

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 JULY 2022

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFSTED MONITORING VISIT MAY 2022

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Summary

This report provides a summary of the findings of the May 2022 Ofsted Monitoring Visit, which had a focus on young people entitled to leaving care services.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1 This report supports the Council Strategy priority "Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential" to achieve the outcome 'Resilient Families'.
- 1.2 In January 2018, Ofsted launched the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS), the framework for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. Medway Children's Services was graded Inadequate at the ILACS in July 2019. This framework outlines the responsibilities of both local authorities and Ofsted following an 'Inadequate' judgement, which includes regular Monitoring Visits from Ofsted inspectors to assess and review progress since the inspection.
- 1.3 Ofsted have now carried out four monitoring visits in May 2020, July 2021, January 2022 and May 2022.
- 1.3 Children's Services are not graded following the Monitoring Visits but receive a report for publication on the Ofsted website.
- 1.4 The framework requires Ofsted to carry out between four and six monitoring visits prior to a re-inspection. A further monitoring visit is expected in Autumn 2022.

2. Background and Findings

- 2.1 The focus of this monitoring visit was young people leaving care and the inspectors covered:
- The sufficiency and quality of accommodation for care leavers and children in care aged 16 and 17
 - Planning and preparation for adulthood
 - The quality and impact of pathway plans and of management oversight and supervision
 - The quality and impact of support and interventions for all care leavers
 - The effectiveness of senior leaders, including quality assurance processes
- 2.2 The inspectors found that senior leaders continue to focus purposefully on their improvement journey, and significant progress has been made since the previous inspection in 2019 in relation to services for older children in care and care leavers.
- 2.3 A number of strengths were identified in the report:
- Capacity within the service has increased resulting in reduced caseloads
 - Personal Advisers and Social Workers are committed, caring and passionate about their work
 - Young people have a trusted adult and feel secure, knowing they will be supported
 - The care leavers hub is a welcoming and safe space where young people can meet, and access support
 - Young people in custody and those who are parents are well supported
 - Young people benefit from continuing to live with their foster carers when they turn 18
 - More Care Leavers are accessing and succeeding in education, training and employment – up to 67% from 34% a year ago
 - Care leavers are now receiving their health histories
 - There is increased oversight of young people in unregistered and unregulated placement provision which ensures young people get the help they need
- 2.4 The inspectors noted positive improvements in the leadership of the service:
- Stable senior leadership team, with strong political support
 - Accurate self assessment
 - Robust audit and moderation process
 - Well organised Corporate Parenting Board with members who listen to the views of the Children in Care Council with full commitment to their corporate responsibilities

- An ambitious corporate parenting delivery board
 - Staff feel well supported and value supervision.
- 2.5 The letter also identifies a number of areas where we need to continue to concentrate our improvement efforts.
- 2.6 Although most care leavers live in suitable accommodation, challenges remain in respect of the availability of suitable accommodation locally for young people. Purposeful work is underway to address this working across the council to ensure young people's needs for suitable accommodation are identified as part of the wider sufficiency work.
- 2.7 Inspectors identified that more work is needed to improve mental health provision for older children in care and care leavers. Demand for such services has increased during the pandemic. Work is underway to strengthen mental health services for young people locally, but this is not yet delivering measurable impact for young people.
- 2.8 The letter refers to improved workforce stability and capacity in the 16 plus service but suggests that stability and capacity in the service remains fragile as a number of posts remain temporary and there is more work to do to ensure sufficient capacity to enable earlier allocation of personal advisers to support more focused transitions planning.
- 2.9 The reason for the temporary posts within the 16 plus service is due the need for further analysis to determine what capacity is needed in the service, after its remit was extended following the inspection in 2019. Since the inspection, additional funding by the council has supported additional posts to enable manageable caseloads while the diagnostic work has been carried out. This work is now concluded, and work is underway to outline the proposals for right sizing the service going forward, including to support earlier transition planning as promoted by Ofsted in their recent Monitoring Visit letter.
- 2.10 Ofsted reported that Medway knows itself well and that the self-assessment confirmed the areas for improvement which were identified as follows:
- Continuing inconsistencies in practice
 - Support for Young People aged 21+ is not always sufficient to meet needs
 - Pathway plans are up to date and written with young people's input, but are of variable quality
 - Transition planning is inconsistent and does not always start early enough
 - Vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation do not always have a clear safety plan
 - Mental Health Services are insufficient for older children and young people

