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| Cabinet |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| 31/07/2019 | |
| Report of: Debbie Jones, Corporate Director Children & Culture | Classification: Unrestricted |
| Outcome of recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) | |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Danny Hassell Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People |
| Originating Officer(s) | Jonathan Solomons, Strategy and Policy Manager, Children & Culture |
| Wards affected | All wards |
| Key Decision? | Yes/No |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | [Insert date notice was published] |
| Reason for Key Decision | [Financial Threshold / Impact on Wards] |
| Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome | A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in |

Executive Summary

Children's Services were inspected between the 3rd and the 21st June 2019. This inspection followed an inspection in early 2017 where Children's Services were rated as inadequate. This most recent inspection considered the improvements that have been made to services over the past two years.

The result of the inspection was the Children's Services in Tower Hamlets are now rated as GOOD. The grade above inadequate is Requires Improvement so this rating represents a significant improvement. This report will outline some of the key highlights from the inspection report.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of this report and the outcome of the recent inspection

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Cabinet have been monitoring the progress of the Children's Services Improvement journey since the inspection in 2017. This report represents the culmination of that work.

2 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

2.1 There are no alternative options

3 **DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

3.1 The final inspection report was published on the 22nd July following an inspection that took place between the 3rd and the 19th of June. During the inspection four inspectors looked closely at the practice within our statutory and early help services.

3.2 The outcome of the inspection was as follows.

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

3.3 This outcome represents an improvement of two grades in the space of just over two years.

3.4 Some of the key highlights from the report are as follows.

“Services for children in Tower Hamlets are now good and have substantially improved since they were found to be inadequate in 2017. Since then, leaders and managers have had a relentless focus to improve practice to deliver good experiences and progress for children and their families. At all levels, there is effective management oversight and a direct understanding of the quality of significantly improved frontline practice”

“Effective and well-coordinated universal and early help provision means that children and families receive good help when they need it. Children in need, including those in need of protection, benefit from good assessments that inform plans to reduce risk and improve children’s circumstances. The workforce reflects the diversity of the local population and staff sensitively take account of, and respond appropriately to, the cultural and religious needs of children and families in Tower Hamlets”

“Children in care and care leavers receive good support from workers who know them well and are appropriately ambitious for them. They live in stable homes, which helps them to do their best in all aspects of their lives.

3.5 In relation to the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection:

“Children and their families benefit from an extensive range of increasingly well-coordinated multi-agency early help support. Since the previous inspection in 2017, the local authority and partners agencies have taken carefully considered action to reconfigure and target services to ensure that they are effective.”

“Referrals into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) are appropriate and reflect partners’ good understanding of thresholds.... All work is allocated for an assessment of children’s needs, quickly and effectively.”

“Children receive effective support and interventions from the out-of-hours emergency duty team..... Good communication between out-of-hours and daytime services means that children receive a timely and highly effective service that improves their immediate situation.”

“Most assessments are comprehensive and analytical. They demonstrate effective and thoughtful engagement with families and a good understanding of children’s needs.”

“The quality of social work practice in the family support and protection teams has significantly improved. **Inspectors did not find any children at risk of immediate harm.** This is vastly different from the 2017 inspection..... In most cases, good work is helping to improve circumstances for children.

“The impact of the strategic neglect work has led to better recognition and understanding of the impact of accumulative neglect. The increasing use of the neglect tool is improving the understanding of this on the child’s lived experience.”

“Management oversight is clearly evidenced on children’s files; it is regular and covers key decision points appropriately in children’s lives. This includes appropriate senior management oversight to ensure that plans are progressed in a timely manner.... Improved oversight of plans from child protection chairs through midway reviews prevents risks of drift in progressing plans. Clear contingency planning, including use of Public Law Outline (PLO), has seen the numbers of care applications rise for younger children. This reflects senior managers’ decision to refocus resources on early intervention and tackle childhood neglect, in this, the most deprived local authority in England (Deprivation Index).”

“Disabled children’s assessments and plans are of a good standard. They inform actions that keep children safe and improve their circumstances. All

assessments give clear focus to the needs of individual children, their health and development.”

“Highly vulnerable children at risk of exploitation, including those missing from home, school or care, receive effective, bespoke services, delivered sensitively by skilled and committed staff. Strong partnerships serve to protect these children from harm..... Emerging risks to young people are identified early, through an innovative multi-agency co-located exploitation team and gangs unit..... Excellent work by the exploitation team ensures that social workers and early help practitioners are knowledgeable and confident in recognising the signs of exploitation and the impact of neglect, domestic abuse and absent fathers, which increase vulnerability to exploitation. Vulnerable adolescents in care receive well-coordinated services, including those adolescents who are placed out of area.”

3.6 In relation to the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers:

“Children come into care appropriately when risks increase for them, and they are no longer able to safely live at home. Workers in the ‘edge of care’ team build close and trusting relationships with children, and effective support enables many to remain safely living at home or with other family members.”

“All permanence options, including special guardianship orders and adoption, are now considered simultaneously, including assessments of family members and whether brothers and sisters can live together. Exceptional effort is made to ensure that children can live with their families and friends.”

“Children’s views are clear in assessments, which are regularly updated. Care plans are child-centred, and most are comprehensive, analytical and include contingency plans. Children’s wishes influence care planning. Social workers visit children regularly, strive to have meaningful relationships with them and speak about them with real affection. Manageable caseloads allow time for sensitive and creative direct work to help children understand their experiences and improve their life chances.”

