


Non-Executive Report of the:  <b>Overview and Scrutiny</b>  26 April 2017	 <b>TOWER HAMLETS</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Debbie Jones, Corporate Director Children's Services	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted
<b>Ofsted Single Inspection Framework Outcome 2017</b>	

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Layla Richards, Service Manager Policy, Programmes and Community Insight
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards

## SUMMARY

This report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee follows the outcome of the Ofsted Single Inspection of children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The inspection took place between 23 January and 16 February 2017 and the overall judgement was that Children's Services in Tower Hamlets are inadequate.

This report provides the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a summary of that inspection, the findings, the high-level response to date and an outline of the process to agree an improvement plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the content of this report and consider the improvement activity outlined in section four of this report.
2. Consider the role of OSC in relation to the Children's Services Improvement Board.

## **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 It is important that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to receive information about the inspection and to consider the improvement activity set out in section four of this report.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 There is no alternative option. It is highly important that Overview & Scrutiny Committee be involved in this process.

## **3. OFSTED INSPECTION**

- 3.1 On 7 April 2017 Ofsted published the report of Tower Hamlets' Single Inspection of children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The overall judgement in this report is that Children's Services in Tower Hamlets are inadequate.
- 3.2 There were also individual judgements of inadequate for Help and Protection and Leadership, Management Governance. Services for Looked After Children and Achieving Permanence, which is broken down into two further judgements of Adoption Performance and Experiences and Progress of Care Leavers were judged to require improvement. The Local Safeguarding Children Board was inspected at the same time and this was also judged to be inadequate.
- 3.3 This was the first time that Tower Hamlets had been inspected against the Single Inspection Framework. Prior to this the last inspection of Children's Services had been in July 2012 under a different framework, the Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) framework, when Tower Hamlets had been rated 'Good'.
- 3.4 The report is broken down by each of the areas for which judgements are provided outlined above and each section details the inspection findings. The report also details 15 recommendations which the local authority must act upon.
- 3.5 As a result of the inspection judgement the Council has been issued with a draft direction of improvement by the Secretary of State and a Department for Education improvement advisor will also be identified to work with the Council to support the necessary improvement.

## 4. OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION

- 4.1 Outlined below is a summary of the recommendations and the Council's high level actions that will form the basis of the Inspection Improvement Plan which is being developed. The Plan will evolve over time as improvements become embedded and challenge and scrutiny are offered. There will be further opportunity for the OSC to be involved.

### **Recommendation One**

- To take immediate action to ensure that work with children and their families is compliant with basic practice standards and that poor practice is challenged.

#### Summary of action

All social work staff and managers will undergo a "back to basics" training programme to ensure consistency of practice and compliance with law and policy.

### **Recommendation Two**

- To take steps to ensure that thresholds are consistently applied and that children who need to see a social worker do so.

#### Summary of actions

- As part of the response to recommendation one, expectations around thresholds will be reinforced and managers and auditors will reinforce their application.

### **Recommendation Three**

- Ensure that strategy discussions include all relevant agencies and that robust arrangements are in place to protect children while child protection investigations take place.

#### Summary of actions

- Attendance at strategy discussions will be closely monitored and when necessary, other agencies will be engaged in discussion about their attendance.

### **Recommendation Four**

- Improve the quality of assessments and plans for children to ensure that purposeful work takes place to prevent drift, and to protect children in need of help and protection and children in care.

#### Summary of action

- There will be a strengthened focus on timely and detailed assessment. Management oversight before assessments and plans are signed off will be increased to assure quality.

### **Recommendation Five**

- Ensure that independent reviewing officers and child protection chairs provide sufficient challenges to the plans.

Summary of action

- The role of Child Protection chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers is being strengthened. The use of established alert processes is being reinforced and monitored.

**Recommendations Six**

- Take immediate action to ensure that management oversight and supervision are strengthened and that all work is recorded appropriately to an acceptable standard.

Summary of action

- New requirements for recording management oversight and supervision are being introduced with immediate effect. Managers are being briefed on their new responsibilities.

**Recommendation Seven**

- Urgently improve the quality and timeliness of services to children who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs and serious youth violence. Ensure the alignment of services with those for children who go missing and those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Ensure that comprehensive and accurate intelligence and data inform services developments.

