

Children and Families Committee

Date of Meeting:	6 October 2021
Report Title:	Update report on the 2021/2022 Action Plan to address the ILACS recommendations
Report of:	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
Report Reference No:	CF/08/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** This report will provide the Children and Families Committee with an update on progress against the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in November 2019. Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee were updated on progress in the interim period from the last inspection. This report will focus on the progress made since the action plan was updated in April 2021 under the leadership of the newly appointed Director of Children's Social Care.
- 1.2.** Ofsted ILACS inspections review the quality of our services and how well we 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 aim in the Council's 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 Parenting to our children in care.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** The Children and Families Committee is recommended to scrutinise the progress to date against the recommendations, and the impact for

children and young people, recognising the achievements and progress made, and to seek assurance around ongoing areas for further development.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. 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 Children and Families Committee have 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.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1. Not applicable.

5. Background

5.1. 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.

5.2. 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 children 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.

5.3. 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 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. 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. We had a focused 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.

5.4. We are expecting to receive an Ofsted focused visit this year. As part of a visit Ofsted will evaluate whether we have made progress against the recommendations from the last inspection.

5.5. Progress against the Recommendations from the Ofsted ILACS Inspection 2019

5.6. Following the inspection, Children's Services have implemented strategies to address the shortfalls identified and have continued to drive forward our ambition for children and young people in Cheshire East. The action plan to address the recommendations from the 2019 inspection, and the progress to date against the actions, is included within the Appendix. The action plan was updated in April 2021 under the leadership of the newly appointed Director of Children's Social Care.

5.7. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the ability to progress some recommendations at the pace desired however as we move into recovery and 18 months into the pandemic there is evidence that the impact of the delay is being mitigated and the quality of practice is continuing to improve.

5.8. The action plan identifies that progress has been made in relation to the quality of social work practice and management oversight however there is still more to do. The service has set strategic objectives for ourselves and with our statutory partners to reduce the impact of neglect for children living in Cheshire East. We have also been able to improve the relationships with our foster carers and our recruitment activity is producing more homes for children and young people to enable to remain connected and living in their communities.

6. Consultation and Engagement

6.1. 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.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

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

7.2. Finance

7.2.1. Financial plans are due to be 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.

7.3. Policy

7.3.1. 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 Corporate Parenting Strategy.

7.4. Equality

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

7.5. Human Resources

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

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1.** 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.

7.7. Rural Communities

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

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 7.8.1.** 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 the children in their care. Full Council made pledges to cared for children and young people in December 2018 in line with the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

7.9. Public Health

- 7.9.1.** There are no direct implications for public health.

7.10. Climate Change

- 7.10.1.** Children's Services continue to support the Council with Climate change objectives.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Action Plan to address the Ofsted ILACS Recommendations
Background Papers:	Cheshire East Ofsted Inspection Report November 2019