

Health and Wellbeing Board

10 September 2019

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| Title: Report on the OFSTED Inspection of Children's Services and the post-OFSTED Improvement Plan | |
| Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration | |
| Open Report | For Information |
| Wards Affected: All | Key Decision: No |
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| Sponsors: Elaine Allegretti; Director of People and Resilience | |
| Lead Board Member: Councillor Maureen Worby; Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care Integration | |
| Summary <p>In February the Council was subject to a Standard Inspection under the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) framework. Following initial feedback provided at the conclusion of the inspection the final 'OFSTED Letter' formally setting-out OFSTED's findings was published on 1 April 2019.</p> <p>This report sets out the headlines from the published findings, including, but not limited to, the 6 named recommendations that OFSTED have made.</p> <p>In response to these recommendations the Council was required to develop and publish an improvement plan in conjunction with partners by 9 July 2019. This report also introduces the published plan and briefly describes how it will be delivered as part of a wider programme of improvement.</p> <p>This document summarises the published arrangements alongside our plans for implementing these arrangements by 30 September 2019. It also sets out our intentions for further developing our partnership arrangements between now and September.</p> | |
| Recommendation(s) <p>Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Note the findings of the OFSTED ILACS Inspection of Children's Services in February 2019;Note the published OFSTED Improvement Plan and consider how it can support the delivery of the required improvements. | |

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Between 18 February 2019 and the 1 March 2019, the Council was subject to a Standard Inspection under the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Service (ILACS) framework.
- 1.2 During this two-week period inspectors met with key officers, including the Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services, as well as the Lead Member for Children’s Services. In a welcome contrast to the previous inspection regime, inspectors spent considerably less time in formal, pre-arranged meetings with a wide range of officers, and much more time observing the direct work and practice of frontline Social Workers.
- 1.3 Following initial feedback provided at the end of the inspection the final ‘OFSTED Letter’ formally setting-out OFSTED’s findings was published on 1 April 2019. This report sets out the headlines from the published findings, including, but not limited to, the 6 named recommendations that OFSTED have made.
- 1.4 In response to these recommendations the Council was required to develop and publish an improvement plan in conjunction with partners by 9 July 2019. This report also introduces the published plan and briefly describes how it will be delivered as part of a wider programme of improvement.

2. Summary of Findings

- 2.1 The judgement from the OFSTED inspection is that services for children in Barking and Dagenham ‘requires improvement to be good’, as was the case in 2014. This judgement was consistent with our Annual Self-evaluation submitted to OFSTED.

| Judgement | Grade |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families | Requires improvement |
| The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection | Requires improvement |
| The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |

- 2.2 Although services for children requires improvement to be good, OFSTED inspectors reported that strong and effective senior leadership was now in place under the recently appointed Director of Children’s Services (DCS). The inspection letter states that the DCS and senior leadership team are creating a “culture of mutual esteem and respectful challenge, holding heads of service and managers to account for the quality of practice in their teams”.
- 2.3 Inspectors reported accelerated progress in the last 6 months and that this is leading to improvements in the quality and impact of social work practice. However, the quality and impact of social work practice remains inconsistent and children’s health needs are not being met.

- 2.4 Senior leaders were found to know the service well, as shown by our recent extensive self-evaluation and had taken decisive action in the last 6 months to address concerns and risks. Inspectors reported that the improved rigorous performance management is now making a real difference and leading to improvements in the quality and impact of social work practice.
- 2.5 Overall, inspectors reported that leaders are highly aspirational for children and families and that corporate parenting arrangements had been improved in the last 6 months. They found that morale is good and that investment in training and development is impacting positively on recruitment and retention.
- 2.6 Although strategic partnerships were found to mostly well established, the provision and access to health services for children in care and for care leavers were judged as “poor” and a significant concern.

