

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**29 NOVEMBER 2022**

### **OFSTED MONITORING VISIT CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Report from: Dr. Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People

Author: Sue Brunton-Reed, Head of Improvement

#### Summary

This report summarises the feedback from the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit which took place on the 21st and 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022, with a focus on disabled children

#### 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.

Ofsted have now carried out five monitoring visits in May 2020, July 2021, January 2022, May 2022 and September 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 final monitoring visit is expected in early 2023.

## 2. Background and Findings

- 2.1 The focus of this monitoring visit was disabled children and the inspectors covered: Disabled children who are the subject of referrals and assessments.
- Disabled children who are the subject of child in need and child protection plans.
  - Disabled children in care and disabled children receiving a short-break service.
  - Disabled children in care transitioning to adult services
- 2.2 The inspectors found that senior leaders had identified significant weaknesses in the 0–25 service for disabled children and young adults following the ILACS in 2019. This led to changes in the management arrangements for the service and the development of a detailed improvement plan. Some progress against this plan is evident, including an increase in staffing capacity, and a training programme to support workers to develop knowledge about child protection and court work, which has had a positive impact for some children.
- 2.3 A number of strengths were identified in the report:
- Capacity within the service has increased although challenges were noted in terms of recruitment
  - Social workers in the 0-25 service are committed to improving disabled children's lives.
  - Children are promptly seen when a referral is accepted and transferred into the 0-25 Service.
  - The Wednesday Squad, run by the Youth Service, is a resource highly valued by young people.
- “It is a happy and safe place. We have fun. We make friends, and there is always someone here we can share any worries with.”* Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter of 26 October 2022
- 2.4 The inspectors noted positive improvements in the leadership of the service:
- Senior Leaders continue to focus purposefully on the improvement journey
  - Senior leaders know the 0–25 service well. The foundations for improvement are in place, specifically to address a lack of community resources for disabled children, recruitment and retention issues, complicated transitions processes.
  - Accurate self-assessment.
  - Robust audit and moderation processes.
- 2.5 The workforce reported being well supported and value opportunities for learning and development
- 2.6 Ofsted reported that leaders are aware of the areas for improvement which were identified as follows:

- Complicated transition processes.
- Assessment and review of children receiving community packages of support is not yet consistently taking place, although recent work has supported more systematic review and children not seen for a long period of time have now been allocated to a social worker for review.
- The quality of practice, and impact of this on children with additional needs, remains inconsistent.
- Sufficiency of placements is limited.
- The lack of community support and resources that cater for children with disabilities means that children have to wait too long for services i.e. short breaks or personal advisors, the support of which could enrich lives and ease pressures.
- Recruiting staff with the necessary skill and expertise required to work with children and young adults.

### 3 Next Steps

- 3.1 Ofsted will continue to undertake a programme of Monitoring Visits going forward, with the final visit likely to take place in early 2023; this will focus on the front door and vulnerable adolescents.
- 3.2 The full re-inspection of the service under the ILACS framework is expected in spring early/summer 2023.
- 3.3 The updated Improvement Plan for 2022-23 is overseen by the Improvement Board; this has a real focus on strengthening the quality of practice and management oversight.
- 3.4 The specific issues raised through the recent Monitoring Visit, are being addressed through the service improvement plan, which has regular oversight and challenge.
- 3.5 Work is underway with commissioning colleagues to improve availability of community support services and placements.
- 3.6 Preparation is already underway with the service to prepare for the full re-inspection.

#### 4. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
<p><b>Practice improvements are not implemented in a timely manner, and do not achieve the anticipated impact</b></p>	<p>If the actions within the Improvement Plan and any other diagnostic activity are not implemented in a timely manner, then Medway's vulnerable children &amp; young people may remain at risk or living in situations of harm.</p>	<p>Regular management oversight within the service, a focus on child centred practice and management oversight, and increased quality assurance activity provides assurance of individual children's safety.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>C2</p>
<p><b>Recruitment &amp; retention</b></p>	<p>There are ongoing challenges relating to recruitment &amp; retention of Social Workers, with a number of vacancies currently unfilled.</p>	<p>HR continues to actively pursue the recruitment strategy, supported by the service. Agreement has been given to recruit a team of 'bank' social workers to be placed where most needed in the service. A Workforce Development Strategy is in place and impact is regularly reviewed with quarterly reports to the Improvement Board.</p>	<p>B2</p>
<p><b>Financial Implications</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>A number of initiatives are in place to support delivery of planned savings on the placement budget.</p>	<p>B2</p>

## 5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Improving Children's Services has created additional budget pressures and additional funding has been made available to the service since 2020 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 non-staffing budgets, such as budgets that relate to financial support for care leavers and provision of specialist assessments as examples. Grant funding from the DFE in 2022-23 has supported additional QA and HR capacity, as well as funding a multi-disciplinary team to support work with families experiencing severe neglect. Further work is continuing to identify resources in order to right size the service into 2023 and beyond, which will ensure the capacity of the service is sufficient to meet demand, and identify where savings can be made through increased efficiency.
- 5.2 There is a need for continued ongoing financial commitment, 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 implications as a direct result of this report.

## 7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

### Lead officer contact

Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People,  
01634 331215, [leeanne.farach@medway.gov.uk](mailto:leeanne.farach@medway.gov.uk)

Donna Marriott, Assistant Director, Children's Services  
01634 331205 [donna.marriott@medway.gov.uk](mailto:donna.marriott@medway.gov.uk)

Sue Brunton-Reed, Head of Special Projects and Improvement,  
01634 334160, [sue.bruntonreed@medway.gov.uk](mailto:sue.bruntonreed@medway.gov.uk)

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter September 2022

Appendix 2 - Ofsted Comms Children's Services message to Corporate colleagues  
and elected members

## Background papers

None