

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services

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Summary

This report summarises the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection of children's safeguarding and services for looked after children in Medway.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Medway Council was issued with an Improvement Notice by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2013 following an Ofsted Safeguarding Inspection in January and an Ofsted Looked After Children inspection in July, both of which rated its services as 'inadequate'. Since then Children's Social Care Services has been working to an Improvement Notice issued by the DfE, and an Improvement Plan which lays out the actions required to meet the requirements of the Improvement Notice. This work has been overseen by an External Improvement Board.

2. Background

2.1 The service was inspected again by Ofsted over a four week period starting in September 2015 under a Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which incorporates safeguarding services, services for looked after children, care leavers and adoption services.

2.2 This is not the same inspection framework. It is recognised that the "bar" has been raised and the SIF is a much more challenging inspection regime.

2.3 The report of the recent inspection was published on 27 November 2015 and found Medway Council's Children's Services "require improvement to be good". The independent inspectors say there are "no widespread or serious failures that leave children being harmed or at risk of harm".

- 2.4 The report finds that there have been positive changes in the experiences of children and young people in most of the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspections and highlights that there has been decisive and directive strategic management and firm leadership by the Director of Children and Adult Services, combined with robust monitoring by elected members and external and internal improvement boards.
- 2.5 It noted that senior and political leaders have been fully committed to improving services, evidenced through substantial investment in social work teams. However, inspectors have made it clear that they require further improvements before they can give the council an overall 'good' rating.
- 2.6 Services for Care Leavers were graded 'good'.
- 2.7 The "requires improvement" report rating puts Medway in line with around half of councils that have been inspected since the new Ofsted inspection framework was introduced in November 2013.
- 2.8 The report includes a set of recommendations which will support the Council in its aim to continue to improve services and become a good to outstanding authority over the next two years.
- 2.9 The DfE will now consider the findings of the report and may issue a revised Improvement Notice. Negotiations will take place with the Minister about the mechanism for overseeing progress against this, which may include a transition of responsibility for scrutiny and challenge from the Improvement Board to the Medway Safeguarding Children Board.
- 2.10 In a separate report, published on the same day, Ofsted rated the Council's independent Local Child Safeguarding Board (LCSB) arrangements, chaired by John Drew, as 'requires improvement to be good'.
- 2.11 The full Ofsted report is publicly available and can be viewed at:
<http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/medway>

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the findings of the Ofsted inspection. There are no policy or structure implications.

4. Risk management

- 4.1 Failure to carry out the recommendations of the inspection report will present a risk to the Council in relation to providing a safe and competent service to children and families and to future Ofsted inspection gradings.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Competent staff and managers will not be recruited or retained	Recruitment of competent staff is a national challenge and Medway faces competition for good staff from neighbouring local authorities.	Maintain an active programme of recruitment and put in place systems to support staff to stay in Medway
More robust management and improved quality of assessment and planning will increase caseloads, placing additional pressure on the service	Improved understanding of thresholds and more robust and effective management of cases may increase workloads. An increase in children subject to Child Protection plans and in numbers of looked after children has already been seen	Flexible use of staff resources to respond to pressures in the system, and avoid any single service being placed under undue pressure
Partners will not be enabled to engage effectively in the ongoing improvement programme	Emerging other priorities, financial constraints and lack of understanding of the shared early help and safeguarding agendas may restrict partner agencies ability to engage and carry out their responsibilities.	Continued work with partners at a strategic and practice level to re-enforce expectations, and seek commitment to improving outcomes for children and families

5. Consultation

- 5.1 There will be a programme of briefings and newsletters for staff and partners to share the findings of the report and its recommendations.
- 5.2 There will be consultation with staff, partners, young people and their families about the priorities for the revised Improvement Plan which will be based around the Ofsted recommendations.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The Council has invested in Children's Social Care, which has been recognised in the Ofsted report.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Ofsted inspects services against statutory and regulatory requirements and there are no other legal implications arising from this report.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 To note the Ofsted report and its findings.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

The full Ofsted report can be viewed at: <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/medway>