“The work of the independent reviewing officers (IROs) has improved significantly..... Evidence of effective challenge is ensuring progress of care plans and reduces delay, including alerts to keep planning on track. IROs are creative in their approach to get to know children, and reviews are child-centred.”

“Children’s physical and emotional health needs are quickly assessed, met, and regularly reviewed. Clinicians and psychologists work collaboratively with social workers, foster carers and other professionals to support them to develop skills that help traumatised children.”

“Personal education plans (PEPs) provide a sound basis to plan and review the progress children make. Children in care receive effective support from

the virtual school staff, who understand their individual needs and act as effective advocates for them.”

“Foster carers feel highly valued, they receive good support and extensive training focused on meeting the needs of children. Good training opportunities are available in support groups, hubs, and one-to-one during supervisory visits.... An excellent Foster Carers Association contributes to national guidance, for example guidance for caring for Muslim children, and is integral to the positive development of the service.

“The adoption service has made considerable improvements since the previous inspection, including doubling the numbers of approved adopters and adoption orders from the previous 12 months.”

“For children leaving care, the ‘through-care’ service provides strong supportive relationships between most staff and young people, including proactive work with young people in custody. Young people value the easy access and the services provided at the weekly drop-in at ‘Kitcat Terrace’, with one young person stating, ‘I grew up here, this is my family’.

3.7 In relation to the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families:

“Senior leaders and elected members have focused relentlessly on improving practice across all services, changing the culture and tackling previous poor performance. This has made a significant and discernible difference to the help, protection and care experienced by the most vulnerable children in the borough..... They demonstrate a shared responsibility and have a comprehensive understanding of their strengths and further areas for development. They are realistic about and cognisant of the challenges that they face in order to embed and sustain the remarkable progress they have achieved since the inspection of 2017.”

“The corporate director for children and culture has effectively influenced and collaborated with a range of partners and corporate leaders to transform the non-compliance culture in children’s services to one of collective accountability for protecting vulnerable children. The focus of senior leaders has been to create sustainable change and to develop appropriate future leaders across the organisation. There has been incremental change that has enabled managers ‘to take people with them’, and to really understand what had previously gone wrong.”

“Leaders, managers and staff have high ambitions for children in care and strive to meet these. Their work with care leavers, is commendably underpinned by the question ‘would it be good enough for my child?’ All the essential components are in place as good corporate parents.

“The local authority has transformed their performance management framework from unreliable and non-compliant to a highly effective and established quality assurance system. Their accurate assessment of the

quality and impact of practice is supported by a well-established and comprehensive performance framework informed by routine and regular case audits, practice observations and feedback from children and families.”

“Local need is both highly challenging and well understood, for example the high levels of poverty, deprivation and subsequent high levels of demand for services. The council responds to this respectfully and with inclusivity. The Parent and Family Support Service builds resilience, independence and sustainability in local communities to support early help and is highly valued by the parents involved. They feel empowered as parents and take great pride in the work they are doing to support other parents to engage with critical universal and targeted services at an early stage.”

“A strong emphasis on developing the social work academy and nurturing newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) encourages more to remain in the local authority..... Staff morale is high. Staff influence developments and are included in decisions, for example the introduction of restorative model of practice. Staff want to work in Tower Hamlets, and many agency staff are converting to permanent contracts. The local authority has invested in staff to ensure that caseloads are manageable; this enables children to build trusting relationships with social workers and creates the right environment for good practice.”

3.8 Areas for development

The report also includes three recommendations for improvement.

- The quality of plans for children in need across the family support and protection teams in order to ensure that they are consistently good or better.
- The response and oversight of work in relation to allegations against professionals.
- The quality and coordination of plans to support children returning home from care to remain with their families.

4 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

4.1 As part of the 2017-2020 MTFS, additional growth of £5.2m was awarded to Childrens Services addressing pressure in a range of areas, most of which featured in the improvement plan

4.2 In addition to the above growth, one-off investment funding via the Council's Transformation Reserve was used in 2017/18 and 2018/19 to support the implementation of the improvement plan. The estimated cost of this plan for Children's Social Care over 2 years was £4.2m. Only £3.7m was spent within CSC during the first 2 years. The balance of £0.5m has been reserved to cover additional costs leading up to the final 2019/20 inspection.

- 4.3 £0.5m was also approved to fund expenditure on CS Improvement within the Governance Division. Therefore a total of £4.7m was approved to fund CS Improvements from the Transformation Reserve.
- 4.4 The level of one-off funding was based on a detailed assessment of the costs associated with the improvement plan and the improvements that will be achieved, as a result of the investment, have also been identified and are regularly monitored. Finance is currently working with the service to identify the impact on the budget moving forward post Ofsted improvement.

5 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 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').
- 5.2. In light of Tower Hamlets' improved performance during monitoring visits, Ofsted re-inspected under the ILACS framework, "Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services", introduced in November 2017. The result of the inspection was the Children's Services in Tower Hamlets are now rated as GOOD. Consequently the Council will now follow the pathway for local authorities which are graded good or outstanding, and unless concerns are identified in the interim, the next inspection will be a short inspection.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None.

Appendices

- ILACS Report

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A