



Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee

28 June 2022

Report of the Interim Director for Children's Services

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and action plan

Summary

1. This report presents the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care under the Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) framework, which was conducted between 7th and 18th March 2022.
2. Members are asked to consider the council's draft action plan in response to areas for improvement identified and to make any recommendations regarding the council's proposed submission to Ofsted.
3. The council is required to submit an action plan to Ofsted within 70 days of the publication of their report (which is 12th August 2022), outlining how the council intends to address each of the areas for improvement and the monitoring arrangements.

Background

4. The last full Safeguarding Inspection of Children's Services was in November 2016 under the previous Single Inspection

Framework (SIF). At this time York was judged to be ‘Good’ in all areas.

5. In addition to the last full inspection children’s service Ofsted has also undertaken a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (November 2018) and a focused visit (2019). As a result of the focused visit in 2019 the need to improve was identified and a local Improvement Board was established.
6. The Single Inspection Framework that York was last inspected against has since been replaced by the ‘Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services’ (ILACS) framework. The new inspection framework focuses much more on the experience and outcomes for children as the basis for its judgements. The inspection does this by looking at case records and speaking to social workers and other front-line workers directly. The old inspection framework was wider in scope and spent more time considering processes, other agencies and the views from a wider range of staff, partners and elected members.

The inspection outcome

7. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements in place to help and protect 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); and the experiences and progress of care leavers. In addition Ofsted evaluated 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.
8. The Ofsted inspection team contacted York on the 28th February 2021. The inspection team then reviewed an extensive range of

data and documentary evidence before undertaking fieldwork in York between the 7th and 18th March 2022.

9. The inspection report was published on the 4th May 2022 and is available through the Ofsted website¹. The inspection confirmed that the quality of children's services has not been maintained following the last inspection in 2016. The overall inspection judgement was that York 'Required improvement to be good'. The judgements contributing to this outcome are shown 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

10. The report identifies that senior leaders and elected members are well informed and clearly sighted on where improvements are needed. Ofsted recognised the work of the improvement board in improving services but also highlighted that the pace of improvement had been too slow. Whilst the majority of services were starting to show improvement it was not yet fully embedded to ensure consistently good services for children.

¹ <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50182483>

11. The progress of improvement activity has been regularly reported through the Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee since the initiation of improvement activity in 2019.
12. The report clearly identifies as a strength that throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, staff and families have been supported. The vast majority of York's improvement activity prior to inspection has taken place against the backdrop of COVID-19.
13. The pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge for children, young people and families, as well as for services working to support them. Despite these challenges improvement activity has delivered significant change for York. This includes:
 - a. The introduction of our new structure in January 2022 represented over £300k of additional investment. The restructure increased the number of established social work posts from 67FTE to 85FTE. A rise of 18FTE social work capacity since 2016.
 - b. The development and launch of a new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and new multi-agency Thresholds (levels of need) document.
 - c. The development of York's early help offer and more recently the development of Targeted Family Support in order avoid the escalation of need or risk.
 - d. The development and implementation of integrated pathways to allow the 'step-up and step-down' of children entering and exiting social care interventions.
 - e. The development and launch of a dedicated Exploitation Team.

- f. The delivery of our workforce strategy to develop new social workers through our Front Line programme, partnership with the University of York, Step-Up to Social Work programme and social work apprenticeships.
 - g. The further development of good quality performance data and management information to help drive improvements in practice and outcomes for children and young people.
- 14. The Ofsted inspection team recognised the challenges that the pandemic caused. The inspection report did identify that the pace of improvement had accelerated in recent months but that these improvements were not yet fully embedded.
- 15. Critically Ofsted reported there were no children seen during the inspection who were found to be at immediate risk of harm.
- 16. The Ofsted inspection team highlighted a number of areas of strength, including:
 - a. That there is commitment to ensure that the needs of children are prioritised and corporate investment to support ongoing improvement.
 - b. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub provided an effective single point of contact for all concerns about children and that families access the right level of support as quickly as possible.
 - c. Families are supported by an effective targeted early help service which prevents escalation to statutory service for many children.
 - d. Where children need protection strategy meetings are held quickly and lead to action to safeguard children.
 - e. Private fostering arrangements are effective.

