



## CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 6 July 2021

**Subject Heading:**

Findings from Ofsted Focused Visit May 2021

**SLT Lead:**

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**Policy context:**

Sharing the finding of the recent Ofsted Focused Visit with Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this report to the Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee is to provide an overview of the findings from the Ofsted Focused Visit in May 2021, and to outline our next steps.

The full details of the findings can be found in the letter published on the Ofsted website on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> June and this can be found at Appendix A.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Committee are asked to note the content of this report and provide comment on its content.

### REPORT DETAIL

1. Under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework, our Ofsted Focused Visit took place on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May, following notification on 27<sup>th</sup> April.
  - 1.1 The visit was undertaken remotely, following discussion and agreement with the DCS and the HMI Lead Inspector. In line with Ofsted's phased approach to restarting inspection activity, the Local Authority was given

notice of the visit ten working days in advance, rather than the usual five days.

- 1.2** The team of five inspectors met with over 25 members of the service over the two day visit, as well as the Chief Executive, Lead Member, Foster Carers, Schools, Children in Care Council and Care Leaver group. The inspection team also undertook remote case sampling outside of direct conversations, and were provided with a large array of supporting documents and performance data.
- 1.3** The visit considered the nine key decision making points throughout a child's social care journey, from the front door through to legal proceedings and leaving care. The visit also considered how we have safeguarded vulnerable children during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on how education was prioritised and promoted. Ofsted acknowledged the significant impact that Covid-19 has had on our borough and on our workforce, noting the high infection and death rate and how services have had to adapt to respond.
- 1.4** The findings note that 'strong, timely corporate and political support for children's services has enabled leaders to mitigate some of the impact of the pandemic.' Inspectors also found that 'strengthened partnership arrangements are enabling a proactive and collaborative effort to support the most vulnerable families at a time of increased demand.'
- 1.5** There were no priority actions identified during the visit which, if found, would indicate concerns requiring an immediate response.
- 1.6** There was progress noted by Ofsted against the recommendations from the last inspection in 2018. These include the improved effectiveness of the quality assurance framework, strengthened partner agency attendance at strategy meetings and the effective and timely decision making within the MASH. The letter also highlights the proactive approach by the social workers in the children with disabilities service and the 'dedicated and knowledgeable' leaving care service.
- 1.7** In relation to schools, it was highlighted that leaders have built positive relationships with schools and have collaborated well to manage the increase in applications for elective home education. It was also noted that children in care routinely continue to attend the same school, minimising the disruption in their lives. Going forward, we need to ensure that there are consistent and effective feedback mechanisms to schools following the receipt of referrals and interventions ending. Work to develop this is already underway.
- 1.8** Inspectors recognised that social care leaders have an accurate understanding of children's services and have maintained a focus on improving services to better safeguard children and to improve their outcomes. Leaders know that there is more to do to ensure consistency in

the quality of assessments, plans and supervision and how these are recorded.

**1.9** The letter from Ofsted provides three areas of improvement for us to build on going forward. These are; the quality of analysis within assessments, rationales for decisions to step-down to early help services and the quality of supervision. Our response to the recommendations and findings from the visit forms part of our ongoing improvement activity. This is managed operationally by the Children's Services Improvement Board with oversight provided quarterly at the multi-agency Executive Board of which the Chief Executive, Lead Member and Council Leader are members.

**1.10** In relation to our response to Ofsted, our priority over the next three months is recruitment and retention, to ensure a permanent and skilled workforce is in place. In order to achieve the necessary consistency in quality of practice needed to progress to the next stage of our improvement journey, stability in our workforce is essential.

**1.11** Ofsted do not provide a grading following a focused visit, however the findings of the visit are taken into account when planning our next inspection or visit.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:** Any potential financial risk due to work to be done described in the paper will be covered by the 2021-22 Children's budget.

**Legal implications and risks:** There are no apparent legal implications in noting the content of the report

**Human Resources implications and risks:** Workforce issues in response to the Ofsted recommendations will be managed in accordance with the Council's HR policies and procedures

**Equalities implications and risks:** OFSTED recommendations will be considered in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure there are only neutral and positive effects of implementing OFSTED recommendations.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**Appendix A**

Link to Ofsted Report – once published