Areas of strengths and positive practice

- 2.7 Within the inspection report, there are many areas of strength and examples of positive practice. Our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was found to be strong and robust; working effectively to safeguard children in need or at risk. Contacts and referrals were found to be managed well, and strategy discussions and child protection enquiries were also timely, well received and management decisions clear.
- 2.8 The emergency duty team was praised in the inspection and judged as well resourced, experienced and effective.
- 2.9 Overall, our work with vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of exploitation and radicalisation was judged as positive with knowledgeable and skilled workers in this area. Inspectors felt that the effectiveness of the MASH had been further strengthened by the establishment and colocation of our new vulnerable adolescent and youth offending service. The risks of radicalisation among vulnerable children and direct work were also judged as effective in helping to protect children.
- 2.10 Inspectors reported that in many cases social workers have strong relationships with children, and “understand their lived experiences and take action to make changes that help and protect [them] and their families”.
- 2.11 The Access to Resources team was also seen as a strength comprising of skilled and experienced workers making a real difference to vulnerable children; including those on the edge of care and children returning home from care.
- 2.12 Inspectors found that disabled children were being well supported by the all-age disability service, and this was enabling effective transitions into adult services. In addition, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements were robust and well managed, as was the arrangements for managing children missing education and children electively home educated.
- 2.13 For children in care, inspectors noted the improvement made on the reduction of children coming into care on police protection and reported that social workers know their children well and had good trusting relationships overall. Contact with family was noted as well planned and positive.
- 2.14 Fostering and adoption were noted as strengths by inspectors with the Mockingbird model and adoption support both highlighted and praised in this inspection report letter.

2.15 Inspectors found evidence of strong relationships between staff and care leavers and that “most care leavers are in touch with the service”.

Areas of improvement including the 6 key Ofsted recommendations

2.16 Inspectors concluded that the quality, management oversight and impact of early help services require improvement, as those services were not targeted or coordinated sufficiently to meet the needs of some groups of children and young people in the borough.

2.17 The assessment teams were raised as an area of concern during the on-site inspection due to high caseloads and inconsistent management oversight. The DCS and senior leadership team, however, took decisive action and capacity increased and management oversight strengthened. Overall, assessments still vary in depth and quality and need to improve on assessing culture and identity in assessments.

2.18 Inspectors found that management oversight was not robust or challenging enough in assessment and care management teams, resulting in managers not identifying drift and delay.

2.19 Public Law Outline (PLO) thresholds were found to be inconsistent and children subject to pre-proceedings were found to spend long periods of time in pre-proceedings without effective review.

2.20 Inspectors concluded that the Local Authority has a lack of specific domestic abuse perpetrator programmes given the high number of children living in families with domestic abuse.

2.21 Inspectors reported that early permanence planning is underdeveloped. They also found that the quality of viability and special guardianship assessments was far too variable, lacking rigour and were mostly descriptive and analytical.

2.22 Our planning for children placed with parents on a care order requires improvement, as plans were judged to lack clarity and not reviewed sufficiently.

2.23 Inspectors reported significant health concerns for children in care and care leavers. The timeliness of initial health assessments was found to be very poor, resulting immediate health needs not being identified, while access to CAMHS for children in care was reported as “insufficient”.

2.24 Health arrangements for care leavers were also reported as “weak” and a “significant concern”. Health histories for care leavers were not available and inspectors found that care leavers are not provided with a health passport.

2.25 **In addition to the above, OFSTED identified 6 key recommendations where they felt improvement was most strongly required. These are:**

- The quality, management oversight and impact of early help services.
- The quality and effectiveness of management oversight and supervision to ensure that children’s circumstances improve within their timeframes.
- The timeliness and effectiveness of public law outline (PLO) arrangements.
- Planning for children placed with parents.
- The strategic relationship with health services, and operational delivery across a range of health functions.
- The provision of help for children living with domestic abuse, or in neglectful circumstances.

