

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 DECEMBER 2019

OFSTED INSPECTION OF MEDWAY'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES – ACTION PLAN

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

Author: Jackie Brown, Head of Business Change (People) and ICT

Summary

The Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) took place in Medway from 15 to 26 July 2019.

The Council is required to submit an Action Plan to Ofsted by 28 November 2019 which identifies priority actions to address the areas for improvement identified within the inspection over the next twelve months.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 This report supports the Council Plan priority "Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential" to achieve the outcome 'Resilient Families'.

2. Background

2.1 In January 2018, Ofsted launched the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' of ILACS, the framework for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.

2.2 The Ofsted 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) took place from 15 to 26 July 2019 and the report was published on the 27 August 2019.

2.3 The Committee considered the findings of this report at its meeting on 3 October 2019 and is scheduled to receive progress reports at its January and March meetings.

2.4 The Council is required to submit an Action Plan to Ofsted by 28 November 2019 which will identify priority actions to address the areas for improvement

identified within the inspection over the next twelve months. Members have asked that this Action Plan be added to the agenda for this meeting. The Plan, which will not be published until after the despatch of the agenda, will be circulated to Members as soon as it is available.

- 2.5 The Department for Education (DfE) issued a statutory direction to Medway Council on the 27 August 2019, due to poor performance in Children’s Social Care Services. As such, an independent Children’s Services Commissioner, Mrs Eleanor Brazil, has been appointed by the Secretary of State.
- 2.6 When a Local Authority’s Children’s Services are judged inadequate, Ofsted is required to carry out monitoring activity that includes an Action Planning visit, quarterly monitoring visits and a re-inspection after a period of around two years.
- 2.7 The Commissioner’s report will be submitted to the Secretary of State on the 1 December 2019 and the outcome will be received approximately two weeks later.

3. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Actions are not implemented in a timely manner	If the actions within the Action Plan are not implemented in a timely manner then Medway’s vulnerable children & young people may remain at risk or living in situations of harm.	The Improvement Board will monitor progress and will hold people to account if progress is not positive.	B2
Resource is not in place to deliver rapid improvement	The authority cannot evidence it is sufficiently strong to maintain the necessary long-term sustainable improvement to Children’s Social Care.	The Local Authority and its partners will commit to support the improvement journey.	C3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
The Council loses control of Children's Social Care Services	In cases of persistent or systemic failure there is a presumption that children's social care services should be removed from local authority control, for a period of time, in order to bring about sustainable improvement, unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.	<p>The leadership of the council will prioritise the needs of children. This will be reflected in corporate decision-making, action and active attendance at key committees and boards.</p> <p>The chief executive and lead member will ensure they are well informed and will hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area.</p> <p>The local authority will continue to be an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles.</p>	C3
Recruitment & retention	Issues relating to recruitment & retention of Social Workers increase due to the Ofsted judgement.	Introduce an engagement forum to support staff, ensure they feel valued and have a voice.	C3
Financial Implications	Improving Children's Services will bring with it financial implications, and may create additional budget pressures for the authority.	<p>Maximise the use of the skills and expertise of colleagues within the council to improve Children's Services as opposed to commissioning external consultants.</p> <p>Continue engagement with Partners in Practice to learn best practice and introduce this in Medway.</p>	B2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Caseloads	Whilst additional resource has been introduced to reduce caseloads, there is a risk that the published judgement will bring with it an increase in the number of referrals, which will require further Social Work resource.	Ensure engagement with partners is increased and discussions regarding the outcome take place to reassure them that safeguarding children is a priority for Medway.	C2

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 Improving Children’s Services may create additional budget pressures for the Council. However, maximising the use of the skills and expertise of colleagues within the Council as opposed to commissioning external consultants will reduce potential cost. We must anticipate, however, that there are likely to be some areas that will require external support to enable improvement.
- 4.2 Furthermore, the Council is required to comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Children’s Services Commissioner in relation to the improvement of the Council’s exercise of its Children’s Social Care function and provide such assistance as either the Secretary of State or the Children’s Services Commissioner may require.
- 4.3 The directorate management team will work with colleagues from across the Council to identify opportunities to use resources more effectively, in order to deliver service improvement.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Secretary of State for Education has powers in the Education Act 1996 and the Children Act 2004 to appoint a Commissioner for Children’s Services and for the Commissioner to make directions to the Council to ensure the children’s social care functions are performed to an adequate standard.
- 5.2 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007 sets out the requirements on the Council following an inspection report. The Council is required to prepare a written statement of the action and the period which they propose to take that action.
- 5.3 The action plan must be published within 70 working days of receiving an inspection report and a copy must be made available by either inspection at Council offices or by providing a copy upon payment of a reasonable fee.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to note the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Action Plan.

Lead officers contact

Jackie Brown, Head of Business Change (People) & ICT, 01634 332363,
jackie.brown@medway.gov.uk

Sue Brunton-Reed, Head of Special Projects, 01634 334160,
sue.bruntonreed@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Action Plan (to follow)

Background papers

None