

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 MARCH 2019

OUTCOME OF OFSTED'S FOCUSED VISIT

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of People – Children and Adults Services

Author: Louise Drury, Head of Service Improvement

Summary

Ofsted undertook a Focused Visit between 5 and 6 February 2019 on the Council's Children's Services Front Door and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). This report sets out the key findings from the Ofsted Focused Visit which was published on 28 February 2019.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This report is within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- 1.2 The Chairman of the Committee, in consultation with the Vice-Chairman and Opposition Spokesperson, agreed for this item to be added to this meeting as he is of the opinion that it should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency as permitted under section 100B of the Local Government Act 1972. This is to enable the Committee to consider a report of the Ofsted Focused Visit which took place between 5 and 6 February 2019, at the earliest opportunity. The report was not available in time for despatch with the main agenda as the publication of the Ofsted findings did not take place until 28 February 2019.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework includes a number of activities which includes:
 - an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future;
 - Focused Visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children;

- standard and short inspections where Ofsted make judgements using the four-point scale; and
 - Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).
- 2.2 A Focused Visit evaluates an aspect of the service and will usually happen between standard inspections. Ofsted usually give five working days' notice of the visit. Usually, two inspectors will be on site for two days contained within one week.
- 2.3 Each Focused Visit will cover part of the scope of standard inspections. Leadership is a feature of all focused visits principally through the lens of the impact of leaders on practice with children and families.
- 2.4 A Focused Visit on the front door focuses on the service that receives contacts and referrals (single or multi-agency) and where decisions are made about:
- child protection enquiries – strategy discussions, section 47 enquires;
 - emergency action – liaison with police to use powers of protection, applications for emergency protection order;
 - child in need assessments;
 - decisions to accommodate;
 - step-up from and step-down to early help; and
 - no further action/sign-posting.
- 2.5 Inspectors also evaluate the effectiveness of:
- performance management;
 - management oversight;
 - supervision;
 - quality assurance; and
 - continuous professional development of the workforce.
- 2.6 Inspectors will not make graded judgements at the outcome of a focused visit. Nor will they indicate what the grade may have been if the visit had been a short or standard inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a published letter.
- 2.7 Where inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action.
- 2.8 On 29 January 2019 notification was received to begin the ILACS Focused Visit on Tuesday 5 February 2019. In addition to the front door, the inspectors also wanted to look at the management of allegations against professionals and carers.
- 2.9 The team consisted of two inspectors on site for 5 and 6 February who were then joined by the quality assurance manager mid-day on 6 February 2019.
- 2.10 Prior to their arrival the Local Authority shared the relevant child level data lists, identifying which cases had received an audit in the last 6 months. From

this information, the inspectors identified 10 cases which they reviewed off site in advance of the on-site elements of the Inspection. Key documentation was provided, as appropriate, in relation to these 10 cases.

- 2.11 Inspectors spent most of their time with practitioners, talking about the children they are working with to assess the quality of front line practice and management oversight.
- 2.12 Inspectors also visited a Children and Family Area Hub and met with the LADO and Out Of Hours Service Manager. The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) is responsible for the management of investigations pertaining to Professionals or Carers working with children.
- 2.13 The final report was published on 28 February 2019 and is set out at Appendix 1 to the report. The report may also be found online <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50059044>.

3. Key findings

- 3.1 The leadership team has secured marked improvements in the Local Authority's response to contacts and referrals since the Joint Targeted Area Inspection in June 2018.
- 3.2 Processes to support social work practice have been embedded and strengthened.
- 3.3 In most cases, children and their families now receive a timely and proportionate response to their needs. The progress that has been achieved has been sustained, despite a significant increase in the number of contacts and referrals.
- 3.4 Multi-agency working and information-sharing in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are increasingly effective and there has been a welcome increase in the range of multi -agency professionals who are based in, or linked to the MASH.
- 3.5 The formation of children and family hubs has provided a sound base for the provision of early help services in Medway.
- 3.6 The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) service has responded effectively to learning from a recent serious case review and the systems for overseeing progression and quality of work are robust.
- 3.7 Senior leaders know the service well. They acknowledge the strengths in the service, but are realistic about where further improvement is needed.
- 3.8 Staff describe experiencing high support and high expectations within a learning culture. They are positive about working for Medway.
- 3.9 The visibility and approachability of senior leaders and managers, and their engagement with staff promotes a whole-team approach that is supporting further progress.

- 3.10 Areas for improvement include the participation and contribution of health partners in strategy meetings, timeliness of contacts and referrals that are sent by the police to MASH and the quality of assessments and timeliness of initial visits to children and their families.
- 3.11 Senior leaders are realistic about what further improvement is needed and suitable plans are in place. No priority areas for action were identified by the inspectors.

4. Impact on Looked After and Adopted Children

- 4.1 Ensuring that effective decisions are made in a timely way at the front door ensure that children's needs are identified and met at an earlier point thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation in need. Continuing to pay relentless attention to the quality of assessments will strengthen practice and ensure that children are receiving the right service at the right time. The participation of health partners in strategy meetings is an area that requires attention to ensure a comprehensive consideration of risk for all children where there are safeguarding concerns.

5. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk Rating
Non participation of health partners in strategy meetings	If the participation of health partners in strategy meetings does not improve, timely and full information will not be available to inform understanding of risk for children.	DCS and Deputy Director have escalated and have met face to face with counterparts to improve practice and resilience of health resource to meet Working Together Guidance 2018.	B2
Timeliness of contacts and referrals sent by police	Impact of new IT System Athena has resulted in there being delays in sending referrals to Children's Services which can delay provision of services and disproportionate numbers of referrals being received on certain days.	Athena is a new IT system and police colleagues are working to mitigate risks associated with implementation of new IT system.	D3
Quality of assessments and timeliness of initial visits	Variable quality in assessment and timeliness in initial visit can result in drift in planning.	Recruitment campaign ongoing. Programme of workforce development, targeted training, management oversight and audit in place to strengthen practice.	C2

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 In building the 2019/20 revenue budget, additional funding was made available for six additional social workers to address high caseloads and £130,000 of temporary resource to ensure that the Council is ready for future inspections. Action is now required to strengthen practice and manage demand back down to sustainable levels.
- 6.2 The recruitment of permanent social workers will reduce the reliance upon agency social workers and deliver savings against the Council forecast overspend on staffing. All recruitment is monitored and approved via Cabinet and in accordance with the Social Care Workforce Development Strategy. In the last six months our vacancy rate has reduced from 38% to 28%.
- 6.3 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to note this report on the ILACS Focused Visit, the progress and achievements made and the next steps for Medway Council.

Lead contact:

Louise Drury, Head of Service Improvement
E: louise.drury@medway.gov.uk T: 01634 331630

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ofsted Letter

Background Papers

None