Summary of action

- Further detailed training in respect to the relationships between gang affiliation, violent crime, children who go missing and children vulnerable to all crime will be made available to all staff. Close monitoring of the most high risk children will be implemented with immediate effect. Learning from monitoring will inform further development.

**Recommendations Eight**

- Ensure that risks to children who go missing from home or care are assessed by social workers and their managers, and that all missing children are offered a return to home interview within 72 hours.

Summary of action

Established processes for managing children who go missing are to be implemented immediately. All children who go missing will be offered a Return Home Interview within 72 hours. Those who decline will have the reasons for this clearly recorded and understood.

**Recommendation Nine**

- Take urgent steps to ensure that social workers and managers receive relevant training to counter child sexual exploitation, and that children identified as at risk of sexual exploitation are subject to risk assessment and offered responsive and appropriate help.

Summary of action

Specific and detailed training on the risks posed to children who are subject to CSE will be offered to all staff. This will be completed by October 2017.

#### **Recommendation Ten**

- Review the arrangements for private fostering to ensure that practice is compliant with statutory requirements, that assessments include relevant information and that reviews are meaningful and timely.

Summary of action

- All children who are privately fostered will be identified and subject to a revised system to ensure that their reviews are timely and their needs fully met.

#### **Recommendation Eleven**

- Ensure that children benefit from effective and timely processes under the Public Law Outline that addresses all the risks for children, and are thorough and well managed.

Summary of action

- A revised system is being introduced to rigorously manage cases subject to the Public Law Outline. This will ensure that work is completed within statutory timescales and the work on this has already started.

#### **Recommendation Twelve**

- Urgently address the sufficiency of emergency and unplanned placements so that children's needs can be met appropriately when they become looked after.

Summary of action

- Work is underway to reduce the necessity of emergency placements. The borough's sufficiency strategy is being reviewed to ensure availability and choice of appropriate placements.

#### **Recommendations Thirteen and Fourteen**

- Improve the quality of child permanence reports to ensure that all areas are fully evidenced, including details of all brothers and sisters and relevant medical information
- Ensure that the agency decision maker reads and considers all adoption panel paperwork, panel minutes and recommendations before reaching her decisions, and clearly records her own reasons for the decisions made.

Summary of action

Revised requirements in respect of permanency reports will be introduced alongside improved monitoring and compliance. There is increased capacity at Divisional Director level to ensure that the agency decision maker has capacity to consider all paperwork and record decisions.

#### **Recommendation Fifteen**

- Implement the workforce strategy as swiftly as possible to improve workforce stability and capacity. Undertake training needs analysis to ensure that the workforce is appropriately trained in order to achieve improvements and consistency in the quality of practice.

#### Summary of action

- Implementation of the Workforce Strategy is a priority. This will target increased recruitment, a decreasing reliance of agency staff and a comprehensive training and development programme to ensure all staff are skilled to the highest levels.

## **5. IMPROVEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

5.1 The Council has a maximum of 70 days following publication of the report to submit a “written statement of action” to the Secretary of State and Ofsted HMCI.

