

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

OFSTED'S INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN THE BOROUGH (2023)

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	15th NOVEMBER 2023
Cabinet Member Portfolio	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the outcomes which have resulted following Ofsted's recent inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in the Borough.

Council Plan priority

This report supports the following priorities and outcomes of the Council Plan:

- A **"Healthy Barnsley"** - Through ensuring vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded from all forms of harm; maintain their wellbeing and are shielded as far as possible from the impact of poverty and inequality upon their potential.
- A **"Learning Barnsley"** – Through which successful interventions, enable vulnerable groups of children and young people to achieve improved education outcomes, ensure active participation in the employment market and in sustainable communities.

Recommendations

That the outcomes of the recent inspection be submitted for consideration at the meeting of Full Council on 23rd November 2023.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ofsted's Framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

1.2 The current arrangements for the inspection of local authority children's services were introduced in 2017. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the effectiveness of the following domains:

1. To help and protect vulnerable children at risk of harm.
2. The experiences and progress of children in care.
3. Arrangements for ensuring the stability of placements for children in need of care.
4. The experience and progress of young people leaving care.
5. The effectiveness of leadership and management, together with the impact this has had on the lives of children in need of help or protection.
6. The quality of children's social work practice.

1.3 In September 2018, Barnsley MBC was the subject of a standard, main inspection under the ILACS Framework. The inspection resulted in a 'Good' outcome for all these domains and a 'Good' judgement for overall effectiveness.

1.4 This result also meant that, by the time Ofsted conducted its next main ILACS inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in the Borough, it would be a shorter inspection. Cabinet will recall that as part of the Framework, Barnsley has also been the subject of two related inspections which have related to, firstly, the multi-agency response to the identification of initial needs among vulnerable young people (July 2022) together with a Focused Visit on the progress and experience of young people leaving care (January 2023)

1.5 Neither of these two related inspections led to a graded judgement and no concern was raised over provision, although a decline in the quality of practice had been noted. Barnsley was, also, the subject of a separate, Local Area Inspection of Services for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs, upon which the outcomes were reported to Cabinet, in October 2021.

1.6 Strengthening Children's Services In Barnsley

1.7 In response to the significant challenges experienced by local authority children's services in all parts of the country, Barnsley MBC made considerable recurring and one-off investments to strengthen children's services, including in the following:

- Measures to enhance the recruitment, retention and development of the

Children's Social Care workforce, including ensuring manageable caseloads.

- Improving access to the integrated 'front door' to children's social care and emergency out of hours care.
- Enhancing early help and edge of care services, including contextual safeguarding, for vulnerable families with children as part of a preventative approach to formal intervention.
- To address the challenges facing the market for children's social care placements, including through directly managed local provision, closer to home and the recruitment and retention of Local Authority foster carers.
- To improve the life chances of young people leaving care.
- Helping improve outcomes for vulnerable children, through the quality of performance data and audits of practice.
- Development of a multi-purpose young people's 'Hub located at Commerce House.

1.8 The benefits yielded through these investments upon the quality of practice and provision formed part of the Local Authority's Self-Evaluation, in preparation for the latest, Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted. Early in September, the Local Authority was formally notified by Ofsted of its short, main inspection under the ILACS Framework.

2. PROPOSAL

2.1 Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in Barnsley (September 2023): Scope and Methodology

2.2 The scope of the ILACS short inspection was to evaluate the experience of the following groups of children and young people:

- Those at risk of harm.
- Children and young people referred to the Local Authority for whom urgent action needs to be taken to protect them.
- Children who are subject to a child protection plan or who need continuing help or support.
- Children and their families who are receiving help from Children's Social Care Services as there are concerns over their safety or welfare.
- Children who are missing from education, including through exclusion.
- Children and young people who are looked after, together with those who are detained under police powers as well as unaccompanied asylum-

seeking children.

- Young people leaving care.

2.3 In focusing upon the quality of social work practice with families, the methodology used is as follows:

- Scrutiny and discussion of a sample of children's cases.
- Meeting children and young people who are receiving help or protection, together with parents and carers, including foster carers and adoptive families.
- Shadowing practitioners in their day-to-day work.
- Observation of practice in single and multi-agency meetings, particularly those concerning the assessment and review of children's cases and child protection matters.

