

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	22 July 2019
Title:	Outcome of April 2019 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) carried out by Ofsted and details of the improvement support work being offered to the region
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide background and an overview of the findings and judgements following the recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) carried out by Ofsted which took place in April 2019.
- 1.2 The report also provides details of the wider improvement support the Children's Services department is undertaking on behalf of the Department for Education

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses the exceptionally positive findings of the Ofsted report.
- 2.2 That Cabinet endorses the continued work of the Children's Services department in undertaking improvement work with other local authorities on behalf of the Department for Education.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report seeks to provide an overview of the recent ILACS in Children's Services, which was the first full graded inspection since 2014.

The ILACS has judged Hampshire Children's Services to be outstanding in each of the four areas;

- Overall effectiveness – **Outstanding**

- The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection – **Outstanding**
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers - **Outstanding**
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families – **Outstanding**

Hampshire is one of only two local authorities to be judged as outstanding in all four areas

4. Contextual information

- 4.1 The new inspection framework was introduced in November 2017 and was an attempt by Ofsted to ensure that the inspection process was more proportionate and regular. The framework describes a three-year cycle, with an ILACS, and focused visits looking at particular subject areas or a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of partnership working, resulting in an annual inspection visit to local authorities by an Ofsted inspection team.
- 4.2 The ILACS for Hampshire was a short inspection as the authority was already judged as good. This involved a one week off site pre-inspection, one week on site where the focus of inspection activity was the quality of social work practice, how leaders knew about the quality of practice and what they were doing to improve it.
- 4.3 In November 2018, Hampshire had received a very positive letter from Ofsted following an October focused visit, inspecting children subject to a *child protection plan, including the quality and impact of pre-proceedings intervention under the Public Law Outline (PLO)*. Hampshire had also previously been subject to a very positive JTAI in December 2016 looking at the multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse. We were therefore expecting an ILACS in 2019.

5. Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services 2019

- 5.1 The phone call from the Ofsted Lead Inspector was received on Thursday 18 April before the Easter holiday, with Ofsted being on site week beginning 29 April. Key aspects of the inspection to note are;
- 5.2 A significant amount of data and case record information was requested by Ofsted from the outset of the inspection. Not including the child level data lists, 563 documents were uploaded to Ofsted during the inspection. Each of these documents was subject to rigorous quality assurance and senior management scrutiny before being uploaded.

- 5.3 All children's cases identified by the Lead Inspector for Ofsted's review, were subject to scrutiny and audit by district and senior managers.
- 5.4 During the inspection, 17 additional requests for information were received from the Lead Inspector. This is a low number and can be directly related to the limited number of key lines of enquiry being identified by the inspection team due to the quality of work they were observing.
- 5.5 The methodology used by the inspection team was to forensically examine case files and speak to the relevant to social workers. The inspectors were rigorous in their examination of the quality of social work practice and the leadership of the system. Members of the inspection team also interviewed;
- Chief Executive
 - Lead member for Children's Services and Chair of Corporate Parenting Board
 - Local Safeguarding Children Board chair
 - Member of the family court judiciary
 - CAFCASS
 - Adoption and fostering panel chairs
 - Designated Children in Care leads in four schools, two primary (Horndean Junior, Cherbourg Primary) and two secondary (Riverside Community School and Cams Hill Secondary)
- 5.6 During the on-site inspection period, the team of five inspectors visited, Winchester, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Fareham, Fareham & Gosport, Test Valley, East Hants, Eastleigh & Winchester and Havant district offices (during the focused visit which took place in November Inspectors had visited different offices thus ensuring that during the last six months they had met with most teams in Hampshire). One social care regulatory inspector spent two days inspecting fostering and adoption in Swanwick and Havant, and one HMI inspector spent the day in Winchester inspecting the Virtual School, electively home educated and children missing education, through data, cases and interviews with key members of Education and Inclusion.

6. Performance

The ILACS has judged Hampshire Children's Services to be outstanding in each of the four areas;

- Overall effectiveness – **Outstanding**
- The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection – **Outstanding**
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers - **Outstanding**
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - **Outstanding**

Key extracts from each section of the report are as follows;

6.1 **ILACS Executive Summary**

- 6.1.1 Children's Services in Hampshire are outstanding. Since the last full inspection in 2014, the director and his leadership team have resolutely focused on continuing to improve the help, care and protection provided to children
- 6.1.2 Strong political and corporate support and well-targeted financial investment have helped the leadership team to implement an ambitious transformation programme. This has created the capacity, training and infrastructure to enable social workers to engage more purposefully with children and their families. Leaders across all levels of the council have an accurate and extensive understanding of the quality of frontline practice.
- 6.1.3 Social workers are highly skilled at building and sustaining enduring relationships with children. This is a considerable strength in Hampshire. Social workers undertake creative, tailored, direct work with children to help them to understand their situation. Social workers eloquently reflect the child's experiences in case recording, writing to them personally, which provides a powerful sense of the child, supporting children's understanding of why decisions are made. This is strengthened further by well-written, thoughtful, child-centred assessments, which bring children's experiences to life and provide a palpable sense of their lives.