- f. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) oversee children's plans effectively and ensure that realistic plans are progressed.
 - g. Children in Care and care leavers are encouraged to learn and are supported by a highly effective Virtual School.
 - h. Care leavers are supported well by personal advisors who know them well and support them to lead independent lives.
 - i. Assessments for adoptive carers are completed promptly and adopters have access to range of post-adoption support and report high quality support from their adoption workers.
17. The inspection report sets out seven areas that require improvement.
- a. The consistency of written records so that they provide an accurate account of decision-making for all children.
 - b. The quality of assessments to ensure that they consistently inform care planning.
 - c. The effectiveness of social work supervision in progressing plans for children and addressing practice shortfalls.
 - d. The analysis of return home interviews.
 - e. Responses to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless.
 - f. The pace of planning for children in unregistered children's homes.
 - g. Children's influence and attendance at the corporate parenting board.

The council's action plan

18. The Ofsted inspection team found that senior managers know themselves well and that the self-evaluation provided to ahead of Ofsted provided a realistic assessment of the quality of services and children's experiences. The majority of recommendations made by Ofsted had already been identified locally and work to address these is already underway.
19. The council is required to submit an action plan to Ofsted within 70 days of the publication of their report (which is 12th August 2022), outlining how the council intends to address each of the areas for improvement and the monitoring arrangements. A draft copy of this action plan is provided as Annex A.
20. Under the ILACS framework York should expect to be re-inspected fully within 3 years. In the intervening period inspection activity will take the form of:
 - a. Annual engagement with the Corporate Director of Children's Services and Ofsted.
 - b. Either:
 - i. Two focused visits from Ofsted, or
 - ii. One focused visit and one Joint Targeted Area Inspection
21. The Ofsted Action Plan will be regularly monitored through the council's Children's Service's Assurance and Ambition Board. The purpose of the Assurance and Ambition Plan is to oversee and drive service improvement and ensure children and young people have services which understand their lived experience and deliver positive outcomes. The Assurance and Ambition Board meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and attended by Lead Member for Children, Young People and Education.

22. Alongside the Assurance and Ambition board there are further weekly and monthly oversight of performance and improvement activity driven by the Corporate Director for Children's Services and the Director for Children's Safeguarding.
23. Final challenge and assurance will take place through the Executive and Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee as required.
24. The City of York Safeguarding Children's Partnership will be an important forum to deliver the changes needed across multi-agency partners as well as the Youth Justice board. The work required to improves children's services does not sit in isolation and will be closely linked through the CYSCP to improvement activity undertake by North Yorkshire Police, health and partners across the city.

Council Plan

25. The delivery of high quality children's services will support the aims of the Council Plan which are to improve the quality of life for residents by supporting good health and well-being and by providing a better start for Children and Young People in York.

Implications

26. Financial – Over recent years there has been significant investment into children's services. The 2022/23 council budget included a total of £4.7m in growth across children and education. There continues to be significant pressure of delivering children's services within budget. The successful delivery of improvement activity will contribute to easing this pressure.
27. Human Resources (HR) – None at this stage.

28. Equalities – The delivery of the Ofsted Action Plan will support the council in its overall duty to promote equality and address the needs of vulnerable or marginalised children, young people and families therefore contributing to the reduction of inequalities across the city faced by children and young people.
29. Legal – The final Ofsted Action Plan must be published within 70 working days of the inspection report being published. The draft action plan is presented as Annex A.
30. Information Technology (IT) – The Ofsted Action Plan includes actions to review the functionality of IT systems used by children's social care. The full implications of these actions are not fully known at this time and will be managed through existing protocols for change management.
31. Crime & disorder – Delivery of the Ofsted Action Plan will ultimately safeguard children and young people, reduced the number of children exposed to risk and the impact of that exposure.
32. Sustainability None
33. Other implications None

Contact Detail

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Report Approved

Date 20/06/2022

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A – Draft Ofsted Action Plan