

CABINET

DATE	14 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
REPORT OF	Councillor Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children’s Services
SUBJECT	Progress following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO	CB 01/26/02

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Across Children’s Services and the wider children’s system, we are committed to working stronger together to achieve better outcomes for our children, young people and families, underpinned by high support and high challenge. The focus on continued improvement and transformation strengthens our infrastructure and system that enables the workforce and our children, young people and families to flourish and thrive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2025, North East Lincolnshire Children’s Services received their Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS).The finalised inspection report can be found here. The overall judgements were:

Area	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children & families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

At the time of publication, North East Lincolnshire Children’s Services were the

fastest transforming Children's Services in the country. As such, we have received a lot of national interest from other local authorities, Ofsted and the Department for Education as to how we have transformed in such a short time. We have shared our improvement journey with other local authorities, we are linking in with others to develop collaborative workstreams, and we are preparing for other visits that are taking place over the coming weeks and months to showcase our transformation.

Following the success of our ILACS inspection, we have continued to sustain positive changes, strengthen our offer, further develop our practice and grow. We continue to work with our Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP) to learn, review and adapt, and have had an amplified focus on developing our local response to significant policy drivers, including the national children's system reforms, which will provide opportunities to build on and further develop the children's system. This report outlines the key headlines from the ILACS report, our subsequent progress, and our ongoing focus on transformation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and notes the content of this report.

## **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

This report seeks to update Cabinet on progress made following the Ofsted ILACS undertaken in July 2025.

### **1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES**

1.1 Key strengths identified within our ILACS inspection include the following:

- Since December 2023, a permanent and highly experienced Director of Children's Services and senior leadership team have driven rapid and profound improvements. The service has transformed from being rated 'inadequate' in 2021 to 'good' overall, with leadership rated 'outstanding'. Leaders are visible, approachable, and have fostered a stable, ambitious workforce. Staff morale and retention have improved significantly.
- Investment in workforce and management capacity has led to greater consistency and quality of practice. There is a strong, supportive culture, with staff feeling valued and trusted. Caseloads have reduced, enabling more impactful direct work with children and families.
- Trust and collaboration with local partners have been rebuilt, resulting in effective multi-agency working and improved outcomes for children, young people, and care leavers.
- Early help is now a strength, with accessible support through family hubs and effective signposting. Multi-agency working is prioritised, and social workers use relational approaches to build trust with families. Child protection processes are timely and robust, with improved responses to domestic abuse

and children at risk of exploitation.

- Children in our care receive good support from skilled social workers and carers. There is a strong focus on permanence, stability, and maintaining family connections. Placement stability has improved, and the fostering service has been transformed. The voices of children in our care are actively sought and valued.
- The leaving care service has been transformed, with personal advisers (PAs) building meaningful relationships and supporting care leavers into adulthood. Accommodation options have improved, and care leavers have better access to health, education, and employment support. The local offer is comprehensive and accessible.

1.2 There were three areas identified by Ofsted which needed to improve, as follows:

- The response to disabled children in need of help and protection
- The timeliness and quality of recordings relating to the pre-proceeding processes as part of the Public Law Outline (PLO)
- How well care leavers are supported to understand the purpose of/and sharing of pathway plans

1.3 Following the ILACS Inspection, we are required to submit an inspection action plan to Ofsted giving details of how we will improve in relation to the three actions above. Since the inspection we have:

### **Strengthened the response to disabled children in need of help and protection**

- Strengthened the workforce by investing in an additional Practice Supervisor for the Children's Disability Service for a fixed term of 12 months, prioritised the recruitment of permanent and suitable social workers, embedded team time for both the Children's Disability Service and integration with the wider Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS) workforce.
- Improved practice by delivering bespoke training sessions in relation to assessments, and risks in the context of the child's disability and short breaks; completing regular observations of staff conducting assessments and visits; modelling of practice within visits; strengthened quality assurance and management oversight of assessments to ensure quality across the service; and shadowing opportunities within the Integrated Front Door and CASS assessment teams to ensure consistency of responding to duty needs and Section 47 enquiries.
- Strengthened direct work with children and young people by delivering training sessions on direct work, how to record on Liquid Logic and learning from serious cases. We have also improved management oversight, with direct work now included within supervision.

- Improved governance and management oversight by ensuring children with a disability have a specific focus within the Children in Need and Child Protection Assurance Meetings.

