

Report to Scrutiny

Item Number:

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No
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Subject of Report:	Overview of Children's Social Care Services, the 2019 Ofsted Inspection and its Outcomes
Meeting:	Scrutiny Review Panel 2 – 2020/2021: Children's Services Ofsted Improvements 11 November 2020
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Scrutiny Officer:	Harjeet Bains Scrutiny Review Officer Email: bainsh@ealing.gov.uk Tel: 020-8825 7120
Cabinet Responsibility:	Councillor Yvonne Johnson (Schools & Children's Services and Deputy Leader)
Director Responsibility:	Carolyn Fair Director Children & Families Email: cfair@ealing.gov.uk Tel: 020-8825 5177
Brief:	To consider an overview of the Children's Social Care Services, the 2019 Ofsted Inspection and its outcomes.
Recommendations:	That the Panel notes the information provided, ask questions and make recommendations accordingly.

1.0 Overview of Children's Social Care Services, the 2019 Ofsted Inspection and its Outcomes

- 1.1 Carolyn Fair (Director Children & Families) and Gary Jones (Assistant Director, Children's Social Care) will attend the Panel meeting to provide Members with an overview of the Ealing Children's Social Care Services, the 2019 Ofsted Inspection and its outcomes.
- 1.2 The Panel is asked to note the information provided, ask questions and make recommendations accordingly.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report summarises how Ealing Children's Services is meeting its statutory responsibilities and continuing to evidence improvement against the 2019 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) recommendations. The report updates members of the Scrutiny Panel on the Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting held in September 2020 and the recommencement of ILACS focused visits. Appendix 8 provides an overview to the Panel of the Children & Families Services response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 1.4 The following documents are appended to this report for the Panel's consideration:

Appendix 1:	Children's Social Care Annual Self-Assessment July 2020 (<i>PowerPoint Presentation Slides</i>)
Appendix 2:	Summary of Ofsted Improvement Plan 2019/20 – 26 August 2020
Appendix 3:	Annual Engagement Meeting Letter
Appendix 4a:	Children's Social Care Services – Workforce Strategy
Appendix 4b:	Summary of Workforce
Appendix 4c:	Workforce Strategy Action Plan
Appendix 4d:	Career Progression Scheme
Appendices 5a-5c	Samples of Weekly Directors Messages to Staff
Appendix 6:	Psychology Resource Working from Home
Appendix 7:	Staff Support Offer – COVID-19
Appendix 8:	COVID-19 Pandemic – Children and Families Services response to COVID-19 (<i>PowerPoint Presentation Slides</i>)

- 1.5 The Ofsted ILACS Inspection is one of a cycle of inspections for Local Authorities in Ealing and Wales. This inspection gives a view on the quality of work to support and safeguard children and young people in Ealing. Therefore, the authority needs to carefully consider the inspection findings and progress being made against inspection priority actions.

Key Implications

- 1.6 The current Ofsted regulatory and inspection system known as the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services takes places over a 3-year cycle and local authorities are subject to one graded inspection within that 3-year cycle and up to 2 focussed visits and/or a Joint targeted area inspection

(JTAI) visit. The ILACS process also involves an Annual Engagement meeting between Ofsted and the authority each year and the authority is required to submit a self-assessment ahead of this meeting.

- 1.7 The following areas were identified by the Ofsted Inspectors in November 2019 as areas requiring further improvement:
- i. Social work capacity and allocation of cases
 - ii. The quality and timeliness of responses to referrals, including strategy discussions and child protection enquiries.
 - iii. The quality and consistency of management oversight and challenge by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's).
 - iv. Sufficiency of accommodation, including the range of accommodation options for care leavers
 - v. The quality and accuracy of performance reporting and quality assurance activities
 - vi. The quality of responses to children and young people who are at risk of being homeless, and children on the edge of care.
- 1.8 The Ofsted Improvement Action Plan continues to be overseen by the Children's Services Improvement Board chaired by the Executive Director of Children, Adults and Public Health and reported to the Portfolio Holder, Leader and Chief Executive on a monthly basis. Reporting to the Children's Services Improvement Board has an increased focus on evidencing outcomes for children in line with the Ofsted inspection framework grade descriptors and reporting on data exceptions.