- Most care leavers live in suitable accommodation, but there is lack of choice of accommodation for the most complex young people

3 Next Steps

- 3.1 Ofsted will continue to undertake a programme of Monitoring Visits going forward, with the next likely to be in the autumn with a focus on our 0-25 Service.
- 3.2 A revised Improvement Plan 2022-23 has been agreed with the Improvement Board which will support continued service improvement and a real focus on strengthening the quality of practice.
- 3.3 Seek governance and funding for proposals for right sizing the 16 plus service going forward, including to support earlier transition planning as promoted by Ofsted in their recent Monitoring Visit letter.
- 3.4 The specific issues raised through the recent Monitoring Visit, including improved mental health support and stronger oversight of pathway planning, are being addressed through the improvement plan, which has regular oversight and challenge both internally and from the Improvement Board
- 3.5 Work is underway with commissioning colleagues to better understand the placement needs of our children in care and care leavers, in order to improve sufficiency and choice of placement and reduce the need for unregistered and unregulated placements.
- 3.6 Preparation is already underway with the 0-25 service for disabled children and young people to prepare for the next Monitoring Visit.

4. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Practice improvements are not implemented in a timely manner, and do not achieve the anticipated impact	If the actions within the Improvement Plan and any other diagnostic activity 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 Quality Assurance and Performance Board as well as the Improvement Board monitor progress and hold the service to account if progress is not made in a timely way. Regular management oversight within the service, focus on child centred practice and increased quality assurance activity	C2

		provides assurance of individual children's safety.	
Recruitment & retention	There are ongoing challenges relating to recruitment & retention of Social Workers.	A Workforce Development Strategy is in place and impact is regularly reviewed with quarterly reports to the Improvement Board. HR continues to actively pursue the recruitment strategy, and the service has developed a business case for additional resources from DFE to support recruitment of additional Newly Qualified Social Workers.	B2
Financial Implications	Improving Children's Services has had significant financial implications. The risk is that the authority cannot continue to maintain the necessary long-term investment in the service which supports sustainable improvement to Children's Social Care. This will create additional budget pressures for the authority.	The Local Authority and its partners will commit to support the improvement journey, whilst ensuring efficient use of resources and identifying opportunities to achieve savings and efficiency in service delivery. A sufficiency plan which supports market management to increase availability of placements will support delivery of planned savings on the placement budget.	B2

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Improving Children's Services has created additional budget pressures and £7.6m of additional funding was made available to the service in 2020-21, a further £6.6m in 2021-22 and an additional £4.9m in 2022-23 through the budget build process and the improvement action plan. The additional funding was made available, to substantially increase the staffing establishment for Children's Social Care as well as the non-staffing budgets, such as budgets that relate to financial support for care leavers as an example. Further work is continuing on a medium-term financial strategy, to identify the need for ongoing support for improvement, ensuring the capacity of the service is sufficient to meet demand, and identify where savings can be made through increased efficiency

- 5.2 Given Ofsted findings there is a need for continued ongoing financial commitment, so as to demonstrate that the Council has the capacity to sustain the required improvements.
 - 5.3 The service will continue to work with colleagues from across the Council to identify opportunities to use resources more effectively in order to deliver service improvement, including working closely with corporate finance colleagues to ensure accurate and robust forecasting
6. Legal implications
 - 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
7. Recommendations
 - 7.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report.

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Background papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Monitoring Visit Letter June 2022