2.4 The duration of the inspection lasted for two weeks in which the inspection team was off-site in Week 1, whilst gathering and evaluating evidence and in Week 2, the team was on-site undertaking fieldwork. As part of this fieldwork Ofsted also sought to evaluate the following:

1. The effectiveness of recruiting, assessing, training and supporting both foster carers and adoptive carers.
2. Evaluation of the educational progress of children in care and young people leaving care.

2.5 Having been awarded a 'Good' judgement, following its previous ILACS inspection in 2018, Ofsted were looking for the answer to the following questions:

- Has the quality and impact of children's social work practice been maintained in Barnsley?
- Were there any areas of practice which had improved since the previous main ILACS inspection?
- Were there any areas of practice which had deteriorated since the last inspection?

2.6 Outcomes of the Inspection

2.7 Appended to this report is Ofsted's letter on the outcomes of the inspection. Ofsted has awarded a 'Good' judgement in all the domains indicated within Paragraph 1.2 of this report and a 'Requires Improvement' judgement on the experience of children and young people in need of help or protection.

2.8 Overall, Ofsted has awarded Children's Services in Barnsley a 'Good' judgement for overall effectiveness. This has effectively restored the quality of our performance to that of the previous ILACS standard inspection in 2018.

- 2.9 In its inspection report, Ofsted praised the cross-party political ownership and senior management support for strengthening children's services in the Borough, through significant recent investments, together with the impact which had been made by the Children's Services Leadership Team and the further improvements envisaged.
- 2.10 As a result, Ofsted recommended a small set of improvements where the quality of practice could be enhanced in the following areas:
- Ensuring the engagement of multi-agency local partners in key decision-making meetings.
 - The quality of recorded management direction to social workers at the point of referral and within the screening process for vulnerable children.
 - The identification and response to children who are the subject of private fostering arrangements.
 - The record of achievements and targets within personal education plans for looked after children.
- 2.11 These improvements will form part of the Barnsley Children's Services Board's Continuous Development Plan. Further details on these actions can be viewed in Ofsted's inspection letter.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

3.2 The Director of Finance and/or his representative(s) have been consulted in the drafting of this report.

3.3 There are no direct financial implications arising from the outcome of the ILACAS inspection at this stage. The areas of improvement highlighted in Ofsted's recommendations already forms part of the Children Services Development Plan, which is funded from recurrent and non-recurrent investments.

3.4 Legal

3.5 There are no legal implications emerging through the ILACS main inspection. No suggestion was made that the Local Authority is not compliant with or failing in its statutory responsibilities towards children in need of help or protection, safeguarding children from harm or in meeting the needs of children in care and young care leavers.

3.6 Equality

3.7 Similarly, no reference was made in Ofsted's report to any inequality in meeting the specific needs of vulnerable children and young people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010) particularly during their

referral, assessment and review.

- 3.8 Principally through Barnsley's own annual Children's Social Work Health Check Survey, we know that our children's social care workforce is now more diverse than it has previously ever been and the insight and intuition which this provides, can further ensure that the quality and experience of vulnerable children and young people with specific characteristics is improved. This accords with our values as an organisation, particularly that of an '*...inclusive Council that is representative of the communities it serves*'

3.9 Sustainability

- 3.10 There are no implications for sustainability in the Borough arising through the outcomes of Ofsted's inspection.

3.11 Employee

- 3.12 Ofsted acknowledges the steps being taken by the Local Authority to recruit, retain and enhance the skills and competencies of social workers and practitioners, together with their commitment and passion to support vulnerable young people in the Borough.

3.13 Communications

- 3.14 Ofsted's inspection report was published on 27th October and the outcome together with the key messages emerging from the report have been disseminated with our partners in the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust and will be shared through the Council's media channels.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Council's Senior Management Team has been briefed on the outcomes of the inspection, together with the next steps.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The exclusive purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in the Borough. All local authorities in England are subject to the ILACS Framework as part of assuring Parliament and the public, on the overall effectiveness of local authorities in discharging their statutory responsibilities towards children and young people in need of help or protection, together with children in care and young people leaving care, during a period of unprecedented demand for services.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The outcome of the recent ILACS short inspection provides assurance to vulnerable children, young people, families and local communities over the quality of children's services in the Borough and to build upon these outcomes and provide outstanding children's services, support levelling-up and to help

make Barnsley truly a place of possibilities.

7. GLOSSARY

7.1 None, applicable.

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix: Ofsted's report on the inspection of local authority children's Services in Barnsley (October 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 (16/10/2023)</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date <i>M P Farrell</i> <i>Marianne Farrell, Team Leader – Social Care, Legal Services (19/10/2023)</i>

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