



Report to the Children's Select Committee

Title:	Ofsted Monitoring visit update
Committee date:	Friday 24 January 2020
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Purpose of Agenda Item

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the latest Ofsted monitoring visit to the Children's Select Committee.

Content of the report

1. On 16 and 17 October 2019, Ofsted conducted their fourth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2018. The monitoring visit reviewed the progress the local authority has made in respect of the arrangements for supporting children in care, including:
 - The understanding and application of thresholds for children in care.
 - The quality of planning, oversight and review of children in care, including those that have returned to the care of their parents.
 - The quality and timeliness of direct work with and for children, including life story work.
 - The quality and timeliness of supervision, management oversight and decision making, social work capacity and caseloads.
2. A range of evidence was considered for the visit, including electronic case records, discussions with social workers and their managers, and reviewing supporting documentation. In addition, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services was

interviewed and inspectors also met with young people in care to gain their views and experience.

3. This visit confirmed the same areas the service had already identified as areas of concern. The report also highlighted that the leadership team has an accurate understanding of what needs to be done, and that our improvement activity is appropriately targeted. The main contributing factor which is hindering the pace of progress is the significant difficulties in recruiting high quality, experienced social workers and managers. During all monitoring visits the Council's self-assessment presented to Ofsted was accepted in full and Ofsted did not identify any areas of concern the service was not aware of and had not identified already.
4. The key findings as detailed within the monitoring visit letter are set out below:
 - a. The leadership team have an accurate understanding of the quality of services and improvement activity is appropriately targeted.
 - b. Leaders have focused on improving compliance across the service, particularly where there have been concerns about children's safety.
 - c. Some inadequate practice continues to have a negative impact on the quality of services to children in care, leading to drift and delay for some children.
 - d. Challenges in recruiting social workers and managers, and continued high staff turnover, means that it is difficult to consistently ensure basic practice standards.
 - e. Progress is less evident in respect of services to children in care, than in other parts of children's services seen during previous monitoring visits.
 - f. Weaknesses in supervision and management oversight, have a negative impact on children's experiences and on the timely progression of their plans.
 - g. Some areas of practice are slowly improving, such as the availability of local placements for children and the effectiveness of independent reviewing officers.
 - h. When children come into care, social workers and managers are thoughtful in trying to identify the right home for them.
 - i. Most children live with families or in homes where they are well supported and cared for.
 - j. The quality and effectiveness of care planning is poor. The quality of children's care plans varies significantly.
 - k. Social workers visit most children according to their needs. For a minority of children, visits are not frequent enough.
 - l. Some purposeful direct work takes place to understand children's views. However, this is not evident for all children who need it.
 - m. Not all children living in long term arrangements have been formally matched with their carers.

- n. The implementation of the quality assurance programme has had a positive impact in some parts of the service. However, there has been insufficient focus on auditing cases from the children in care service.
 - o. The corporate parenting board has matured in its approach since the last inspection and concerted efforts by the partnership and the corporate parenting board has led to some improvements in the timely completion of health assessments, but this has not been sustained over time.
5. The next monitoring visit is due to take place in Spring 2020.