Social work capacity and allocation of cases (actions related to recommendation i.)

- 1.9 Cabinet approved £700k following the November 2019 inspection to enhance social work capacity within front line services; to ensure the timely allocation of cases and to respond to the demand within social work teams. Progress has been made since the previous inspection in relation to the allocation of children to social workers and focused work is underway in ECIRS and the MAST services to effectively respond to the demand within teams and to ensure that we only work with families within a statutory context in line with our threshold of continuum need. Overall, there are no unallocated cases within the service, and we are working effectively with partners to respond to the demand within our system.

The quality and timeliness of referrals, including strategy discussions and child protection enquiries (actions related to recommendation ii.)

- 1.10 Managers in ECIRS are undergoing training on the consistent application of thresholds. Thresholds training is important for managers as it supports them in being able to make consistent evidence informed decisions about children and young people who are in need (S.17 C.A 1989) or children who are at risk of significant harm (S.47 C.A 1989). The consistent quality of decision

making by managers is essential to keeping children safe and an important consideration for Ofsted inspectors during an ILACS inspection.

- 1.11 An ECIRS improvement plan is in place to support the partnership in respect of the quality and timeliness of response to referrals; improved decision making; managing the demand at the front door; multi-agency working and our domestic abuse response. The ECIRS Head of Service is responsible for implementing the plan with partner agencies and reporting progress on the plan to the Children's Services Improvement Board.
- 1.12 Progress continues to be made in effectively responding to the demand within statutory social work teams. Currently there are 1107 open children in need and child protection cases within the Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) service. Social Work Practice Guidance has been revised for social workers and managers and a range of Scrutiny Panels and Practice Forums have been created and led by Senior Managers in order to bolster improvements in practice.
- 1.13 A strategic stakeholders board chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care is in place to work closely with partner agencies to effectively respond to the demand at the front door service and to continue to drive improvements with decision making for children in need and at risk of harm. The strategic board will report into Ealing's Safeguarding Children Partnership for scrutiny and constructive challenge.
- 1.14 Child Protection training has consistently been delivered by an external consultant to social work managers to strengthen their practice in respect of child protection strategy meetings and investigations. A Focus on Practice Forum takes place three weekly and is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care to support reflective practice discussions with social work managers on active child protection investigations. Improvements need to continue to be made to the timeliness of assessments; the rate of child protection enquiries and the quality of strategy meetings. Regular auditing activity undertaken by senior officers continues to inform our learning and approach to developing our workforce.

The quality and consistency of management oversight and challenge by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) (actions related to recommendation iii.)

- 1.15 The quality and consistency of management oversight and challenge by the Independent Reviewing Officers continues to improve. Ealing Care Planning and Review Standards have been produced and a new IRO escalation service went live in March 2020. Our Mosaic workflow has been adjusted to include IRO escalations. The number of issues being raised has reduced, and where they are escalated, they are resolved swiftly.

Sufficiency of accommodation, including the range of accommodation options for care leavers (actions related to recommendation iv.)

- 1.16 Our work with corporate colleagues continues to explore the financial impact of Council Tax exemptions for Care Leavers. A paper sourced from the London Assistant Directors of Children's Services Group will inform further local work in this area. Quota housing for care leavers remains an issue due to demand vs supply. Twenty care leavers have been allocated quota housing to date while work continues with corporate colleagues to find solutions for our vulnerable cohort of young people. Eight Care Leavers have secured quota tenancies from 2019/20 allocation and twelve young people have had applications accepted for quota housing so far this year 2020/21. Private sector housing options are being actively pursued. Eighteen Care Leavers have secured private rented tenancies.

The quality and accuracy of performance reporting and quality assurance activities (actions related to recommendation v.)

