

**OPEN**

## **Children and Families Committee**

**Monday, 13 November 2023**

### **Children's Services Improvement Plan**

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**Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: CF/16/23-24**

**Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);**

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report briefs committee on Ofsted inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS), our improvement and impact plan which addresses previous inspection findings, and the findings from our self-evaluation of the impact of early help and social care practice on outcomes for children and young people.
- 2 Our improvement plan contributes to the council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 priority to protect and support our communities and safeguard children and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation, and to be the best corporate parents to our children and young people in care.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 3 We are currently expecting two major Ofsted inspections of children's services in Cheshire East. This report provides a briefing on the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS). ILACS inspections inspect children's services across the levels of need, including prevention and early help, child in need and child protection, cared for services, care leavers, and education for vulnerable pupils.
- 4 Cheshire East Council is expecting to receive a standard inspection, which takes place over three weeks and covers all the areas listed above. The inspection findings are included in an inspection report which will be published on the Ofsted website following the inspection.

- 5 The early help and children's social care improvement and impact plan (appendix 1) sets out how we will continue to improve and develop the quality of services which fall under the ILACS framework. The plan is based on Ofsted's evaluation criteria from the ILACS framework, so assessed our services against what good quality services look like, and identified areas where we want to strengthen our practice.
- 6 Every local authority is required to complete a self-evaluation of the quality of services each year for their annual conversation with Ofsted. The self-evaluation is also required to be submitted in an ILACS inspection. The self-evaluation is designed to give an overview of the quality of services and their impact on children and young people, including strengths, areas of weaker practice, challenges and key priorities for the year. The key findings from the current self-evaluation will be provided as a presentation to committee. The findings from the self-evaluation have informed the improvement and impact plan.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note that Cheshire East Council is expecting to receive a standard inspection of local authority children's services.
2. Scrutinise the early help and children's social care improvement and impact plan to ensure that the right actions are in place to deliver high quality support to children and young people.
3. Scrutinise the findings from the self-evaluation of early help and social care practice (these will be provided in a presentation during the meeting).

#### Background

- 7 We are currently expecting two major Ofsted inspections of children's services in Cheshire East:
  - An inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS)
  - A special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) area inspection.
- 8 This report provides a briefing on the ILACS inspection.
- 9 ILACS inspections inspect children's services across the levels of need, including prevention and early help, child in need and child protection, cared for services, care leavers, and education for vulnerable pupils. Although it is a local authority inspection, inspectors will review how

effectively we work together as a partnership to protect children and young people.

- 10 There are different types of inspections local authorities can receive under the [ILACS framework](#). Cheshire East Council is expecting to receive a standard inspection, which covers all the services listed above, as these usually take place every three years, and our last standard inspection was in November 2019.
- 11 A standard inspection takes place over three weeks. During week one, the local authority is required to submit performance and management information on our services for inspectors to review and analyse. In weeks two and three, inspectors are based in Cheshire East and meet with children and young people, families, foster carers and adopters, practitioners, managers, and partners and review the quality of our work with families. Inspectors review children's case records, shadow workers in day-to-day practice and observe practice in multi-agency meetings. The inspection focuses on practice within the last 6 months.
- 12 Inspectors judge practice under the following areas:
  - Overall effectiveness
  - The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
  - The experiences and progress of children in care
  - The experiences and progress of care leavers
  - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
- 13 Inspectors will judge each area as either:
  - Outstanding
  - Good
  - Requires improvement to be good
  - Inadequate.
- 14 The findings of the inspection and the judgements will be included in an inspection report which will be published on the Ofsted website following the inspection. Cheshire East's previous inspection reports are available on the [Ofsted website](#).