6.2 **ILACS - The experience of children who need help and protection**

- 6.2.1 Children in need of help or protection benefit from high-quality services that improve their lives, whatever the level of their need.
- 6.2.2 Children and families benefit from effective early help services. Strong partnership engagement and co-located early help hubs ensure effective coordination, enabling families to access timely, well-targeted help when their needs are first identified.
- 6.2.3 Experienced, skilled practitioners and managers, supported by highly effective systems, ensure a consistently swift and efficient response when children are referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Well-understood thresholds are consistently and confidently applied by managers, leading to appropriate decisions about next steps. Management oversight is strongly evidenced, with clear recording of the rationale for threshold decisions.
- 6.2.4 When children need protection, swift, proportionate and authoritative action is taken during and outside of office hours.
- 6.2.5 Social workers are highly skilled at building and sustaining enduring relationships with children. This is a considerable strength in Hampshire.

Social workers undertake creative, tailored, direct work with children to help them to understand their situation. Social workers eloquently reflect the child's experiences in case recording, writing to them personally, which provides a powerful sense of the child, supporting children's understanding of why decisions are made.

- 6.2.6 Senior managers have taken authoritative action to strengthen pre-proceedings work since the focused visit in 2018. This has led to significantly improved management oversight and more consistent practice across the county
- 6.2.7 The 'Hampshire Approach', permeates the work with children and families, building confidence and resilience and leading to positive outcomes for children. A new format for reviews ensures that the progress of children's plans is easily understood.
- 6.2.8 When children go missing from home or care, managers and social workers respond quickly and effectively to ensure that they are not exposed to potential harm. High-risk multi-agency strategy meetings, overseen by senior managers, are highly effective in progressing children's plans.
- 6.2.9 Adolescent contextual safeguarding is understood well within the Hampshire context. The response of the strategic and operational partnerships to vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation is highly effective.

6.3 ILACS - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is outstanding

- 6.3.1 Tenacious and creative work is undertaken to support children to safely remain in the care of their families wherever possible. Intensive support workers demonstrate skill through their sensitive, relationship-based work with families. Thorough, well-evidenced rehabilitation assessments and plans provide a sound basis from which to support children to successfully return home when this is in their best long-term interests. Appropriate and well-balanced decisions concerning children who do come into care are informed by thoughtful and rigorous management oversight.
- 6.3.2 Social workers build consistent and important relationships with children in care. They undertake insightful direct work that is carefully tailored to children's individual needs.
- 6.3.3 Social workers support children to participate in developing their care plans, capturing this on the newly developed care plan template, 'My Life, My Future'. These child-centred plans are written to the child and include scaling questions and emojis to help children to express their opinions about issues that are important to them. Participation is evident through their subsequent review process, where children are supported to chair their own reviews where possible.

- 6.3.4 The well-regarded virtual school is ambitious for children in care, proactively supporting children to do as well as they can at school. Personal education plans, with an improved completion rate and greater quality, provide a rigorous tool for monitoring children's progress in education, particularly in understanding the reasons underlying lower attainment.
- 6.3.5 Assessments of prospective foster carers and the training and support subsequently provided are of a high standard.
- 6.3.6 Children with a plan for adoption benefit from a high-quality service from experienced and skilled social workers and managers. This already strong service has improved further since the last inspection.
- 6.3.7 Care leavers are strongly supported by their PAs to be ambitious in pursuing suitable education, employment or training opportunities. The increasing impact of the virtual college has generated a sharper focus on early post-16 transition work, to guide young people into clear and purposeful pathways that are suitable to their individual needs. This has resulted in a marked improvement in the proportion of care leavers who are in employment, education and training.

6.4 **ILACS - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families is outstanding**

- 6.4.1 Senior and political leaders in Hampshire are ambitious, purposeful and influential. Together, and consistently over time, they have presented a coherent and shared vision to deliver high-quality services for children. They have a strong record of continuous improvement. Hampshire Children's Services demonstrates a strong commitment to continual learning, constantly seeking to develop and enhance the capabilities and capacity of the workforce. Corporate and political leaders demonstrate a solid commitment to children's services. They are confident in the leadership team's vision for future-proofing the service and have committed substantial financial investment to make that vision a reality.
- 6.4.2 Effective governance and strong partnership arrangements promote a joined-up approach to meeting children's needs. Children's needs and views are kept at the centre of strategic planning and decision-making. Strong political and corporate support in children's services is evident. In addition to committing significant investment in the service transformation, political leaders have ensured substantial investment to build seven new children's homes to support children to live closer to home.
- 6.4.3 The corporate parenting board effectively seeks to build a well-informed understanding of the experiences, concerns and achievements of children in care. The board is energetic in taking steps to ensure that all children receive good services.