- 1.17 The quality and accuracy of performance reporting and quality assurance activity is central to providing assurance to Ofsted inspectors that leaders and managers have a clear line of sight on social work services for children and families. Heads of Service continue to lead weekly performance meetings with their management teams. Power BI is being used more routinely by managers especially in respect of ensuring the timely allocation of work.
- 1.18 Regular performance data is sent to managers on a weekly basis and more progress needs to be achieved in cleansing data for children in need visits, plans and reviews and child protection data. There is a changing cultural context within the children's management team regarding their relationship with data, but managers continue to need support in consistently applying the data to their team context.
- 1.19 We have continued to make improvements to the Mosaic system that includes reconfiguring workflows, introducing some aspects of group based working, improving the accuracy of the data on the system and developing a suite of reports that aids the managers and provides the senior leadership with a dataset that enables an oversight of work and performance in the system. A Mosaic User's Group has been created that ensures users, developers and trainers are able to continually improve the standard of the system. We have also created two data officers who will lead on improving the quality of the data held on the system.

The quality of responses to children and young people who are at risk of being homeless and children on the edge of care (actions related to recommendation vi.)

- 1.20 The quality of our responses to children and young people who are at risk of being homeless and children on the edge of care continues to improve. Legal Panels are chaired by a designated Head of Service which ensures that we have a consistent application of threshold for children where the Local Authority decides to issue care proceedings to safeguard children.

- 1.21 The Legal Proceedings Panel tracker is regularly updated to ensure a continued focus on timeliness for families in pre-proceedings and in Public Law Proceedings. The Pre-proceedings letter has been revised to ensure better and more meaningful engagement of families in the Public Law Outline (PLO) process. PLO training has been delivered to social care staff.
- 1.22 We have twenty-one children where adoption is their care plan, pending the outcome of the final Court hearings. We are long term family finding for eight children and we have twenty-four children in short term foster placements where the plan is to make those long-term foster placements, subject to assessment and matching processes. COVID 19 has brought about a raft of challenges for children and young people in public law proceedings due to hearings not taking place. This will have an impact on our in-year care proceedings performance, but this is a national issue.
- 1.23 During COVID we have taken steps to provide accommodation to vulnerable young people who may not meet the criteria for At Risk of Homelessness (AROH) but had no alternative options at the time of presenting to the Local Authority in need. The panel process is on Mosaic and we have recently updated our guidance for young people to try to encourage them to attend panel with their workers if they wish to.
- 1.24 The Children's Housing Support Team supports children and families who are not eligible for services via the Housing Department but where there is a need to provide some services to the family under legislation. This includes families with no recourse to public funds. Homeless 16- and 17-year olds are also supported by this team.

Ofsted Social Care Annual Engagement Meeting

- 1.25 The Social Care Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted took place on the 3rd September via Teams. As part of ILACS, Ofsted asks each local authority (LA) to share an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of its practice with children and families. This is discussed at an annual engagement meeting (AEM), which in turn helps to inform Ofsted's decision-making about the next inspection steps they will take and their timing of the inspection.
- 1.26 Ofsted inspectors' meeting feedback included the following:
- 1.27 Our self-assessment is clear and well-presented and provided a good overview of current performance and plans. Ofsted inspectors described the self-assessment as a positive read and it provided encouraging evidence of our work and progress.
- 1.28 Ofsted noted our focus on equality, diversity and issues affected by 'black lives matter', and they are interested to hear more about the impact of this as we progress our work in this area over the next year.

- 1.29 Ofsted is aware of our challenges including the timeliness of assessment and our rate of S47 enquiries. Ofsted recognised our recent successes including the increased percentage of children placed with our foster carers. This is because of the level of wrap-around support available through Brighter Futures.
- 1.30 Officers present during the annual engagement meeting described how online meetings have enabled closer working relationships between schools and social workers and they have also been successful in supporting engagement and attendance with the safeguarding partnership.
- 1.31 Officers spoke of how the safeguarding partnership arrangements have held up well during COVID-19; strong engagement and consistent attendance have been assisted by online working. Work on serious youth violence and rapid reviews, for example, are working well. Multi-agency training is generally positive and has been able to quickly re-establish itself as an online service.

