

 St. Helens Council	<h1>CABINET</h1> <p>Wednesday, 26 February 2020</p>
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Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services – Outcome Letter & Action Plan

Cabinet Portfolio	Cabinet Member - Protecting Young People
Cabinet Member with lead accountability	Cllr Nova Charlton
Corporate Plan Theme	Improving People's Lives
Corporate Plan Objective	Ensuring the best possible outcomes for children, families and vulnerable adults
Exempt Report?	No
Reason for Exemption	Open
Key Decision?	No
On Public Notice?	N/A
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Originating Service Area	Children's Social Care
Accountable Director	Strategic Director People's Services
	Executive Director – People's Services

	saraho'brien@sthelens.gov.uk
	01744 676 480
Accountable Employee	Sarah O'Brien
	Executive Director – People's Services
	saraho'brien@sthelens.gov.uk
	01744 676 480
Report to be or has been considered by (Meeting and Date)	

Recommendations for Decision

Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the proposed Action Plan developed in response to the findings of the recent Inspection of Children's Services.

Recommendations for Noting

The Cabinet is recommended to note:

The outcome of the Inspection of Children's Services undertaken by Ofsted during September and October 2019.

1. Purpose of this Report

1.1 This report presents to Cabinet the proposed ILACS Action Plan that has been developed in response to the findings of the recent Inspection of Children's Services that was completed during September and October 2019.

2. Background and Consideration of Alternatives

2.1 Children's Services received an Inspection from Ofsted under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework from 23 September to 4 October 2019. The outcome of the Inspection was published on 4 November 2019. A copy of the letter received from Ofsted is attached at Appendix 2.

- 2.2 The findings of the Inspection were that in two domain areas – the ‘Impact of Leaders on social work practice with children and families’ and the ‘Experiences and progress of children who need help & protection’, the finding was that the service Required Improvement. For the third domain – ‘Experiences and progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers’, the finding was that the service was Inadequate. Under the ILACS framework, the Inadequate finding in the third domain resulted in a judgement in ‘Overall Effectiveness’ of the service as Inadequate. As the overall judgement is ‘Inadequate’ the Department will receive regulatory oversight from both Ofsted and the Department for Education. A Ministerial Letter has been received informing the Council of the need to improve and a meeting has been held between the Department for Education and Senior Leaders within the Council, where a commitment was given by Senior Leaders to ensure that services are improved.
- 2.3 Ofsted have since completed an Action Planning Day in December 2019 with Senior Managers in the service and will now carry out quarterly Monitoring Visits to the Department, with the first Monitoring Visit expected in May 2020. The Department for Education has appointed a Lead Officer, who will also complete regular monitoring of progress. Support from the Department of Education includes the appointment of a Specialist Advisor, who will work alongside the service to address the issues identified and will provide regular reports on progress back to the Minister and the provision of practical support from another local authority through the Partners in Practice programme. For St Helens, the Partner identified is Cheshire West & Chester Council, who have already agreed the areas of the service for which they will provide additional support.
- 2.4 In order to capture this activity and provide a demonstrable indicator of the progress being made, Ofsted require all local authorities who are judged Inadequate to produce an Action Plan within a specific timeframe, setting out the areas for improvement and how the Department plans to progress in these areas. Since this judgement was reached, there has been significant activity in responding to both Ofsted and the Department for Education and to produce a draft Action Plan that meets the expected standards.
- 2.5 Attached at Appendix 1 to this report is the Draft ILACS Action Plan that has been submitted to Ofsted in January 2020. Ofsted will now review the Plan and provide confirmation if the Plan meets the expected standards and provides sufficient rigor to address the issues the Inspectors identified.

The ILACS Action Plan

- 2.6 The ILACS Action Plan contains nine sections, with each section leading on a specific recommendation made by Ofsted within their judgement letter of November 2019. The Plan builds on the observations and findings of the Inspectors and sets out the action that will be taken in response to each area, including timescales and a responsible lead officer for each area. There are specific sections relating to areas of priority identified by Ofsted, such as the Edge of Care Service and the Permanence service. The Plan also sets out what the aim of the improvement activity is and how this will be measured by specific Key Performance Indicators.
- 2.7 This ILACS Action Plan will replace the previous Action Plan that was developed in response to the Ofsted Focused Visit in July 2018. The new Plan will receive monthly oversight and challenge where required by the Children’s Improvement Board, who will monitor progress made. In addition, Children & Young People’s Scrutiny Panel will also scrutinise progress against the Action Plan and progress made, including receiving regular updates from the Chair of the Children’s Improvement Board.

- 2.8 Whilst the overall responsibility for the delivery of the Plan remains with Children’s Social Care, it is important to note that in order to successfully deliver the outcomes required, there is a need for wider Corporate and partner support. Section Eight of the Plan sets out the wider support required from the Council and Section Nine of the Action Plan will be delivered by the multi-agency Safeguarding Children Board.
- 2.9 Whilst the Department has developed the Action Plan in a timely manner and in line with the guidance from Ofsted, the Department has mobilised quickly to respond to the wider findings of the Inspection in relation to practice. One of the main areas identified by Ofsted related to the need to improve permanence planning for the children in our care. Since the findings of the Inspection, the Department has established a permanence tracking process to ensure that all children who are looked after have a long-term plan for permanence approved and progressed.
- 2.10 Whilst the outcome of the Inspection in Autumn 2019 was disappointing, it is acknowledged that the Council had already commenced its improvement journey for Children’s Services from July 2018 – this included previous investment from the Council to deliver the changes required and a restructure to create the conditions for improved Social Work practice and most importantly, better outcomes for children and families in St Helens. The ILACS Action Plan will be the guiding document by which progress can be measured whilst the Department continues to receive support and further regulatory oversight.
- 2.11 Cabinet are requested to note the outcome of the Inspection as detailed in the letter from Ofsted at Appendix 1 and to approve the draft ILACS Action Plan attached at Appendix 2.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications emerging from this Action Plan – Cabinet has previously approved a series of requests for additional investment into Children’s Social Care since July 2018. However, in order to deliver the actions required to respond to the issues found by Ofsted, the actions within the Action Plan span a time period beyond 2021 therefore the longer term financial investment into the service will need to be considered as part of future Budget planning.
- 3.2 The main financial costs from this Department remain in meeting the need for residential placements for Looked After Children, the committed costs in funding Fostering placements and in supporting young people leaving the care of the Council. The development of services such as the Edge of Care service and further preventative activity by the Department will assist in responding effectively to the growth in demand for services and support.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The council is in formal intervention with DfE.

5. Equalities Implications

- 5.1 None known.

6. Environmental Implications

- 6.1 None known.

7. Human Resources Implications

- 7.1 Recruitment and retention of experienced Social Workers continues to be a challenge for the Department and is a risk that will need to be managed throughout the improvement journey. In response to this, recent activity has included a Recruitment Event and updating literature and branding to attract both experienced and new Social Workers to St Helens.

8. Corporate Landlord Implications

- 8.1 The Council will operate as landlord for the residential element of the Edge of Care Service – the development of this service was presented as a previous report to Cabinet in 2019 and is also contained within this Action Plan.

9. Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 9.1 Ensuring that children and families receive timely and good quality support is a key objective of the Council Plan. The delivery of this Plan will address the issues raised by Ofsted information on how delivering better outcomes for children will be measured.

10. Appendices

- Appendix 1 ILACS Action Plan
Appendix 2 Outcome Letter to St Helens Council – November 2019.

11. Background papers

None

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