- 15 The early help and children's social care improvement and impact plan (appendix 1) sets out how we will continue to improve and develop the quality of services which fall under the ILACS framework. The plan will be reported regularly to an improvement and impact board which will evaluate the impact of improvements on frontline practice and outcomes for children and young people. This board will be accountable to the corporate safeguarding accountabilities group and the Children and Families Committee. As our action plan on how we will continue to improve services, this will be a key document which will be scrutinised by inspectors during an ILACS inspection.
- 16 A new plan has been created to cover this year's activity from September 2023-2024. The plan is based on Ofsted's evaluation criteria from the ILACS framework, so assessed our services against what good quality services look like, and identified areas where we want to strengthen our practice. The plan also addresses the areas for development identified in previous inspections, except the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) carried out in July 2022, as there is a separate partnership JTAI action plan already in place (progress on this plan has been previously reported to committee).
- 17 Key performance measures will be used to evaluate progress against the improvement and impact plan, and it is proposed that these will be shared with committee on a six monthly basis.
- 18 Every local authority is required to complete a self-evaluation of the quality of services each year for their annual conversation with Ofsted. The self-evaluation is also required to be submitted in week one of an ILACS inspection. The self-evaluation is designed to give an overview of the quality of services and their impact on children and young people, including strengths, areas of weaker practice, challenges and key priorities for the year.
- 19 It is important that the self-evaluation is an accurate reflection of the quality of practice. Inspectors will test how accurate the self-evaluation is to inform their judgement on how well leaders understand the quality of support, any gaps/weaker areas of practice, and whether leaders respond quickly and effectively to improve areas for development and address challenges.
- 20 The self-evaluation will be reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis as part of our regular evaluation and quality assurance activity. This will support us to address any areas for development that are identified through the self-evaluation in our improvement and impact plan.

- 21 The key findings from the current self-evaluation will be provided as a presentation to committee. The findings from the self-evaluation have informed the improvement and impact plan.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 22 The improvement and impact plan and self-evaluation of practice have been completed in consultation with the services involved and have incorporated findings from wider consultation with children, young people, families and practitioners, such as the compliments and complaints process and staff surveys.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 23 One of the key areas of focus for the Children and Families Committee is to review performance and the scrutinise the effectiveness of services for children and young people.

## **Other Options Considered**

- 24 The committee could choose not to receive the improvement and impact plan, and/or the findings from the self-evaluation of practice, but this would limit the committee's effectiveness in overseeing and scrutinising services to children and the impact of services on children and young people's outcomes.

<b>Option</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Risk</b>
Don't scrutinise/receive the improvement and impact plan and/or the self-evaluation findings	The committee does not have oversight of the plan and its impact on outcomes for children and young people, or the current quality of services, so limits its ability to drive improvements to services.	There is not sufficient council leadership/ oversight to drive improvements to services.

## **Implications and Comments**

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 25 The local authority is statutorily required to provide social care services for children, young people and their families.

### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 26 There are no financial implications or changes required to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as a result of the recommendations in this report.

### *Policy*

- 27 The Children and Families Committee is responsible for services which keep children and young people safe and enable them to achieve to their full potential. The committee is responsible for oversight and scrutiny of the impact of services on outcomes for children and young people.

	<p><b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b></p> <p>Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.</p> <p>Protect and support our communities and safeguard children and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation.</p> <p>Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.</p>	
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### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 28 There are no equality, diversity and inclusion implications – children and young people’s diverse individual needs, experiences, culture and backgrounds are considered as part of our support to them. ILACS inspections will consider the extent to which the local authority complies with the relevant legal duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

### *Human Resources*

- 29 Recruitment and retention of practitioners and managers within frontline services is essential in building high quality services. We have experienced staffing challenges in some teams but we are now in a more positive position. Recruitment and retention will continue to be a key area of focus over 2023/24.

### *Risk Management*

- 30 There is a risk that if our improvement and impact plan is not effective in driving improvements to services, and/or that if our self-evaluation is not an accurate reflection of the quality of our practice, that our services and/or leadership will be judged to not be of the required quality during an inspection. We know that when services receive a negative judgement in inspection this impacts on team morale, can result in workforce turnover, and makes it more challenging to recruit. Addressing any significant deficits identified during an inspection can also require investment so there is also a financial risk to a negative inspection. A negative inspection also poses a reputational risk to the council.
- 31 Challenge sessions have been held with heads of service to ensure that our self-evaluation has a strong evidence-base that we can demonstrate on inspection. A peer challenge on our self-evaluation will be held with another North West local authority in January 2024 to assess its accuracy, our impact on outcomes for Cheshire East children and young people, and the effectiveness of our plans to drive improvements.

### *Rural Communities*

- 32 Our vulnerable children and young people exist in all communities, including rural communities.

### *Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*

- 33 The improvement and impact plan aims to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people. It is vital that we provide high quality support to these children and young people as we know that for some, the experiences they have that lead them to require our support can have an impact on their long-term outcomes, health and wellbeing.

### *Public Health*

- 34 The improvement and impact plan aims to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people and so should have a positive overall impact on the health and wellbeing of these Cheshire East children and young people.

### *Climate Change*

- 35 There are no implications for climate change.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Lauren Conway lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement and Impact Plan
Background Papers:	None