made at pace.
- 6.4. Inspections under the ILACS framework evaluate the effectiveness of local authority services and how we work together as a wider partnership to support children and young people, including:
- the help and protection of children.
  - the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those who return home.
  - the arrangements for permanence for children who are cared for by the local authority, including adoption.
  - the experiences and progress of care leavers.
  - the effectiveness of leaders and managers
  - the impact we have on the lives of children and young people.
  - the quality of professional practice.
- 6.5. The ILACS framework is a complex system of inspection; the aim is to create a proportionate inspection process based on their most recent inspection judgement and intelligence gathered throughout the year. There are three different types of inspections under the framework:
- **Standard Inspection** - this inspection covers all the services above across levels of need and takes place over three weeks, with one week's notice and inspectors onsite for two weeks. At the 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. Authorities that are already judged to be good or outstanding have a shorter standard inspection which takes place over two weeks.

- **Focused Visit** - these inspections focus on one area in particular. Prior to the recent focused visit in November 2021 on our Children in Need and Child Protection Service (CIN/CP) we had a focused visit on cared for children and care leavers. These inspections take place over two weeks and inspectors are onsite for two days. At the 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, and 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 the end of the inspection, a letter is written which outlines strengths and areas for improvement, no overall judgement is given.

## **6.6. Progress against the Recommendations from the Ofsted ILACS Inspection 2019 and further areas for improvement from the Focused Visit**

- 6.7.** Following the inspection in 2019, Children’s Services have been driven to address the areas for improvement identified where some progress has been evidenced in our focused visit into child in need a child protection and in some areas of our performance. With the current action plans the service have been able to remain focused on the areas that the inspection identified as requiring further improvement. However, some of the progress previously achieved has been impacted by challenges in the recruitment and retention of frontline colleagues, rising demand, increased complexity and further inspection activity. We have maintained a solid focus on our legal and statutory requirements however seek to progress further in our ambition to deliver truly excellent service to support and safeguard children and young people.
- 6.8.** At this point in our improvement journey it is necessary to review and refresh our approach, strategy and action planning, to embed the rich learning and reflection that further inspection has offered us as a single agency and also as a partnership.

## **7. Consultation and Engagement**

- 7.1.** Children’s Social Care consult and engage with key stakeholders as part of service delivery. For the purposes of the period referenced, consultation has taken place specifically with foster carers, and cared for children and young people accessing emergency accommodation. Future consultation will take place with our stakeholders to ensure that our ambition is shared and that our planned activity on our continued improvement journey is achievable at pace.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Legal**

**8.1.1.** Ofsted inspections are conducted under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

**8.1.2.** Cheshire East has a statutory responsibility to safeguard children and young people within the borough and the service operates within the relevant legal framework.

### **8.2. Finance**

**8.2.1.** Financial plans are currently being reviewed to ensure that the service can continue to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people in Cheshire East and will be reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

### **8.3. Policy**

**8.3.1.** Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring that together, we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young. Our priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people are driven through the council's Corporate Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan, and the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy.

### **8.4. Equality**

**8.4.1.** Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are taken into account and supported.

### **8.5. Human Resources**

**8.5.1.** Recruiting and retaining high quality social workers and managers is crucial in supporting us to achieve consistently good practice for children and young people.

### **8.6. Risk Management**

**8.6.1.** There are reputational and financial risks of not providing good Children's Services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are minimised by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve where areas for development are identified.

### **8.7. Rural Communities**

**8.7.1.** Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

## 8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1. Our plans intend to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people across the borough, in particular those that are most vulnerable. Cheshire East Council has a Corporate Parenting responsibility for children in their care. Full council made pledges to cared for children and young people in December 2022 in line with the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy.

## 8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

## 8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. Children's services continue to support the council with climate change objectives.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
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Appendices:	Action Plan to address the Ofsted ILACS Recommendations
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Children's Inspection Report 2019</a> <a href="#">Children's Services Focused Visit Report 2021</a>