3. Next Steps: Delivering Improvement

- 3.1 Whilst the publication – and delivery of – the OFSTED Improvement Plan is key pillar of our plan to improve services for children and young people in Barking and Dagenham, it must be supplemented by improvements in a range of interconnected areas if we are to impact realise our ambitions. These activities have been compiled under the umbrella of the Children’s Improvement Programme.
- 3.2 To develop the improvement programme a series of approaches were taken to ensure that the proposed changes are the right ones and will have the intended impact. Several externally commissioned tests of the system were performed to ensure a full understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and culminated in the production of the Annual Self Evaluation. To supplement this, the OFSTED ILACS Inspection provided both a test of the system itself, as well as of our plans (as set out in the Self Evaluation) to improve. This was an important stage in evaluating our intended approach.
- 3.3 Plans were further developed through a series of facilitated workshops with key stakeholders, particularly those with expertise in frontline practice and, most importantly, those who are/will be delivering services to children and young people. We will continue to use these methods and expand on our use of various user-led forums to ensure the changes being implemented will meet the needs of our vulnerable residents, of our staff, and of the Council. Most importantly this approach – alongside the Programme Outcomes Framework – will tell us if the change is working.
- 3.4 Put simply, the objective of the programme is to improve the quality and long-term financial sustainability of Children’s Care and Support. The programme incorporates all our work under a single plan, with four key strands:

Fig 1. The four strands of the Children’s Care and Support Improvement Programme



3.5 The size of this programme should not be underestimated in terms of scope, ambition and financial implications. Each strand of work has a detailed delivery plan, and in some cases these plans are already underway. There are also a series of key outputs that the programme must deliver, as below.

- 1 Deliver the OFSTED Improvement Plan.
- 2 Implement the new Target Operating Model for Children’s Care and Support.
- 3 Move to the Efficient Structure Target Operating Model within the specified timescale.
- 4 Improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly – but not limited to - those identified in the OFSTED Improvement Plan.
- 5 Ensure the relevant policies, procedures and protocols are in place to support high-quality Social Work practice.
- 6 Develop the requisite Commissioning Plans (to make sure that the correct services are in place in the most cost-effective way).
- 7 Deliver the above objectives within the financial envelope specified and against the projected financial trajectory.

3.6 To understand whether the programme is working, a bespoke outcomes framework has been developed. This framework sets out the key indicators with a set of success criteria for each outcome to demonstrate what is improving and what is working well throughout the life of the programme. It does not replace the existing Children’s Care and Support performance management framework and is not inclusive of all key performance indicators across the service.

3.7 The indicators have been selected to demonstrate the programme effect and to aid the refresh of the Vital Signs dashboard. They are closely linked to the recent OFSTED inspection and the resultant Improvement Plan and can be grouped as follows:

Fig 2. Children’s Care and Support Improvement Programme: Outcomes Framework themes



3.8 The outcomes framework is just one way that we will know whether the programme is working and having the intended impact. There are a range of tests that we will apply as part of a routine package of assurance. Many of these are tests that we would apply as a matter of good operation, but these will be tailored to ensure that they are also able to determine the effective implementation of the programme. This work will include:

External tests of the system: this will include those we commission for ourselves e.g. peer-reviews and targeted evaluations in key areas such as Early Help, as well as those that are mandated i.e. Focused Visits and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) that will be performed by OFSTED inspectors.

Annual Self Evaluation: we are required to produce a self-evaluation of Children's Care and Support each year, and this will be a key document that will outline progress. This will be presented to OFSTED colleagues each year at our Annual Engagement Meeting.

Audit and Quality Assurance: our Quality Assurance Framework sets out how we will use our rolling programme of case audits and thematic 'deep dives' to understand the effectiveness of our services and inform continuous improvement. This includes multi-agency auditing to test the response of partners in the system.

Independent Scrutiny: the role of the independent scrutineer – as set out in the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) – will ensure that the lived experiences of our children and families are a constant feature in our assurance processes and actively used to inform continuous improvement.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of this Report

- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Inspection of Children's Social Care Services (OFSTED Letter)

List of Appendices

- Appendix A: *London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Inspection of Children's Social Care Services (OFSTED Letter)*
- Appendix B: *Children's Care and Support OFSTED Improvement Plan*