

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

TITLE: INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES: OUTCOMES OF THE OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT ON THE EXPERIENCE AND PROGRESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE IN BARNSELY

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	14th June 2023
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Children's Services
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the findings and recommendations of the Ofsted focused visit concerning the experience and progress of young people leaving care in the Borough.

Council Plan priority

The outcomes of the focused visit directly relate to the following priorities and outcomes of the Council Plan:

A **Healthy Barnsley** through ensuring young people leaving care are safe from harm, can live independently and do not experience inequalities in health, wellbeing and income

A **Learning Barnsley** where young people leaving care can achieve good outcomes in education, develop skills and access lifelong learning, including higher education.

Recommendations

- 1. That Cabinet considers the outcomes of the recent Ofsted focused visit on the experience and progress of young people leaving care in Barnsley, together with the next steps.**
- 2. That this report be submitted for consideration at the meeting of Full Council, on 27th July 2023.**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As well as full inspections, Ofsted's inspection framework (ILACS) is also composed of the following integral features in assuring the effectiveness of local authority children's services for helping and protecting vulnerable children; together with improving outcomes for looked after children and young people leaving care.
- (a) The Local Authority's own self-evaluation of the quality of practice in children's social care
 - (b) The 'annual conversation' between the Local Authority's Director of Children's Services and the Ofsted Regional Director
 - (c) Focused inspections or visits which evaluate a specific theme within the ILACS Framework or the progress and experience of a specific cohort of children and young people, leading to a national thematic review and the sharing of best practice.
 - (d) Joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) of arrangements within local areas, for supporting young people in need of help or protection.
- 1.2 Cabinet will recall that a separate report on the Local Authority's recent JTA on the multi-agency response to the identification of initial need and risk among vulnerable children in Barnsley, together with the draft Written Statement of Action, were considered in September and October last year.
- 1.3 Scope and Methodology of the Ofsted Focused Visit on the Experience and Progress of Young People Leaving Care in Barnsley
- 1.4 The scope of the recent focused visit concerned the following:
- Supporting care leavers aged 16-17 years, together with those aged 18-25 years.
 - Quality and suitability of accommodation.
 - Employment, education and training.
 - Support into adulthood
 - Maintaining relationships and keeping in touch.
- 1.5 The duration of the focused visit was a period of two weeks in which the following activity was undertaken:

Week 1

Off-site evaluation of evidence by the inspection team, including child-level data; audits, together with performance and management information.

Week 2 (25th – 26th January 2023)

On-site gathering and evaluation of inspection evidence (such as relevant policies, plans and strategies) and meetings with both the Lead Member and

Director of Children's Services. The focused visit would culminate in a letter which would evaluate the effectiveness of the Local Authority in the following domains:

- Performance management
- Leadership and management oversight
- Supervision
- Quality assurance
- Continuous professional development of the social care workforce

Unlike the standard or short versions of the full ILACS inspection, no graded judgement was applied to the focused visit

1.6 Outcomes of the Focused Visit

1.7 Ofsted published the findings of its inspection on 1st March 2023 and a copy is appended to this report. The findings resulting from the inspection, included the following:

- Challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff, coupled with workload pressures have impacted the quality of front-line practice.
- This has made it harder for young people leaving care to maintain meaningful relationships with trusted adults, particularly social workers and personal advisers, necessary to make an effective transition to adulthood
- Pathway plans for young people leaving care were under- developed and lacking in multi-agency input, making it unclear if needs were fully met or reviewed and if progress was effectively taking place.
- These constraints have been compounded by limited performance data and information recording
- Further engagement needs to take place to obtain the voice or perspective of young people leaving care on their experience

1.8 Preceding self-evaluation activity, including the end- to- end internal review of children's social care in Barnsley had already identified these factors as inhibiting the quality of practice and provision. Indeed, as part of the inspection letter, Ofsted acknowledges this self-awareness as part of the areas of strength noted during the focused visit. These areas of strength include the following:

- The senior leadership team in the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service has a good understanding of what improvements need to be made, are receptive to feedback and can be expected to achieve them via the Children's Services Development Plan.
- Barnsley MBC is unwavering in its support for improving the experience and progress of young people leaving care. This has been particularly demonstrated by the significant recurring and one-off investments in children's services which were made in November last year and more recently, in enhancing a corporate 'offer' to this vulnerable group of young people, particularly through a scheme of discretionary payments aimed at improving life chances.

- Many of our care leavers continue to participate in further or higher education, employment or training. For those who are not currently engaged, plans are in place to re-establish opportunities.
- Most care leavers live in suitable and safe accommodation within the Borough which meets their needs and promotes independence and are supported by the Council with costs.
- Care leavers who are parents, together with those in custody and older care leavers continue to receive a service as part of the Care Leavers' Covenant, irrespective of whether they continue to participate in further education and training or not.
- Care leavers from Barnsley who live outside the Borough receive financial support to remain in independent or semi-independent accommodation as well as other living costs.
- Staff are fully engaged, supportive and excited by the additional investments and other developments taking place to support workloads and enhance the experience and progress of young people leaving care in Barnsley.

