

## **CABINET**

**26 SEPTEMBER 2023**

### **OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services  
(including statutory responsibility)

Report from: Dr Lee Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief  
Executive

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#### **Summary**

This report provides a summary of the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) which took place in July 2023, published on 11 September 2023.

The re-inspection followed a previous ILACS in July 2019, when the service was found to be inadequate. Since that time, the service has worked to improve under a Statutory Direction from Department for Education (DFE), requiring oversight of progress from an independently chaired Improvement Board. Ofsted have continued to monitor progress through quarterly Monitoring Visits.

The re-inspection in July 2023 has acknowledged progress made and graded the service as Good overall. Following publication of the findings, the Minister has indicated that the Statutory Direction will be rescinded, but the service will continue to be inspected by Ofsted as part of their regular programme of inspection.

#### **1. Recommendation**

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the report.

#### **2. Suggested reasons for decision**

2.1. To formally notify the Cabinet of the outcome of the inspection.

#### **3. Budget and policy framework**

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

- 3.2. Since the inadequate rating, there has been significant investment in improving Children's Services, with c£7million added to the gross budget for 2020/21, a further c£9million added for 2021/22, a further c£6million added for 2022/23 and a further £10million added for 2023/24, with this growth acknowledged in the Ofsted ILACS findings. It is recognised that there is a continuing need for investment to support sustainable improvement.

## 4. Background

- 4.1. The Ofsted ILACS took place in Medway Children's Services from 17 to 28 July 2023 and the report was published on the 11 September 2023.
- 4.2. Ofsted provide judgements against four discrete domains and then provide an overall judgement. The overall judgement for Medway was rated Good.
- 4.3. The four areas of service delivery were graded as follows:
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: **Requires Improvement**
  - The experiences and progress of children in care: **Good**
  - The experiences and progress of care leavers: **Good**
  - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: **Good**
- 4.4. Key findings:
- Services for children and families in Medway have substantially improved since the inspection in 2019.
  - Leaders have achieved significant progress, with a well-managed 'front door' and 'early help service', which ensures appropriate initial and timely responses to children's needs.
  - Corporate and political leaders have addressed the systemic weaknesses and there is now a strong, determined and cohesive leadership team.
  - There has been significant investment and commitment by leaders and the new corporate and political leadership have given their ongoing commitment and support to the continual improvement journey of children's services.
  - There have been improvements for children in care and care leavers, who now receive good care and support. There have been significant improvements in the quality and impact of the Corporate Parenting Board. The inspector noted that children matter in Medway.
  - Variability remains in the quality and impact of social work practice, specifically in the longer-term support provided to adolescents, and those at risk of exploitation.
  - There continue to be significant challenges regarding recruitment and retention of the workforce.

#### 4.5. What Ofsted have said still need to improve:

- The quality and effectiveness of assessments, plans, interventions and responses for children who are at risk of exploitation and/or risk outside of the home.
- The quality and variety of direct work and life-story work available to children.
- The quality and consistency of assessments and planning to support disabled children.
- The quality and consistency of management oversight.

#### 4.6. Next Steps

- Ofsted will return to Medway to do a focused visit in a year and will expect to see progress against their identified areas for improvement.
- The Council is proposing to relaunch the partnership Improvement Board, chaired internally by the Director of People, as the mechanism for overseeing, supporting and challenging implementation of the improvement plan which will be developed by the service with statutory partners, and shared with Ofsted as required by mid December 2023.
- Children's Services will continue to embed improvements, and prioritise the areas identified by Ofsted. They will work closely with HR colleagues to build a stable workforce, which is essential to sustaining improvements and delivering a consistently high-quality service.
- A Test of Assurance will be undertaken in early 2024, supported by the LGA. This reviews senior management arrangements for managing children's and adult services and tests the extent to which the organisational structure provides effective leadership, meets statutory responsibilities and supports effective partnership working.

### 5. Options

5.1. This report is for information only.

### 6. Advice and analysis

6.1. There has been and continues to be significant work undertaken across children's services to make and sustain the necessary improvements so that children and families in Medway receive a good and improving service, and all statutory responsibilities are met.

6.2. Political and corporate leaders continue to support our improvement programme and have publicly expressed their commitment to children in Medway, particularly our children in care, supporting the Ofsted observation that children matter in Medway.

6.3. Recruitment to social work roles across Children’s Services remains a priority despite the challenges regionally and nationally.

6.4. The stable leadership team in the service and the committed practitioners will continue to focus on delivering a consistent and high-quality service to benefit children and families in Medway.

## 7. 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.	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.  The Quality Assurance and Performance Board (QAPIB) as well as the Improvement Board will monitor progress and hold the service to account if progress is not made in a timely way.	CII
Recruitment & retention	There are ongoing challenges relating to recruitment & retention of Social Workers, with a number of vacancies currently unfilled.	HR continues to actively pursue the recruitment strategy, supported by the service, with additional capacity funded by the DFE. A Workforce Development Strategy is in place and impact is regularly reviewed with quarterly reports to QAPIB and the Improvement Board.	BII
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, and ensures all	The Local Authority and its partners will commit to support the sustainability of the improvement programme, whilst ensuring efficient use of resources and identifying opportunities to achieve savings and efficiency in service delivery. A number of initiatives are in place to support delivery of planned savings on the children’s services budget.	BII

	<p>statutory duties are carried out. This will create additional budget pressures for the authority.</p>		
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## 8. Consultation

- 8.1. Some children, young people and families in receipt of services, as well as statutory partners were consulted by Ofsted inspectors as part of the inspection. No consultation has been undertaken in relation to this report, but the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection will be published on the Ofsted website, so will be made available to the general public.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1. 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 gross budget for the service has grown each year, with c£7million added to the budget for 2020/21, a further c£9million added for 2021/22, a further c£6million added for 2022/23 and a further £10million added for 2023/24. 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 and 2023-24 has supported additional quality assurance and HR capacity, as well as funding for some staffing within the multi-disciplinary service and additional capacity to support use of performance data
- 9.2. There is a need for continued ongoing financial commitment, to demonstrate that the Council has the capacity to sustain the required improvements, and avoid a repeat of the previous history of moving out of intervention, only to be judged inadequate at a subsequent inspection.
- 9.3. 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.

## 10. Legal implications

- 10.1. Children's services must continue to deliver all statutory responsibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ofsted ILACS report published 11.09.23

Background papers

None.