

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	18 April 2023
Title:	Ofsted Focused Visit report 2023
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to brief Cabinet regarding the outcomes from the recent Ofsted focused visit. The focus was on children in care.

Recommendation(s)

2. That Cabinet notes the very positive letter from Ofsted in Appendix A and the continued and consistently high performance with regards to Children's Services in Hampshire.
3. That Cabinet note the positive comments regarding the level of skill, knowledge and child centred approach of our social workers in achieving this outcome and their pride in representing Hampshire.

Executive Summary

4. This report seeks to brief cabinet on the recent Ofsted focused visit inspection of Children's Services in January 2023, and the positive outcome of that inspection detailed in the letter received following the inspection.

Contextual information

5. Ofsted's inspection framework for local authorities children's social care services, called the Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), requires that local authorities are subject to standard or short inspections depending on their previous Ofsted judgement every three years, with a focused visit or

Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in the intervening two years. These latter two types of inspection do not include a judgement grade but are no less rigorous for that.

6. Hampshire has been subject to the following inspections since the introduction of the ILACS:
7. **November 2018** - Hampshire was subject to a focused visit, inspecting children subject to a child protection plan, including the quality and impact of pre-proceedings intervention under the Public Law Outline (PLO). Hampshire had received a very positive letter from Ofsted following this visit.
8. **April and May 2019** - Hampshire was subject to a full ILACS inspection. Report to Council dated 15 July 2019 refers to this inspection. This inspection judged Hampshire to be outstanding overall and across the other three areas of judgement.
9. **November 2021** – Hampshire volunteered to pilot a new Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI). The focus of this inspection was multi agency Safeguarding arrangements across all partners, working from initial contact through to a CIN/CP decision. The inspection involved inspectors from Ofsted, CQC (Care Quality Commission) and HMICFRS (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services). The partnership received a very positive outcome letter following this visit.
10. It is worth noting that the inspection framework is rooted in safeguarding and has therefore fully tested Hampshire's safeguarding practice, alongside testing the front door process within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Finance

11. There are no financial recommendations in this report although the issue of the continued rise in cost (price) of placements for children in care in the independent sector, is a key pressure for the County Council.

Focused Visit activity

12. On the 24 January we received a call from Ofsted to let us know that we would be subject to a focused visit to assess the local authority's arrangements for children in care, with inspectors on site from 31 January to 1 February 2023.
13. Within 24 hours of the call we were required to upload Ofsted requirements, which include child level data lists and the data that was applicable.

14. In addition, as part of the standard process, Ofsted identified nine children for whom they required case file audits and associated case documents in order to test our quality assurance processes. These cases were identified by Ofsted on Wednesday 25 January, with the uploading of documents required within 24 hours.
15. On Thursday 26 January, Ofsted conducted meetings with Hampshire's Chief Executive Officer and the Virtual School Head.
16. On Friday 27 January, they met with the chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, lead members and the Director of Children's Services.
17. The timetable was finalised on Friday for the following week with an additional 25 cases identified and meetings with 24 social workers and the leads of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRS), as well as meeting with 10 young people on Tuesday 31 January, to discuss participation and how their views shape the service.
18. The letter following the visit is attached at Appendix A and is exceptionally positive. Key points are:
 - 18.1. *'The continuing commitment of political and corporate leaders to deliver effective social work services is evident in the investment the council has made to increase social work and placement capacity for children in response to rising demand and sufficiency pressures since the pandemic. It is a great credit to the stable, trusted leadership team and to frontline managers and practitioners that the quality and impact of practice for children in care continue to be impressive.'*
 - 18.2. *'Social workers are knowledgeable, confident and child-centred in their discussions about children and their needs. Their practice is inclusive of the child's wishes and feelings, ensuring they have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them. Practitioners have a good understanding of the complex legislative framework within which they are operating and this helps them to ensure the most appropriate court orders are sought so that children feel safe and secure in their homes.'*
 - 18.3. *'Hampshire has been welcoming unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as part of the National Transfer Scheme, and those children who spontaneously arrive within Hampshire borders. Children receive prompt and effective support to meet their cultural and religious needs. Social workers assess the risks of trafficking and take action to minimise concerns.'*
 - 18.4. *'Direct work with children, including disabled children, is a significant strength in Hampshire, with case records thoughtfully written to the child. Skilled practitioners use a range of communication techniques to help engage with disabled children. Children who are traumatised and isolated benefit from the tenacity and relentlessness of their social workers who are persistent in the efforts to engage and support them, even when emotions are heightened.'*

- 18.5. *'Children's educational needs are considered well. The virtual school works closely with social workers, making sure that personal educational planning meetings take place regularly and set appropriate targets for children. The virtual school supports social workers to secure educational placements for children in care, whether they live locally or further afield.'*
- 18.6. *'Inspectors spoke with children in care, who were delightful and engaging. Children can see their social workers as often as they like, can contact them when they need to and know how to raise a complaint. All felt their social workers listen to them.'*
- 18.7. *'Hampshire invests in its workforce and takes action to ensure that social workers' concerns are listened to. Leaders addressed pressures on social workers' caseloads in the autumn of 2022. Additional recruitment of social workers is underway to manage caseloads in the children in care service'*
- 18.8. *'Whether permanent employees or agency staff, social workers are proud of what they do and love working for Hampshire local authority.'*

Other Key Issues

19. Inspections should always identify areas for improvement, that is their main purpose, to drive an improving system. Areas of focus during the inspection were very few for Hampshire and had already been identified by senior managers with plans in place to address, indicating that our self-assessment process is thorough and well balanced. Within the report they included:
- 19.1 *'Workload pressures are hindering Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) oversight of care plans. Looked after reviews happen regularly, although not all children are seen by IROs before their reviews. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen the IRO intervention'*
- 19.2 *'Many children wait too long for initial and review health assessments, so carers are not always aware of their full health needs. Leaders have worked proactively with health partners to tackle this issue, but more progress is needed'*
- 19.3 *'The local authority has developed its concept for the children in care council, but the voice of children in care is not sufficiently informing the corporate parenting committee work programme'*

Conclusions

- 20 This was a very positive inspection, with a positive outcome letter for Hampshire. We can be assured and feel very proud of the work that our social workers, and their managers are undertaking with children and families, and be assured of the impact this work is having on a daily basis.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	No
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This report provides a summary of an inspection of local authority Children's Services. There are no formal proposals or recommendations being made as part of this paper but it should be noted that the department, and activity, that was subject to inspection, provides a service to children and young people who cover many if not all groups with protected characteristics. As there are no formal proposals or recommendations being made, it is considered that there are no specific impacts, or mitigating actions required as a result of this paper. However, assurance can be gained from the inspection feedback that the local authority is both very aware of its responsibilities as a corporate parent, and proactively responding to the varied needs of children in our care, with specific positive comments made about our support to children with disabilities, and children from other countries and cultures who have become children in care having been identified as unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The areas of focus identified during the inspection will strengthen our offer, and service available to the children in our care.

3. Climate Change Impact Assessment

The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tool were not applicable because there are no proposals or recommendations being made as part of this paper and therefore no decisions required of Cabinet. The paper is provided purely for information purposes.