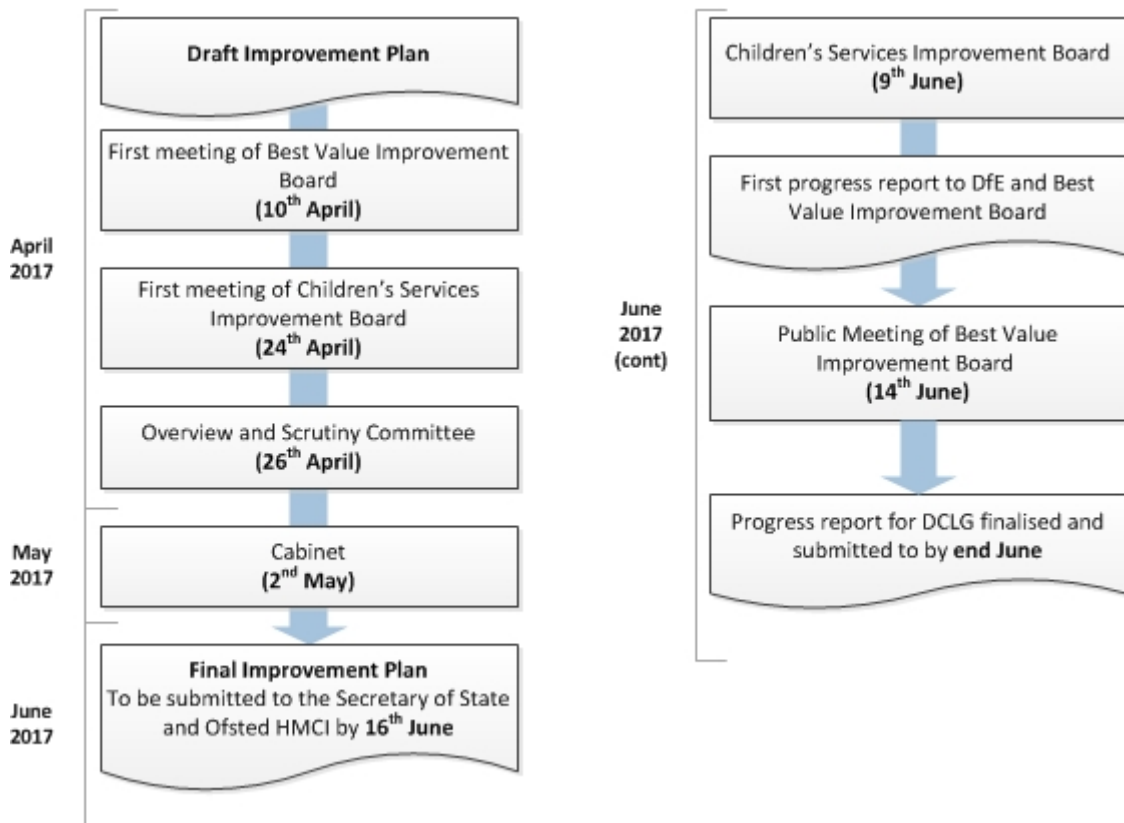
5.2 The improvement plan will need to reflect the recommendations detailed in the report and will be reviewed by Ofsted to ensure this is the case. The improvement plan is developing under four main headings which are:

- A robust model of social work practice
- A sufficient and skilled workforce
- Quality assurance and audit
- Leadership, management and governance

5.3 A Children’s Services Improvement Board (CSIB) is being established to take forward the improvement work. This will meet every six weeks and for the first time on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017. It will be independently chaired by Alan Wood, a former DCLG appointed Commissioner and former Director of Children’s Services. The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services along with the scrutiny lead will also be on the CS Improvement Board. The Independent Chair will produce a report to the DfE three months from the date of the Direction and every quarter thereafter. In addition, a DfE appointed Intervention Adviser, reporting and accountable to the Secretary of State, will be providing reports every six months following reviews to determine progress made improving its children’s social care services.

5.4 To ensure transparency reports from the CS Improvement Board will be considered by the Council’s cross-party and public Best Value Improvement Board. This Board meets every quarter and chaired by the Mayor, John Biggs and attended by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Cllr. John Pierce. It has responsibility for overall improvement across the Council. Reports from BV Improvement are submitted to DCLG every quarter from June 2017.

5.5 The improvement plan will need to be signed off by the Council’s Cabinet before it is submitted to the DfE. The process timeline for this will be:



Note: dates are currently being scheduled.

5.6 When a local authority is judged to be inadequate, Ofsted will carry out a programme of monitoring activity to report on progress. Quarterly monitoring visits starting in the summer will take place to evaluate the progress made against the recommendations. We will then likely be subject to a full re-inspection within two years of submitting our action (improvement) plan.

#### 4. **COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

4.1 It is recognised in this report that there are a number of improvement activities required to ensure that the desired outcomes for children and young people are delivered.

4.2 Where this investment is off a one-off nature this will be secured from reserves and the CFO will need to be assured that the activities represent value for money and are affordable. Where there is a need for an on-going increase in expenditure, this will need to be considered as part of the Council's future MTFs planning as it will impact on the Council's overall financial position and again will need to demonstrate VFM, be affordable and demonstrate sustainable improvement to the service.

4.3 During the 2017/18 budget setting process significant additional resources were made available to the service, recognising that some savings from previous years did not support the approach to improving services that had already been identified.