1.9 The focused visit identified no serious weaknesses which required immediate priority action. In recommending the following areas in need of attention, Ofsted has been mindful that improvements have already begun to take place via the Children's Services Development Plan:

- Earlier opportunities for care leavers to build supportive relationships with consistent personal advisers.
- Workload capacity and management oversight of support for care leavers.
- Needs assessments and pathway plans, including regular review when young people's circumstances change.
- The integrity of performance data used across children's services.
- The regularity and impact of quality assurance activity.

1.10 Despite the intensifying challenges faced, this will put Barnsley Children's Services in a strong position going forward. Further details on the areas of strength and areas identified as in need of attention, following the recent focused visit can be found in the Appendix to this report.

2. PROPOSAL

2.1 Next Steps Following Ofsted's Focused Visit

2.2 The areas for attention identified by Ofsted in its letter, correlate with those identified through our preceding self-evaluation and internal review activity. These improvements form part of the Barnsley Children's Services Development Plan upon which progress will be overseen by the Children's Services Development Board as we continue our state of preparedness for a full ILACS inspection.

2.3 Quarterly reports on the impact made by the recommendations of such external reviews, together with the recent investments in strengthening

children's services will be presented for Cabinet's consideration as part of our overall ambition for commissioning quality services that fully meet the needs and aspirations of children, young people and families in the Borough.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

3.2 The Director of Finance and his representative have been consulted in the drafting of this report.

3.3 There are no additional financial implications arising following the outcome of the Ofsted focused visit of care leavers undertaken last year. The improvements in the experience / progress of the young people leaving care are well understood by the Council and can be demonstrated by the significant investment in Care Leavers services (secured via the Development Plan). These include the following:

- enhancing a corporate 'offer' to care leavers, particularly through a scheme of discretionary payments aimed at improving life chances (£160k).
- Additional personal advisors capacity to improve workload capacity and management oversight of support for Care Leavers and give Care leavers earlier opportunities to build supporting relationships with consistent Personal advisors (£195k).
- increase opportunities for participation of this cohort through increasing our advocacy offer (£42k).
- Investment in the Council's Business Intelligence / Data capacity so that effective and robust performance data can be provided to enable the Children Services (including the Care Leavers service) to manage risk effectively.

3.3 Legal

3.4 Ofsted's inspection letter did not expressly indicate any non-compliance with the Council's statutory responsibilities towards young people leaving care. No unanticipated risks are envisaged through consideration of this report and the next steps.

3.5 Equality

3.6 As part of addressing the areas for attention emerging through Ofsted's focused visit, the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service is committed to ensuring any specific needs concerning young people leaving care who have a protected characteristic under the Equality Act are fully met particularly through rigorous pathway plans which are informed through timely reviews, quality assurance of practice and the timeliness of performance data.

3.7 One of the recommendations of last year's Independent Review of Children's

Social Care was to make young people who have experienced and are leaving care a protected characteristic under legislation. This was in response to the disproportionate impact which the Covid Pandemic and its restrictions, followed by the rising costs of living and the potential for discrimination has had upon the life chances of this vulnerable group of young people.

- 3.8 On this, many councils, including most recently City of Doncaster Council, have declared motions in support of ensuring young people leaving care becomes a protected characteristic under legislation.

3.9 Sustainability

- 3.10 There are no implications for sustainability in the Borough arising through consideration of this report.

3.11 Employee

- 3.12 Investments to strengthen children's services in Barnsley will enable the steps to be taken to ensure the Council attracts and recruits the calibre of staff required to further improve the range of outcomes for this group of young people and to successfully retain and develop such staff to ensure the continuation of best practice

3.13 Communications

- 3.14 The outcomes of the recent focused visit will be disseminated with our statutory partners, responsible for the education, health and wellbeing of young people leaving care and their wider networks to ensure a strategic, systems-based approach in enriching our local 'offer'

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Council's Senior Management Team has been consulted on the findings and recommendations of the Ofsted Focused Visit.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The exclusive purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet and Full Council of the outcomes of Ofsted's recent focused visit and to provide assurance on the action to be taken to address the areas identified for attention, within the purview of the Children's Services Development Plan.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Our ambition is to ensure the commissioning and provision of an outstanding range of services for all children, young people and families in the Borough. Inspections, together with other forms of external assurance and our own self-evaluation activity form an important triangulation on the current quality of practice and provision.

6.2 This will help in closing any gaps particularly in preparation for the Council's next full inspection under the Ofsted ILACS Framework (in which the experience and progress of young people will form a 'Key Judgement' towards grading the overall effectiveness of children's services) and the future development of services, following the Government's final response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and its recommendations concerning young people leaving care.

7. GLOSSARY

7.1 None, applicable.

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix: Ofsted Letter to the Executive Director (Children's Services) following the Focused Visit to Barnsley's Children's Services (1st March 2023)

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

10. REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date <i>Joshua Amahwe 12/05/2023</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date <i>Marianne Farrell, Team Leader – Social Care, 15th March 2023</i>

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