- 6.4.4 Comprehensive performance and quality assurance systems support leaders and managers to maintain strong oversight of practice. Managers and leaders at all levels scrutinise performance information, learning and audit activity. This is supported by a programme of annual internal peer reviews of every district, involving frontline staff in assessing the effectiveness of services.
- 6.4.5 Social workers are positive about working in Hampshire. They value the innovative approach to technology and flexible working, which helps them to juggle the demands of work and home and enables them to go 'over and above' in supporting the children and families.
- 6.4.6 The appointment of personal assistants to support social workers, combined with improved technology and the implementation of the strengths-based social work model, the 'Hampshire Approach', have equipped social workers with the tools, skills and time to work directly with children and families.
- 6.4.7 Senior leaders recognise that their greatest asset is their staff. They have invested heavily in the children's workforce, fundamentally changing their approach to recruitment and retention through an ambitious workforce development plan. This plan is built on a strong commitment to create capacity and stability within the service in 'growing our own social workers' through the introduction of the graduate entry trainee scheme.

6.5 **ILACS - Areas for improvement**

- 6.5.1 Two areas for improvement are identified in the ILACS report, which will be incorporated into the Quality Improvement Action Plan (QUIP) for Children and Families, with appropriate actions to address the improvement areas. This plan will be sent to Ofsted by 13 September as per the requirement of the framework. The two areas for improvement identified by the inspection report are;
- The proportion of children who are offered, and take up, a return home interview when they have been missing from home or care.
 - The Corporate Parenting Board's rigour in holding partners, including health providers and district councils, to account to ensure that they prioritise services for *children and young people more effectively*

7. **Improvement Adviser work on behalf of the Department for Education**

- 7.1 As a longstanding, high performing local authority children's services, Hampshire has been successful in tendering with the Department for Education (DfE), for the role of improvement adviser. This role involves working with an individual local authority when their children's services has been judged to be 'inadequate' by Ofsted in an ILACS inspection. It

generates a small but nonetheless important income stream for the County Council.

- 7.2 The role typically has three phases; firstly, a rapid diagnostic to understand why the failure occurred and how improvements would be best achieved. This is led by the Secretary of State appointed 'Commissioner'; phase two involves a more detailed intervention offering improvement support and scrutiny of the progress being made, led by the Director of Children's Services and a small number of officers; phase three is a tapering of support over a 9 to 12 month period as progress is sustained.
- 7.3 The work is undertaken on behalf of the DfE who require regular reporting of the work undertaken and the view of Hampshire as to the progress being achieved.
- 7.4 Ofsted noted in the recent ILACS report that this improvement work brings important benefits to Hampshire. 'Leaders recognise the benefits that come from being an improvement partner, not only in creating income, but also in the learning that is gained from other local authorities and from keeping its own staff stimulated and stretched.' This further reiterates findings from the 2014 inspection which found that our improvement work with the Isle of Wight also had tangible benefits in broadening the experience and capacity of Hampshire managers.
- 7.5 To date, Hampshire has been working with two local authorities in this capacity and Hampshire's Chief Executive has recently been appointed as the Commissioner for a third authority. These are detailed below;
- Work with Torbay Children's Services who were judged as inadequate in 2016. This work is in phase three and will complete later in 2019.
 - Work with Buckinghamshire County Council who were judged as inadequate in late 2017. This work is now entering phase three and improvement support will continue on a reducing basis for the next twelve months.
 - Hampshire's Chief Executive Officer has recently been appointed by the Secretary of State, as the Commissioner for West Sussex County Council. West Sussex Children's Services were judged as inadequate in February 2019. This work is at the beginning of phase one.
 - The Director of Children's Services continues to be the Director for Isle of Wight Children's Services. Whilst this is no longer an improvement arrangement per se, given that the Isle of Wight are now rated as 'good' across all categories, it is testament to the long-term improvement that has taken place from a very low base in 2012. This partnership is now a voluntary arrangement with benefits for both partners.

7.6 In addition to this, Hampshire is a nominated Partner in Practice for the Department for Education which means that we also receive a further modest income stream which is used to support authorities within the region in their improvement journeys. Usually, these are authorities that 'require improvement' rather than having failed an inspection. The aim is to ensure that these authorities can maintain a positive trajectory.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Ofsted, through the ILACS has judged Hampshire to be outstanding in all inspection areas, resulting in Hampshire being one of only two local authorities to be judged as outstanding across all inspection areas.

8.2 This is a significant achievement for the County Council and reflects the strong political and corporate support that Children's Services has received. However, it is also a testament to the skill, dedication and tenaciousness of the Council's frontline staff to improve outcomes for Hampshire's most vulnerable children.

8.3 The continued work of Hampshire Children's Services in supporting improvement in other less well performing local authorities, is an important aspect of being a top performing authority and brings both a small income stream and wider benefits for the County Council.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

No adverse impact has been identified.