- 4.4 It is vital that the CSIB exercises strong governance over the financial resources that have been and will continue to be made available for both the one off investments and any future ongoing funding commitments. In addition the management of these resources within the Children's Services Directorate will continue to be subject to the Council's normal budget management processes including reporting on a quarterly basis to the Cabinet and affording the OSC the opportunity to challenge and review.

## **5. LEGAL COMMENTS**

- 5.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions. It is consistent with the Constitution and the statutory framework for the Executive to provide a response and it is reasonable for the Committee to be provided with progress updates.
- 5.2 The framework for Ofsted inspections of Children's Services is set out in sections 135-142 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 ('the Act') and associated Employment and Education Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007 ('the Regulations'). Pursuant to section 136 of the Act, on receipt of the Ofsted report, the Council is required to publish the report within 30 days by sending a copy to each of its safeguarding partners, as well as a local newspaper and radio station (Regulation 2). The Council then has 70 days to publish a written statement of the actions it intends to take in light of the report of the report within 70 days of receipt of the report ('the Inspection Improvement Plan') (Regulation 3).
- 5.3 Ofsted's "Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Reviews of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards" ('the SIF') sets out a single assessment framework for assessing local authorities during inspections conducted under section 136 of the Act. Local authorities are graded outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate in each of the areas inspected.
- 5.4 The SIF notes that a rating of inadequate indicates: "*There are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm and/or the welfare of looked after children is not safeguarded and promoted.*" (para. 31)
- 5.5 In light of the Council's rating of inadequate in 2 out of the 3 areas assessed, Ofsted's "Monitoring and re-inspection of local authority children's services judged inadequate" guidance will apply. Ofsted will carry out a programme of



monitoring activities, including quarterly monitoring visits, to report on the progress made by local authorities.

- 5.6 The Council must arrange an action planning visit between 25 and 35 days after receipt of Ofsted's report, which an Ofsted inspector will attend. Ofsted's quarterly monitoring visits will evaluate the progress made against the recommendations since the inspection and check that there is no decline in other areas (para. 5).
- 5.7 Ofsted's lead inspector will review the Inspection Improvement Plan as soon as possible after receipt to check that it reflects the recommendations contained in the inspection report (para, 21.) As the Council has an early draft of its Inspection Improvement Plan, the Director of Children's Services should share this with the lead inspector before the action planning visit to assist planning (para.15).
- 5.8 The first monitoring visit will usually be within four weeks of the submission deadline for the Council's Inspection Improvement Plan (para.24). In advance of the visits, the inspector may ask the Council to audit cases, or to request information about up to six cases that have already been audited by the local authority. The Council will be asked to return the completed audits at least three working days before the monitoring visit (para. 28). Inspectors will produce a brief report about their findings and, in particular, their evaluation of the Council's progress. Other than the report arising from the first monitoring visit, these will be published (paras. 41-42).
- 5.9 Ofsted will usually re-inspect a local authority judged inadequate at its last inspection within two years of it submitting its action plan, usually after at least four quarterly monitoring visits. Because the Council has been found to be inadequate overall, this will involve a full repeat SIF, although this will be shorter than the initial SIF as inspectors will take into account information gathered during monitoring visits (paras. 50-52).
- 5.10 If the inspection determines that the Council remains inadequate, the monitoring process in section one of this guidance will start again. The Secretary of State may also consider appointing a Children's Services Commissioner or remove service control from the Council (para. 68).

## **6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 The Ofsted inspection looked at the experiences of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough. The inspection found that those children and young people are not always receiving the services they deserve. The Council's response to the inspection findings needs to ensure that vulnerable children and families receive the best services possible.

## **7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The findings of the inspection suggest the Council, in a number of areas, is falling well short of delivering best value in its services to children and young people. This will be a focus through all four themes of the improvement plan.

## **8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

8.1 None identified.

## **9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Council will need to demonstrate improvement at the quarterly improvement visits which will start in the summer. There will need to be appropriate challenge and rigour in developing and implementing the improvement plan to ensure progress is made and positive impact on the lives of children and young people can be demonstrated.

## **10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The report contains a specific recommendation to improve the quality and timeliness of services for children who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs and serious youth violence. This will require close working with our partners.

---

### **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

#### **Linked Report**

- NONE

#### **Appendices**

- NONE

#### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- NONE

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

- Layla Richards x2364