Introduction to Restart of ILACS Inspections

- 1.32 On 17 March 2020, it was agreed by the Secretary of State for Education and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to suspend routine inspection because of COVID-19. More recently, HMCI has agreed with the Secretary of State that the return to Inspecting Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) should concentrate on providing assurance across as many local areas as possible.
- 1.33 Ofsted agreed that focused visits were an appropriate way to hold Local Authority children's services to account without making a graded judgement before returning to the full routine ILACS programme. Apart from certain exceptions, inspectors will follow the guidance and methodology in the main body of the ILACS framework.
- 1.34 Ofsted has indicated that they will visit as many providers and Local Authorities as possible, prioritising those it has concerns about. It will also include a sample of local authorities judged good or outstanding at their last inspection to identify good practice that will help others with their recovery plans. We anticipate our inspection could happen at any point post October 2020.
- 1.35 The Ofsted focused visits will evaluate the quality and impact of key decision-making in three practice areas outlined below:

1) Help and Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the effectiveness of the front door with specific reference to rise in and response to referrals, section 47 enquiries and strategy discussions the progress of children subject to child protection and child need plans the progress of those recently stepped up or stepped down early help and the exercise of threshold
2) Children in care and care leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> edge of care/pre-proceedings, particularly those subject to letter before proceedings the focus on physical and mental health of children in care care leavers, including how the local authority has maintain contact with the child/care leaver and how they have facilitated contact with families placement decisions, including the quality of matching, particularly when sufficiency is a challenge
3) Impact of leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality assurance of practice and line of sight to the quality and impact of practice with children and families management and workforce capacity, including responses staff well-being the effectiveness of leaders in leading and contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective work practice

1.36 Inspectors will look at what has happened for children and families in the six months before the visit to understand children’s experiences. Ofsted’s evaluation criteria, which sets out their description of good practice, will still apply. The focus will be on child-centred practice that has been carefully risk assessed to result in the best possible decisions for children in the context of the pandemic locally.

1.37 Ofsted will be evaluating and seeking assurance about the quality and impact of practice within a challenging context, when circumstances may have resulted in decisions that may have been different to those taken in normal times. Inspectors are likely to carry out a mix of on-site and off-site evidence gathering depending on each case, considering the local context and working arrangements.

1.38 Inspectors will follow up their findings in a letter identifying areas of strength and good practice and areas where improvement is needed most. If inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will include a section that identifies areas for priority action. If inspectors identify an area for priority action, the letter will be subject to additional moderation which may affect the dates that the draft and final letter are shared. Inspectors will confirm this with the Director of Children’s Services.

2.0 Legal Implications

2.1 There are none arising directly from this information report.

3.0 Financial Implications

3.1 There are none arising directly from this information report.

4.0 Other Implications

4.1 There are none arising directly from this information report.

5.0 Background Papers

As noted in item 1.2 above.

Report Consultation

Name of Consultee	Job Title	Date Sent to Consultee	Date Response Received from Consultee	Comments Appear in Report Para
Internal				
Helen Harris	Director of Legal and Democratic Services	N/A		
Ross Brown	Chief Finance Officer	N/A		
Sam Bailey	Head of Democratic Services	30.10.20		
Cllr Karanvir Dhadwal	Panel Chair	30.10.20		
Cllr Seema Kumar	Panel Vice Chair	30.10.20		
Carolyn Fair	Director, Children and Families	30.10.20		
Gary Jones	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care	30.10.20		
Charles Barnard	Assistant Director, Early Help and SEND	30.10.20		
External				
None.				

Report History

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Authorised by Cabinet Member:	Date Report Drafted:	Report Deadline:	Date Report Sent:
N/A	29.10.20	03.10.20	02.10.20
Report No.:	Report Author and Contact for Queries:		
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