

Cabinet 27 June 2017	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Debbie Jones, Corporate Director, Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Summary of the Inspection Improvement Plan 2017	

Lead Member	Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education
Originating Officer(s)	Nancy Meehan Divisional Director, Children's Social Care
Wards affected	All wards or state wards
Key Decision?	Yes/No
Community Plan Theme	A fair and prosperous community

Executive Summary

In January and February 2017 Ofsted carried out a single inspection of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. On 7th April 2017 Ofsted published its report providing an overall judgment that Children's Services in Tower Hamlets are inadequate.

The Department for Education require that an Action Plan be submitted 70 working days after the publication of report. This report outlines the themes and a synopsis of the improvement work that will be undertaken. In order to achieve sustainable progress a diagnosis of the causes, extent and impact of the challenges had to be undertaken. This report also incorporates that and outlines how the analysis has informed the improvement plan.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the report and approve the submission of the Improvement Plan to the Department for Education by the 20th July 2017.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Local Authority is required to submit to the Department for Education a “written statement of action” in response to the Ofsted report. Ofsted are not responsible for endorsing the plan, however they will write to the Director of Children’s Services to confirm that the or improvement plan reflects the recommendations.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The local authority must submit a response to the inspection report to the Department of Education. However, Cabinet could decide to request further amendment prior to submission.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1 Ofsted undertook its inspection of Children’s Services in Tower Hamlets in January and February 2017. The outcome of the inspection was that Children’s Services were inadequate. The report was published on the 7th April 2017.
- 3.2 This judgment was accepted by the senior leaders of the Council and a commitment made to address the serious issues identified within the report. In order to oversee this process, a Children’s Services Improvement Board has been established, independently chaired by Alan Wood CBE. Alan is a former Director of Children’s Services for the London Borough of Hackney as well as a one of the Secretary of State’s Commissioners both in Tower Hamlets and Doncaster. He has recently been appointed as a member of the Youth Justice Board. The Children’s Services Improvement board has representation from politicians and senior managers as well as from the wider Tower Hamlets partnership. This board meets every six weeks, with two meetings having already taken place.
- 3.3 One of the key challenges is to understand the reason that services for children were rated as inadequate. This is a vital step in ensuring that any changes that are made will support the improvement journey as well as being sustainable. This report contains analysis of some of the reasons for the situation.
- 3.4 The Local Government Association has identified ten components of a successful children’s services department. These components provide a framework for the action which children’s services, the wider Council and our partners are taking. It reflects the detailed work being undertaken already by the frontline service and through wider Council strategies and plans. Improving children’s social care requires a whole Council approach which is ambitious for young people and in its pace of change.

3.5 The ten components are:

- A whole Council vision for excellence
- An outward facing organisation and culture
- Corporate and political support and an ambition for excellence
- Strong member-officer relationships based on trust and constructive challenge
- A clear 'golden thread' from the political leadership through to the front-line
- Strong and dynamic leadership throughout the organisation
- A permanent and stable workforce with capacity and resources
- A strong model of practice, with good checks and balances
- Clear and embedded systems, processes and data
- Strong coherent partnerships at strategic and operational level

These components are further expanded upon in the Summary of the Inspection Improvement Plan (appendix 1)

3.6 The Children's Services Improvement Board (Operational Group) supports the work of this board and is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children's Services. This meets monthly and to date has focused on addressing the urgent recommendations made by Ofsted as well as overseeing the development of the improvement plan.

3.7 Following the inspection, there is a requirement to submit to the Department for Education an improvement plan. At appendix 1 is a high level draft summary of the plan with a fully developed improvement plan being submitted to the DfE by the 20th July 2017.

3.8 The four main themes around which the improvement plan has been built are:

- Leadership, Management and Governance
- A robust model of social work practice
- A sufficient and skilled workforce
- Quality assurance and audit.

3.6 The improvement plan will be regularly monitored and reported as well as being subject to overview and scrutiny. Following any inspection where the outcome is that the authority is judged to be inadequate, there will be a process of monitoring visits. The first of these will be in August 2017 and three monthly after that. The reports on our progress will be published at regular intervals following these visits with a full inspection in two years.

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

4.1 Implementation of the improvement plan is likely to have significant financial implications

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- 4.2 Significant additional resources have already been identified as part of the 2017-2020 MTFs; in particular total additional growth of £5.2m addressing pressure in a range of areas, most of which feature in the improvement plan.
- 4.3 For one-off activities, it is proposed to create a separate reserve and the subsequent progress of costs against it will be reported to Members as part of the Council's normal budget management reporting mechanisms.
- 4.4 The level of the proposed reserve will be based on a detailed assessment of the costs associated with the improvement plan and the demonstrable improvements that will be achieved as a result of the investment.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1 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 within 70 days of receipt of the report ('the Inspection Improvement Plan') (Regulation 3).
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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)
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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).

- 5.6 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).
- 5.7 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).
- 5.8 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).
- 5.9 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 children and families supported by Children's Services are amongst the most vulnerable in Tower Hamlets. Ofsted identified that the services provided to these children were inadequate and the improvement plan seeks to address this.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The allocation of resources for the improvement plan, will be based on the need to achieve best value in relation to Children's Services.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 There are no implications arising from this recommendation.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There is a risk that should the authority fail to address the significant issues highlighted by the inspection report, that children and families will not receive the services required to meet their needs. These risks are being mitigated by the robust and detailed improvement plan that will be submitted to the Department for Education as well as a significant improvement architecture that has been put in place to ensure that the necessary changes are made and sustained.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no implications arising from this recommendation

11. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Ofsted Single Inspection undertaken in January and February 2017 highlighted serious concerns about how Children's Services discharges its statutory responsibilities for children and families in Tower Hamlets; the improvement plan is the response to this. This document provides an analysis as to why these services were rated as inadequate, and outlines the actions required to support the necessary changes in service delivery.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Summary of Inspection Improvement Plan 2017
- Appendix 2: Ofsted Inspection Report

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

Or state N/A