CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE 30th November 2017

REPORT OF Paul Cordy, Director of Children’s Social Care

SUBJECT Ofsted Single Inspection Framework Report and Outcome

STATUS OPEN

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Ofsted inspections ensure that children’s services meet the minimum statutory requirements and deliver best practice. Good services for children primarily deliver outcomes in respect of the Safe and Secure outcome (Feel Safe and Are Safe), but contribute to all five outcomes both directly and indirectly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To inform board members of the outcome of the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework which took place between 12th July and 3rd August 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The panel are asked to note the contents of the report and the overall Ofsted judgement of children’s services in North East Lincolnshire.

2. The panel are asked to agree to the proposed future plans for panel content to address the recommendations for Elected Members within the Ofsted report.

3. The panel are asked to consider any additional actions that could be taken to respond to the recommendations within the Ofsted report.

REASONS FOR DECISION

To respond to the recommendations by Ofsted inspectors in respect of executive governance.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 North East Lincolnshire Council was subject to an inspection of children’s services by the government regulatory body Ofsted between 12th July and 3rd August 2017. The report containing the inspection findings was published on 25th September 2017.

1.2 Ofsted’s judgement structure is a four-point scale: Outstanding; Good; Requires Improvement; or Inadequate. The overall judgement made by Ofsted was that children’s services are ‘Good’. This judgement is a landmark achievement for the Council, being one of only four local authorities in the country in the top quartile of deprivation to achieve a Good judgement. In addition, only 3 local
authorities in the country have been judged to be outstanding, and therefore a Good judgement puts us in the top 25% of local authorities in the country.

1.3 The full Ofsted report is appended to this report. The main findings were:

- Good progress has been made and services have been strengthened since the last inspection in 2012 (where the overall judgement was Adequate/Good)
- There is a strong partnership commitment to strengthening preventative services
- Robust performance management and quality assurance frameworks have ensured accurate self-awareness which has led to many successful improvements
- Appropriate processes safeguarding children who go missing and/or are at risk of sexual exploitation.
- Statutory safeguarding services are effective.
- Adoption services are good and improving.
- Decisions for children to be bought into care are appropriate and timely.
- Outcomes for children in care are positive.
- Social workers and IROs know their children well.
- There is good educational support for looked after children and progress against all educational stages is positive.
- Care leavers have a good range of support services.

1.4 The report also identified some areas where there is further room for development. These are as follows:

- Social work assessments of children and their families should be timely, and lead to clear plans and interventions which enable the extent of progress to be measured.
- Ensure that the intervention plans for children and young people at high risk of sexual exploitation are clear and that their progress over time is tracked.
- More care leavers should benefit from education, employment and training opportunities, including those provided by the local authority as a diligent corporate parent.
- Ensure that the CfCC is able to influence senior decision-makers in the local authority area effectively.
- The corporate parenting board should ensure that all council services are executing their duties towards children in care, in line with the pledge.
- The local political scrutiny panel should be aware of how well vulnerable children are being supported.
- Ensure that the Health and Wellbeing Board’s priorities for children are aligned with other strategic boards’ priorities, and that progress is being made with these priorities.
- Ensure that care leavers have full information about their health histories.
- All child permanence reports should include a good, comprehensive account of an adopted child’s birth family history.
- Increase the take-up of the independent visitor and advocacy services for those children in care who would benefit from these opportunities.
- Private fostering should be promoted so that all children who are privately fostered can be assessed and provided with support appropriate to their needs.

1.5 A comprehensive action plan has been developed to address the recommendations. Progress against the actions within the plan will be monitored by the Improvement Board (chaired by Joanne Hewson, Deputy Chief Executive) and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. In addition, NELC is required to submit the action plan to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector by 4th January 2018. It is positive to note that some recommendations have already been completed (Private Fostering; Child Permanence Records; Health Histories).

1.6 There were some paragraphs within the report that are more relevant to the elected member committees: Corporate Parenting Board; Scrutiny Panel for Children and Lifelong Learning; Health and Well Being Board. Comments in respect of these committees were as follows:

- Local Councillors regularly attend the corporate parenting panel and scrutinise children’s services through local democratic arrangements. However, there is insufficient focus on the voice of children in care and whether their outcomes are improving. The scrutiny panel’s programme of work does not include a focus on children in care. The corporate parenting board, also regularly attended by the chief executive, does not hear from the Council for Children in Care or find other ways to elicit the views of children in care and care leavers. This means that the corporate parenting panel cannot ensure compliance with the corporate parenting pledge. (Recommendations)

- Children’s views are considered well in individual plans for them, but insufficient attention has been given to enhancing their collective influence. The council for children in care is underdeveloped. The corporate parenting board does not hear enough directly from children or check that the pledge is being kept. The scrutiny panel is insufficiently focused on children in care and care leavers.

- There are several useful mechanisms in place for the local authority to learn from children about their experiences in care. However, the council for children in care (CfCC) is underdeveloped. Senior corporate parents need stronger links with the CfCC to ensure that it can properly represent children’s views and contribute to service development.

- More work needs to be done to ensure that the wishes and feelings of children in care are heard and taken into account, particularly in the work of the corporate parenting and children’s services scrutiny panels. The Council for Children in Care has insufficient influence, and needs to be developed and better supported.

- The Health and Wellbeing Board’s focus on vulnerable children is weak and the children’s action plan is not up to date, hampering the ability to see its impact.
• Community needs are clearly set out in a comprehensive joint strategic needs assessment. This has enabled well-informed commissioning of services, supported by a robust commissioning strategy. Alignment with the sufficiency strategy ensures that appropriate services are available to children and families, and further services are planned in response to emerging needs. The impact of the Health and Wellbeing Board is less clear, with an out-of-date strategy and a lack of focus on some key areas of vulnerability for young people such as mental health and neglect, although services for children in these areas are being delivered nonetheless. (Recommendation)

1.7 In order to respond to the recommendations a number of actions have been suggested and these are as follows:

• Sharing of the minutes of meetings between the Corporate Parenting Board and Scrutiny Panel for Children and Lifelong Learning.
• Corporate Parenting Board annual report to be produced and shared with the Scrutiny Panel for Children and Lifelong Learning (as per the terms of reference for Scrutiny Panel.)
• Review the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure appropriate representation across the organisation, including Leisure, Housing and Libraries.
• Review the format of the Council for Children in Care meetings, to ensure their collective voice informs strategic decision making, including regular reports to the Corporate Parenting Board and Scrutiny Panel for Children and Lifelong Learning.
• LSCB to launch a Children’s Voice and Influence Strategy to allow strategic decisions to be made with due consideration of the collective views of children. The strategy will be delivered by a newly formed LSCB Voice and Influence Sub-Group.
• Review of the Corporate Parenting Pledge in conjunction with the newly reformatted Council for Children in Care.
• Review of the reports that are currently produced and reported to various boards across the organisation to determine a governance mechanism that ensures sufficient information in respect of children’s social care is received by elected member committees.

1.8 Board members are asked to consider these actions and any other additional measures that can be taken to strengthen governance in respect of children’s social care and the voice of children in need of statutory services.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Not applicable

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED
4. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Assistant Director, Law), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Human Resources Group Manager.

5. WARD IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ofsted Single Inspection Framework Report – North East Lincolnshire Council

7. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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