### **Strengthened the timeliness and quality of recordings relating to the pre-proceeding processes as part of the Public Law Outline (PLO)**

- Strengthened the oversight of children who are the subject of PLO by developing robust and regular senior management oversight and practice standards of the quality of PLO planning.
- Improved tracking of children open to PLO including weekly mechanisms to monitor timeliness of the initial PLO letters and meetings, reviewed the protocol and the Legal Tracking Safeguarding Panel (LTSP) Terms of Reference.
- Reviewed the minute template and implemented a dedicated legal officer to lead to ensure consistency of recording that is specific, and focussed SMART planning that is clear regarding expectations of all parties.

### **How well care leavers are supported to understand the purpose of/and sharing of pathway plans**

- Continued development and strengthening of the recording system to ensure that records of how and when a pathway plan is shared is explicit (to be completed December 2025).
- Continued roll out of pathway plan development workshops to ensure all staff are trained in best practice in completing high quality plans, with a focus on young people understanding the purpose of and sharing of the plan (to be completed by January 2026).
- Consideration of digital solutions for sharing of, completing and engaging in pathway plans in other methods which may be better suited to their needs (to be completed by April 2026).

1.4 In addition to the responding the findings from Ofsted, there is a continued ambition to drive forward further improvements and transformation at pace. A key workstream is to develop our response to the national children's system reforms, and key developments include:

- The Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) Reforms governance structure is in place and working well. A FFPP Reforms codesign event took place on the 2.9.2025, which enabled consultation on the development of the three pillars in relation to:
  - Family Help
  - Family Group Decision Making

- Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams
- North East Lincolnshire Children's Services leads and partnership co-leads have been identified for each of the three pillars. Following the co-design event, individual deep dives were held, facilitated by the leads and attended by partner agencies. A further deep dive event has also taken place to look further at the Family Help pillar from a Children's Services perspective. A draft model has been developed and is being socialised with key leads, and we are on target to submit the next iteration of our development plan to the Department for Education (in December 2025).
- A stakeholder engagement and communication plan is in place and there are opportunities to further socialise the current position and next steps across the governance and reporting processes. The Department for Education have requested the plan format be shared with other areas as good practice.
- There has been a collaborative approach to this co-design stage, and good engagement across the partnership. The detail behind the working version of the model is being worked up, and clarity is emerging as to how the approach may work in practice, which will required an amplified focus on wider workforce engagement. Key leads are utilising the communities of practice through Mutual Ventures, the ADCS Innovation Unit and other mechanisms to listen to and learn from pathfinders and other areas who are adopting a range of different approaches.

**We have also:**

- 1.4.1 Strengthened mechanisms to collate children and young people's voice by developing and launching the Children's Services Core Questions. The questions have been co-produced with staff representatives, young people and families, and ultimately can be asked across the service at key points in a child or young person's journey, to enable us to develop a better understanding of their views and experiences of the services, support and interventions they receive across the service. The outcomes of the questions will be recorded on Liquid Logic and findings shared via relevant governance and reporting arrangements, with the intention that they help to further develop practice and shape and influence service developments.
- 1.4.2 Enhanced our Children's Services audit framework to include additional oversight of children post audit with the development of a 3 monthly post audit checklist that will ensure that actions from the audit have been completed and that we review the experiences of the child since the audit. Alongside this, we have also moved to random selection of auditing across children's social care, family help and youth justice and increased the educational oversight of children's audits.
- 1.4.3 Reset the scope, format, frequency and reporting arrangements to the Continuous Improvement Board, which will now become the Continuous Transformation Board, to reflect the current position in our improvement and transformation journey, and our ambition to continue to develop our local offer to our children, young people and families. This will be underpinned by the

reset of our priority areas of focus.

- 1.4.4 Reorientated our approach to SLIP delivery to progress against our priority areas of focus. As a result, we reset our programme(s) of activity in place with Camden, North Tyneside and Leeds, which are monitored in service and through the appropriate governance and reporting arrangements. We have also sought out and engaged in other sector led and peer review activities, i.e. in relation to corporate and community parenting, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- 1.4.5 There has been and continues to be a greater focus on enhancing inspection preparedness arrangements across the scope of inspection frameworks (including ILACS, youth justice, area SEND, joint targeted area inspection, children's homes and supported accommodation). Where appropriate, this includes the development and monitoring of action plans, storyboards and document banks, as well as there being clarity around our self-evaluation and ensuring preparedness across the workforce
- 1.4.6 Launched the Family Enterprise programme which supports our care leavers to have an empathic, compassionate and tailored route into education, employment and training. A training provider has been appointed to provide the education element of the scheme, and we have identified our first cohort of young people who will be accessing the scheme in January 2026.
- 1.4.7 Continued our focus on developing our learning and development offer through establishing mandatory e-learning for all staff across North East Lincolnshire Council in relation to safeguarding children, child exploitation and corporate and community parenting. We have also refreshed and rolled out a Children's Services wider one day induction, alongside the Foundations for Practice for all practitioners. We have also supported the Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, to develop two social work degree courses, which will further contribute to upskilling people in our area to take up social work as a positive career choice.
- 1.4.8 Piloted the use of Artificial Intelligence, with a representative group, as a mechanism for enabling front line practitioners to spend less time recording, and more time on direct work with children, young people and families. The feedback from the pilot, will shape and influence a further comparative pilot, the outcomes of which will help to inform decision making around the preferred programme, which can then be rolled out across the wider workforce.

