



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 21 JANUARY 2020**

**OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S
SOCIAL CARE SERVICES**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of children's social care services in Leicestershire and to present the Action Plan which has been developed to address the recommendations in the Ofsted Report. The Ofsted findings and the County Council's response are attached to this report as Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Cabinet, in March 2017, noted the outcome of an Ofsted inspection of children's social care services which had taken place at the end of 2016 and agreed an Action Plan which set out the approach to the future development and improvement of services to children and families in Leicestershire.
3. A report was presented to the Cabinet in December 2019 that set out the outcome of the recent inspection and the draft action plan.
4. The Ofsted Inspection was undertaken in accordance with the framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services.

Background

5. Ofsted undertakes the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services on all local authority areas with the statutory responsibility for delivering children's services. The inspection framework inspects local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers and the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people and the quality of professional practice.
6. The last full inspection of the County Council's children's services was undertaken in November 2016 when the services were graded as "requiring improvement to be good" across all areas. Following the 2016 Inspection a

comprehensive action plan was created in order to drive improvements across a number of key areas in the Department including the development of a quality assurance framework, social work development programme, practice and management standards, improved quality of supervision for staff, service improvements and the development of strong policies and procedures.

7. In November 2018 a focused visit was undertaken by Ofsted on the Front Door, which deals with all new requests for services coming into the Department, the conclusion of which was that services had improved from November 2016. (“Focused visits” evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children and take place between standard and short inspections).

Leicestershire’s Ofsted Inspection

8. The inspection was carried out over three weeks from 16 September to 4 October 2019, involving 8 inspectors. The inspectors considered the quality of work across Early Help and Children’s Social Care and the impact of services on children and young people in Leicestershire.
9. The inspectors read case files, met with staff and leaders in the Department and considered the Department’s Self Assessment of its performance and improvement journey since the inspection in 2016.

Inspection Findings

10. The findings of the inspection are detailed in a report from Ofsted, attached at Appendix A to the report. This includes gradings indicating how the service is judged to be performing in four broad areas. The grades available to Ofsted are (1) inadequate – which triggers formal intervention by DfE, (2) requires improvement to be good (3) good, and (4) outstanding.
11. To date, in relation to overall effectiveness, around 13% of councils in England have been graded inadequate, 35% require improvement to be good, 36.5% are good and 15.5% are outstanding.
12. Leicestershire has been graded as follows:-

Service Area	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.	Requires Improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers.	Good
Overall effectiveness.	Requires Improvement

Report Headlines

13. Ofsted identified that progress has been made in many areas of children's social care services in Leicestershire since the last inspection in 2016, when all judgements were graded as 'requires improvement to be good'. However, it acknowledged that whilst services for children in care are now judged to be good, those for children needing help and protection still require some further improvement. The report further emphasised that overall, children are not experiencing good practice consistently enough across all services, and that the extent and impact of the remaining areas for improvement are substantial. For these reasons, in terms of overall effectiveness Ofsted concluded that the services still require improvement to be good.

Leicestershire's Strengths

14. Ofsted recognised that the commitment and investment by political and corporate leaders, together with effective work by staff and senior managers, have meant that responses to the needs of children and families have improved in many areas across children's services. For instance -
- Leicestershire provides a good variety of Early Help Services which support parents to safely care for their children.
 - Children receive a timely and effective response when they need help and protection in the evenings and at weekends. Swift action is taken to ensure that children are protected, with those at risk of immediate harm seen early, and initial assessments of their needs are prompt. Moreover, improvements in the first response service mean that checks are now timelier, and thresholds are more clearly understood.
 - Disabled children who need help and protection receive a good service. They are seen regularly, according to their plan, and are supported effectively by social workers who know them well.
 - Inspectors were impressed by the Vulnerability Hub and its effectiveness in safeguarding children and young people who are at risk of harm or who are experiencing harm from sexual exploitation, as well as those who go missing from home and from care. Ofsted highlighted the strong multi-agency collaboration and investment that enables the work to be effective.
 - Inspectors praised the effective systems in place to monitor the welfare of children who are electively home educated, as well as those who are missing from education.
 - Most children in care and care leavers make good progress, are settled in good homes with their needs well met, and their lives are better because of the improved services.

- Social workers have manageable caseloads, enabling them to get to know the children well and work with them. Furthermore, most children enter care only when it is necessary and appropriate to do so.
- The Fostering and Adoption Services were identified by inspectors as very strong, in particular the training and support provided to children in foster care and to foster carers, post-adoption support and the Adoption Panel process.
- Most care leavers live in suitable accommodation, and the majority are participating in education, training or employment. Inspectors noted that the County Council has aspirations for its children in care and care leavers and holds regular events that celebrate their achievements.

Areas for Further Improvement

15. Ofsted identified a number of areas for improvement, in addition to the key actions set out in the report, in particular -
- That the quality of social work practice is still too variable, particularly for children needing help and protection. In addition, core areas of social work practice (in particular planning and recording) and management oversight still need to be improved.
 - Inspectors noted that plans for children in need or at risk did not always state the specific actions that needed to be taken, and most plans lacked timeframes within which actions needed to be completed, and were concerned that this might inhibit timely progress and could lead to drift and delay for children.
 - Inspectors considered that permanence planning was significantly weaker for those children who needed options other than adoption (for instance, foster or residential placements) and that permanence is not being sufficiently driven through management oversight or planning.
 - Supervision of social workers is not of a high enough quality to ensure that social work practice is always effective and meeting the needs of children in a timely way.

Ofsted's Key Recommendations

16. The report contains six recommendations for improvement covering the following areas:-
- i. The timeliness of assessment and help for children who are not identified as being at immediate risk of significant harm but who live with the impact of cumulative risk and harm.
 - ii. The timeliness of work to secure positive change for children during the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline.

- iii. The quality and consistency of social work practice in care planning, including the quality of supervision and oversight to prevent unnecessary drift and delay for children.
 - iv. The quality of case recording to enable new workers to more easily understand a child's history and circumstances.
 - v. Planning for permanence for children whose plan is not adoption.
 - vi. Monitoring of the quality and appropriateness of alternative education provision for children in care.
17. The action plan prepared in response to this is attached as Appendix B. This builds on the continuous improvement plan (The Road to Excellence) that was developed as a four-year plan following the 2016 Ofsted inspection. The latest action plan must be submitted to Ofsted by 10th February 2020.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

18. There are no specific equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The findings apply to all children and young people with whom the County Council is engaged regardless of any protected characteristic. The changes as a result of the Action Plan will help improve the outcomes for children and their families.
19. Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments will be undertaken as appropriate should there be any reviews of Departmental strategies or services.

Appendices

Appendix A - Ofsted Report
Appendix B - Action Plan

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 10 March 2017

Ofsted Report - Leicestershire: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers (2016)

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4859&Ver=4>

Ofsted – framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None

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