

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	07 July 2021
Title of Report:	Ofsted Inspection Local Authority Children's Services Briefing
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Jean Kelly
Contact Email:	Jean.kelly@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	280621ILACSJK
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Information sharing for committee members

Introduction:

This briefing sets out the Ofsted framework for inspecting Children's Services. Ofsted's published framework for inspection can be found on the DfE website. The framework allows for a three year cycle of inspection and focused visits. This cycle has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as ordinary inspection activity was temporarily paused during the first lockdown in 2020. Ofsted activity has been reset in a gradual way, including virtual focused visits and inspections.

Ofsted has continued to undertake monitoring visits with those local authorities judged inadequate. All other local authorities are now being visited in rotation as previously was the case.

For all local authorities who are judged Requires Improvement, there are three key types of Ofsted activity in each three year inspection cycle:

- a. A full ILACS inspection where a judgement is applied about every three years.
- b. Up to two focused visits in between full inspections which usually have a key theme and explore a particular part of the service.
- c. A possible Joint Targeted Area Inspection (which replaces one of the focused visit which explores key themes across the partnership and involves key inspectorates for police, youth justice, health and children's services including education.

In Plymouth, we did not have our expected Focused Visit during 2020 and we continue to wait for this to take place any time this year. The link to the latest Ofsted guidance in respect of inspection can be found here.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services>

Framework Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS).

The current ILACS framework has been in place since November 2017 and were updated in March 2021. Ofsted inspection teams review the following key areas of practice:

- These inspections focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:
- to help and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers

They also evaluate:

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of professional practice

Key principles of the inspection framework:

- whole system approach
- Intelligence based from a wide range of sources
- responsible – fair and proportionate

Full Inspection arrangements:

Five days' notice is usually given for this inspection. However, during the pandemic up to 10 days' notice can be given. Four social care inspectors visit to include one education inspector.

The inspectors undertake a great deal of off-site work with the local authority to review data and documentation. They are then on-site for 2 days. A judgement is given (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement to be good and Inadequate). This might be indicated on the final day of the inspection but as this is due to Ofsted moderation, it is not confirmed until the report is shared approximately 4-6 weeks later.

Focused Visit arrangements:

Ofsted announce the visit up to 10 days before they visit for their fieldwork (virtually or in person). They do this by calling the DCS to alert the local authority on a Tuesday or Wednesday each week. This two week period allows time for the local authority to provide the lead inspector with all of the data and information required to be provided before the fieldwork is undertaken. Fieldwork is undertaken by 3 HMIs (Her Majesty's Inspectors) for two days.

The lead inspector will alert the DCS to any particular theme being explored so that evidence can be shared. Currently, we know that Ofsted have been particularly interested in issues, including:

- Edge of Care responses to children who are at risk of being looked after.
- Legal planning and the quality of pre-proceedings responses.
- Whether children in need of adoption are served well, this includes when the local authority is part of a Regional Adoption Agency, which Plymouth is. We are part of Adopt South West, with Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Somerset.

Joint Targeted Area Inspection arrangements:

These are multi-agency inspections undertaken with other key inspectorates to view the quality and effectiveness of partner agency responses to children and centred on a particular theme.

This process lasts for 4 weeks and includes two weeks of fieldwork in all key agencies (police, youth justice, health, children's social care and education)

Local Preparation has included:

- Regular preparation meetings and communication to the service
- Preparation of presentation of our self-assessment to inspectors on the first day they arrive.
- Share all required performance data related to children open to social work services (Annex A).
- Audit activity in preparation to evidence our practice in respect of key issues, for example, our responses to issues of child exploitation, the quality of child protection planning and decision making when children leave our care.

Recent Inspections and key learning:

1. Inspection of LA Children's Services (ILACS) took place in October 2018
 - a. Plymouth was judged Requires Improvement to be good.
2. Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) too place in November 2019. No judgement is given in these inspections. However, we have an action plan to address key learning points which is reviewed regularly by all partner agencies as part of the Plymouth Children's Safeguarding Partnership
3. Focused Visits take place in between full ILACS visits and JTAI visits as part of the three year cycle of inspection. We have not had a focused visit since prior to the last ILACS inspection in 2018. We have been preparing for this visit as a service so that we are ready to provide accurate child and service level information when the visit if announced.

Recommendations and Reasons

Not applicable

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Ensuring we are responsible as a service and support families in the community.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Not applicable

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

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Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

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Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Click here to enter text.											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 25/06/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: <i>[electronic signature (or typed name and statement of 'approved by email/verbally')]</i> Date approved: 28/06/2021											