## **2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- 2.1 Risks and opportunities are identified through the respective risk management and assurance arrangements, and measures are put in place to manage them, and exceptions reported through the relevant governance and reporting arrangements. Any identified risks are aligned to the NEL Council Risk Register as appropriate.

- 2.2 The national policy direction, and the pending reforms, across the children's system, will have a significant impact on our systems, processes and practice, and as such there is an amplified focus on co-designing and developing our local response.
- 2.3 The Local Authority is awaiting Ofsted and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation completing our SEND and Youth Justice inspections respectively. The findings of these inspections will contribute to our learning and areas for improvement. There is, as mentioned above, an amplified focus on inspection preparation in relation to these inspections.

### **3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no specific reputational implications as a result of this report, though the status of and practice within Children's Services, and the associated inspection outcomes, does have reputational implications for the service, Council, wider partnership, and Borough as a whole.
- 3.2 There is dedicated communications capacity for Children's Services across the Council, who leads and contributes to responding to, and proactively managing internal and external communications.
- 3.3 As a result of the improvement and transformation journey, the recent inspection report, and the ongoing focus on communications, this is contributing to enhancing the positive perceptions of North East Lincolnshire, and of North East Lincolnshire Council, and of them being a positive place to live and work.

### **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

### **5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Across Children's Services, we have been driving forward tangible transformation at pace, focusing on embedding sustainable change across the system, and as articulated in our self-evaluation, we have significantly enhanced the lived experiences and outcomes for our children, young people, and families. This is underpinned by our commitment to continuous listening, learning, reviewing, and adapting, through the simplification and implementation of our practice approach, and on integrated working. As a result, there has also been significant, and transformative progress in the relationships between Children's Services, the wider Council, and the wider Partnership, which are now built on trust, transparency, high support and high challenge, with children, young people and families first, centre and last in all we do.
- 5.2 We have placed a considerable focus on promoting Children's Services and the wider Council as an employer of choice. This effort is yielding rewards in terms of unparalleled recruitment increases and positive perceptions of the Council among the workforce and community. We have focused on workforce communication and engagement and we have developed and championed various opportunities to connect, build relationships, find solutions, challenge and

support each other, share best practices, and celebrate our achievements. As a result of our investment in the Children's Services workforce and progress against our improvement plan, including sector-led improvement and transformation funding, we have achieved sustained workforce stability. This has led to a reduction in agency workers and the recruitment of significantly more social workers in one year than in the previous three years combined. The ever improving sufficiency landscape and oversight are also enabling stability and a continuing reduction in external placements, with more children returning to the Borough.

5.3 As a result of the ILACS inspection in July 2025, Ofsted also reflected that the service has undergone profound and positive change, and that many children, young people and care leavers are now benefitting from help when their needs are first identified and throughout their social care experience. In addition, noteworthy cultural changes across the service have stabilised and galvanised the workforce to have ambition to deliver impactful services that are helping more children, and their families, to thrive.

5.4 Ultimately, as a result of our improvement and transformation journey, underpinned by the strength of our assurance framework, children and young people in North East Lincolnshire are now more likely to:

- be listened to, their views taken account of and have their needs met
- be supported by permanent staff with less changes in worker
- receive support early from across the system and be less likely to need a statutory service
- benefit from assessment, intervention and planning where a statutory service is required
- benefit from timely and holistic decisions made by all involved partners
- remain living within their own family and community
- have permanency plans
- benefit from more timely care planning (where care proceedings are required, these are more likely to be concluded swifter)
- as care leavers, live in their own suitable accommodation as they enter adulthood
- as children in our care, live with our own NELC foster carers rather than Independent Fostering Agency carers
- have positive, inclusive school experiences

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

No impact

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

No impact

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

No impact



**9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

No impact

**10. MONITORING COMMENTS**

Monitoring officers have reviewed the report and their comments have been factored in as required.

**11. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

All wards impacted

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[North East Lincolnshire Local Authority Children's Services Ofsted Inspection July 2025 report](#)

**13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services, North East Lincolnshire Council

**COUNCILLOR MARGARET CRACKNELL**

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION**