



REPORT OF:	COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON
TO:	FULL COUNCIL
ON:	25th JANUARY 2018

SUBJECT Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and Care leavers

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update all Members with regard to the Council's recent Ofsted inspection, completed as part of Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework (SIF) between 25th September and 19th October 2017. As Members will recall, a link to the full report was distributed on the original publication date (8th December 2017); the link has been provided in the Background Papers section of this report.

Inspectors judged the following areas:

- Children's Services overall **(good)**
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection **(requires improvement)**
- The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence **(good)**
 - Adoption performance **(good)**
 - The experience and progress of care leavers **(good)**
- Leadership, management and governance **(good)**

There is a separate judgement for the Local Safeguarding Children Board, which was also judged to be good.

Nine recommendations have been made in respect of Children's Social Care and three recommendations for the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB); more detail concerning these recommendations is contained in section 5 of this report.

The judgement puts the Council in the top third of local authorities nationally and it's one of only six out of 23 in the North West to have this rating.

2. OPTIONS

Not applicable.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members:

- Note the findings of the Ofsted inspection, including the recommendations made.
- Note the four inspection frameworks under which the council continues to be regulated by Ofsted.
- Note that the action plan developed in response to this inspection will be subject to Scrutiny review.

4. BACKGROUND

Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework (SIF) has been in place from November 2013 until November 2017. Blackburn with Darwen was one of the last two authorities to be inspected under this framework; our previous inspection of safeguarding services was the Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) inspection of January 2012, when we were judged 'good'.

A four point judgement scale is used by Ofsted: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

The inspection lasted 4 weeks, with inspectors on site during weeks 1, 3 and 4. During week 2, the authority was required to complete an audit of 20 cases selected by inspectors and to prepare a written report on findings for the inspection team to evaluate.

There were 8 inspectors on site over the course of the 4 weeks, in addition to 2 shadow inspectors, a quality assurance manager (HMI) and a senior data analyst. Inspectors interviewed over 100 people in scheduled meetings, as well as the staff they talked to as they based themselves in social work teams during parts of the inspection. In addition to the 20 cases formally audited by ourselves and case tracked by inspectors, inspectors also had direct access to our management information systems and looked at over 150 cases.

As part of the inspection the team scrutinised a significant range of evidence, including data, reports, documentation (strategies, policies and action plans for example), survey results as well as previous inspection reports of the Local Authority and performance profiles.

5. RATIONALE

5.1 Brief overview of findings

Inspectors found that the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and her senior management team have an accurate view of the strengths and areas needing further development. Improvements since the previous SLAC inspection of 2012 were noted, including family support workers, advanced practitioners and implementation of our risk model.

Inspectors saw that during 2016/17, capacity was an issue as the Council continued to

face significant financial pressures while demand for services continued to increase. As a result, work in the assessment teams was not as good as it had been and for some children less at risk, there were delays in them receiving support.

The Council's response to the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review in November 2016 and the political agreement and support to reinstate £2.5m into the budget was recognised by inspectors as critical to the early signs of improvement now being made in this area. However, the area still requires improvement to be consistently good.

Early help is a strength, delivered through our Children Centres where there is evidence of good partnership working to deliver services in an integrated way. As a result, some children can continue living at home safely.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is effective, with good out of hours support provided by the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). Children at immediate risk of harm receive an appropriate and timely response to protect them from harm. This includes work around child sexual exploitation and children who go missing from home. However the response to children suffering chronic neglect is not always made quickly enough to improve outcomes, for example delays in pre-proceedings.

Partners work together well to provide good support for children who are subject to either Child In Need or Child Protection Plans. Children are seen regularly, with their views recorded. There is good support for children with disabilities, although preparation for adulthood needs to start sooner.

Children who are looked after spoke positively to inspectors about being looked after by Blackburn with Darwen and spoke highly of the care they receive, and about positive and trusting relationships with their social workers. Political and senior leaders champion the needs of children in their care, promoting corporate responsibilities amongst chief officers. Inspectors found that children who are looked after achieve well at primary school, but less so at secondary. The quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) is not yet consistently good, and under-reporting of the use and impact of pupil premium funding means that we do not fully understand the impact on children.

Participation of children and young people is recognised as a strength, with a range of opportunities for children to influence practice.

The adoption service is good; inspectors saw evidence of tenacious practice for children who are harder to place, supported by clear senior management direction in which 'doing the right thing' for children is the priority. Feedback from adopters was very positive about delivery of services and both pre- and post-adoption support.

Care leavers are supported well by personal advisors who are in touch with all care leavers. They use their voice well to inform their services. They feel safe in their accommodation, and most progress on to employment, education or training. While there are apprenticeships ring-fenced to care leavers within the Children's Services department of the Council, there is not yet a consistent corporate approach to increasing the range of opportunities available to them.

The LSCB is meeting its statutory responsibilities, with strong governance arrangements

that support and promote a strong multi-agency safeguarding culture. It is proactive and responsive, disseminating learning well and effectively raising awareness of key issues such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse. The independent Chair of the LSCB understands strengths and weaknesses of partner agencies well, and regular meetings between the Chair, the DCS and the Chief Executive support key board issues being made clear. Board members attend meetings regularly and are committed to progressing the work of the Board.

5.2 Recommendations

The report sets out 9 recommendations in the main body of the report:

- Ensure that all assessments are timely and updated to reflect changes in the children's lives and take account of their history and identity needs.
- Ensure children's plans contain clear actions, timescales and outcomes and that actions are progressed effectively to avoid drift and delay for the child.
- Ensure that the transition arrangements for disabled children are focused on the needs of the individual child and that clear plans are in place well before their 18th birthday.
- Improve the quality and timeliness of pre-proceedings work, particularly in relation to chronic neglect, and ensure that monitoring systems are in place to prevent delay.
- Ensure that life story work and later life letters are available for children looked after to assist each child's understanding of their history and plan for their future.
- Ensure that PEPs for children looked after involve children and young people and are specific about targets and achievements, and the impact of pupil premium funds is monitored and used to best effect.
- Improve work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers.
- Ensure that supervision for all staff is both regular and reflective, and promotes high-quality social work practice.
- Ensure that the performance monitoring framework analyses and reports children's individual experiences as well as compliance of activity undertaken by social workers.

LSCB recommendations:

- Ensure that the LSCB has a good understanding of the resource challenges faced by agencies and how this impacts on the individual experiences of children and their families.
- Ensure that there is good participation throughout the LSCB by expediting lay member recruitment and improving attendance at subgroups.
- Ensure that the annual report is published in a timely manner to assist with planning

and delivering priorities with partner agencies.

The Department has developed an action plan to address each of these recommendations. At the annual conversation with the Director for Children's Services and senior officers on January 5th 2018, Ofsted discussed actions taken to date by the council to address recommendations contained within their report and requested a copy of the action plan for their review and agreement.

5.3 Future Inspections

Since 2012, the Council has been subject to the two main safeguarding inspections (SLAC and SIF), an Ofsted thematic inspection of assessments and two external Peer Reviews. This has been a relatively quiet period and it is unlikely we will go for such a length of time with so few formal Ofsted inspection/visits going forward.

There are four Ofsted inspections that the Council could be subject to at any time:

5.3.1 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The new ILACS framework begins in the new year and replaces the single inspection framework (SIF), as the main regulatory/accountability tool. Pilot inspections have already been undertaken within the region. Ofsted describe the ILACS as being part of a system rather than a programme of inspections, with a shift to a layered approach to inspection that includes:

- Annual self-evaluation of social work practice, focusing on:
 - What we know about the quality and impact of social work practice with children and families in our authority
 - How do we know it?
 - What are our plans to maintain or improve practice?
- An annual conversation with each local authority
- Focused visits on potential areas of improvement or strength (2 for authorities last judged to require improvement; for authorities last judged to be good or outstanding, this will depend on Ofsted's ongoing assessment of concerns or areas of good practice). A Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI – see section 5.3.3) may take place instead of a focused visit.
- Judgement inspection based on previous inspection result:
 - Local authorities previously judged to be good or better will get a one-week short inspection every three years.
 - Those that required improvement to be good will get a two-week standard inspection every three years.
 - Inadequate authorities will be subject to a series of monitoring visits, followed by a full SIF re-inspection.

This will increase the frequency of engagement between local authorities and Ofsted. Performance data and other local intelligence will be used in addition to the information gained through the above system to enable Ofsted to risk assess each local authority on a regular basis (at least annually) and to decide on the best point for inspection.

5.3.2 Local Area Inspections of Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)

“Ofsted inspection of local area responsibilities for disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs”

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) work together to undertake inspections of the effectiveness of local areas in fulfilling their responsibilities towards disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs, as part of the duties contained in Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

All local authority areas will be inspected over a five year period, between May 2016 and 2021. The inspection teams will consist of a HMI from Ofsted, a CQC Inspector and a trained inspector from a local authority. These are not graded inspections but instead reports feature strengths and areas requiring further development. For local areas who are significantly failing in their duties, Ofsted determine that a written statement of action is required, which requires the local area (Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group) to submit a written statement of action within 70 days of receipt of the inspection report.

There was an understanding that a local authority would not be inspected under the SEND framework until their SIF was completed; this now means that we are now candidates for inspection. Additionally, Lancashire County Council was very recently inspected under this framework, with the final letter being unpublished at the time of writing this report. However, inspectors will have covered aspects of our own services due to the geographical footprint and so it is possible that this makes it more likely that Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool will be inspected in the next year. Finally, there were two areas for improvement identified in the recent SIF inspection which the inspectorate may wish to return to in the event of an inspection: Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) for looked after children, and earlier transition into adulthood for children with learning disabilities. It is also possible that these findings from the SIF may make an inspection in the New Year more likely.

5.3.3 Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI)

JTAI inspections are designed to assess the effectiveness of arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection, and each series of JTAI inspections has a specific theme. The inspection team will typically consist of 3 Ofsted inspectors, 3 CQC inspectors, 3 HMI Constabulary inspectors and 2 HMI Probation inspectors. Inspections take place over a 3 week period.

Inspections in support of each JTAI theme have typically included between 4 and 6 local authorities; an individual report for the local authority is published and then a thematic report is also published to share learning and promote good practice.

The themes announced/completed so far are:

- Child sexual exploitation and children who go missing (February - June 2016) COMPLETE
- Children living with domestic abuse (September 2016 - March 2017) COMPLETE
- Children subject to neglect (May 2017 - March 2018) ONGOING

- Child sexual exploitation (CSE) (March - September 2018) PLANNED
- Children at risk of, and subject to, sexual abuse in the family (October 2018 - March 2019) PLANNED

As our CSE services were viewed positively by inspectors during their recent visit, this could make us more likely for selection in the CSE deep-dive theme.

5.3.4 Local Authority Arrangements for Supporting Improvement in Schools

The inspection of a local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement provides an independent external evaluation of how well it carries out its statutory duties in relation to promoting high standards in schools and among other providers, so that children and young people achieve well and fulfil their potential.

Ofsted will evaluate a number of areas including: the effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement; the clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting school improvement; how clearly the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles; and the way the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need.

The inspection takes place over 2 weeks and consists of 4 Ofsted inspectors.

Under this inspection framework, Ofsted are not inspecting all authorities within a specific interval and will carry out focused inspections where there are concerns about the effectiveness of a local authority's education functions. For example, where the proportion of children attending good or outstanding schools is lower than found nationally, where there is a higher than average number of schools in an Ofsted category or where attainment levels are lower than the national average, where the trend of improvement is weak. Current performance levels across the borough's schools (& inspection judgements) make inspection under this regime less likely at present.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There may be changes to policies required as a result of the Ofsted recommendations; these will be approved appropriately.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct immediate financial implications arising from this report, however implementation of the recommendations may have resource and/or financial implications. If this is the case, as these are identified they will be discussed and approved appropriately.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from publication of the Ofsted report.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of the recommendations will impact on resource, however the detail will be scoped out separately with the appropriate approvals gained before implementation. It is also worth noting that the report states that inspectors were reassured by council leaders that the additional resources provided in early 2017 would continue to be available for children's social care to ensure that children are properly protected.

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

EIA checklist completed, full EIA not required.

11. CONSULTATIONS

There have been no consultations undertaken with regard to this report.

Councillor Maureen Bateson

Contact Officer: Linda Clegg, Director of Children's Services

Date: 11th December 2017

Background Papers:

- 1) Link to the published inspection report (as shared with Members on 8th December 2017):
https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/blackburn_and_darwen/052_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf
- 2) The Minister of State for Children's and Families, Robert Goodwill MP, acknowledged the Ofsted judgement in a letter to the Council Leader on 18th December 2017 – please see Appendix A.

Background documents are any files, guidance or other materials that have been relied upon in producing the paper. Any background documents listed must be available for public inspection upon request.