

REPORT TO: Children and Families, Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 20 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education & Social Care

SUBJECT: Inspection of Authority Children Services (ILACS)

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To share the findings of the recent Inspection of Authority Children Services (ILACS) in Halton and its recommendations.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 Members note the findings and invite comments on the initial action plan.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 OfSTED conducted a standard inspection under the ILACS framework from 2 March to 13 March 2020.

3.2 OfSTED had previously inspected Halton under the Joint targeted inspection of the multi-agency response to children experiencing or at risk of exploitation, including sexual and criminal exploitation, between 8th and 12th July 2019 and a short focused inspection on the arrangements for contacts and referrals in the integrated contact and referral team (iCART) and thresholds for children in need and child protection, with a focus on children and families stepping down to early help between 24 and 25 July 2018.

3.3 The ILACS inspection provides a Judgement across four areas and Halton was deemed to require improvement to be good across all areas.

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

- 3.4 The inspection team found that we had made positive improvements in some areas of the service since the previous inspections. Most importantly they found no children in immediate harm or at risk of immediate harm and that children were safe.
- 3.5 Other areas of strength were on strategic planning that has resulted in effective early intervention services, a strengthened initial response to children needing help and protection and strong arrangements to tackle extra-familial risk.
- 3.6 Slower progress has been made in some areas, and in contrast to the focused visit inspectors judged that decision making at the front door was inconsistent. Other areas for improvement include decision making in situations where children are living in situations of chronic neglect and having a too optimistic view of parental ability to change. Consistency of the quality of work was a feature across the service and that this was hampered by issues of capacity and the need to have a more robust quality assurance framework.
- 3.7 Inspectors did recognise that we had lost some key managers and that as new team we are in a strong position to affect change.
- 3.8 Ofsted identified 5 main areas for improvement and listed them in the following order:
- Consistency of application of thresholds and understanding of parental consent in iCART.
 - Quality of assessments, and plans, including personal educational plans (PEPs) and contingency planning.
 - Management oversight, challenge and supervision, to support consistent, good-quality social work practice.
 - The sufficiency of high-quality placements to meet children's needs.
 - Strategic planning to support service improvement.
- 3.9 In response to these recommendations we have submitted a draft plan to OFSTED as per requirements of the ILAC framework. The plan is split into two phases. The first phase was done to reflect the changes and actions required to respond to COVID 19. The second phase are longer term actions.
- 3.10 Although 'strategic planning to support improvement' is the last of the recommendations strategic planning it will underpin all that needs to be done and clarify our direction and outline our measurable goals to achieve improvement in the other four areas.
- 3.11 A key feature of the plan that is proposed is to have a partnership board "Working for Children" to provide the vehicle for partner contribution and will be supported by the LGA to provide additional oversight, critical and independent challenge and ensure evidence based progress and secure accurate self-evaluation.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Having a strong and robust framework for identifying and responding across all agencies is the key to ensuring that children and young people are safe and protected, and partners are clear about their responsibilities and role in working together.

6.2 Employment and Learning Skills in Halton

None

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Children and young people whose health needs and level of development is potentially compromised are identified early and multi-agency support is in place to support them.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Children who are at risk of harm are identified quickly and services work together to minimise the risk of harm and take action to formally protect children in a timely way.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 All key stakeholders are committed to working together to address the areas of development identified by the different inspectorates. This will ensure a most robust and consistent approach across the partnership to child exploitation in Halton.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Issues arising from a child's equality and diversity needs will inform the decision-making at the point of contact and it will be ensured that the voice of the child is to the forefront.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There are no relevant background documents to this report.