



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children's Services
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Children's Services
DATE:	12 April 2018

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children's Services
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
KEY DECISION:	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUBJECT: Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ILACS framework is the new Ofsted inspection framework which came into force in January 2018. Ofsted describe this as a *system* of inspection covering a range of activity where a judgement inspection is just one aspect. The different components are:

- a) Annual self-evaluation – submitted to Ofsted, seeking to answer what we know about the quality and impact of social work practice, how we know this, and what our plans are for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice
- b) Annual conversation between Ofsted and the Local Authority (LA)
- c) Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) – up to 10 of these will take place each year
- d) Focused visits – 1-2 visits within a 3 year cycle, depending on previous inspection judgement
- e) Judgement inspection - standard (2 week) or short (1 week) inspection, depending on previous inspection judgement and also influenced by the other elements and other data analysis

The level of activity depends on an authority's most recent judgement:

Inadequate local authority	Requires improvement to be good local authority	Good or outstanding local authority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly monitoring visits • SIF or post-monitoring SIF • Shared self-evaluation • Annual engagement meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard inspection (once in a three year period) • Up to two focused visits in between inspections • Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) • Shared self-evaluation • Annual engagement meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short inspection (once in a three year period) • Up to two focused visits in between inspections • Possible JTAI (would replace a focused visit) • Shared self-evaluation • Annual engagement meeting

The first 3 elements in list above (a – c) have already been in place for 12-24 months. The newer aspects of this framework (d and e above) came into force in January 2018 and more detail is provided in section 4.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Note the inspection frameworks under which the Council continues to be regulated by Ofsted.

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council was one of the last 2 local authorities to be inspected under the SIF inspection framework. The only SIF inspections going forward will be for those authorities judged inadequate.

The ILACS framework is one of three Ofsted inspection frameworks currently in force which apply to local authorities, with the other two being:

- Local Area Inspections of Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)
- Local Authority Arrangements for Supporting Improvement in Schools

These were outlined in a report presented to Members at Full Council on 25th January 2018.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Two Types of Judgement inspections: Standard and Short

Local authorities will receive one judgement inspection within a three year period. The type of judgement inspection will depend on their previous inspection judgement, as set out in section 1 of this report.

There are 4 judgements:

- **Overall effectiveness**
- The experiences and progress of **children in need of help and protection**
- The experiences and progress of **children in care and care leavers**
- The **impact of leaders** on social work practice with children and families
How good are leaders at creating an environment where social work can flourish?

5 days' notice is given, with inspectors on site for 2 weeks in a **standard** inspection (for authorities last judged to require improvement) or 1 week in a **short** inspection (for authorities last judged to be good or outstanding in their last inspection). The inspection team consists of 4 inspectors, with a school HMI and a regulatory inspector allocated for up to 2 days in addition. Inspectors arrive on site on a Monday afternoon, leaving site early afternoon on the Friday. There are no set notification dates as there were under the SIF.

The timing of standard and short inspections will usually be between six months before or six months after the three-year anniversary of the authority's most recent SIF inspection. This would mean that Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council can expect a short inspection between late March 2020 and late March 2021, assuming that there is no precipitating event(s) in the meantime.

In a short inspection, inspectors will arrive on site assuming that the LA continues to be good, and will therefore seek to answer three key questions:

- Has the quality and impact of practice been maintained?
- Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have improved?
- Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have deteriorated?

Focused visits

Local Authorities will receive up to two of these visits in between a judgement inspection, depending on their most recent judgement inspection. Ofsted give 5 days' notice, with notification taking place on a Tuesday and 2 inspectors arriving on site the following Tuesday. There are no set notification dates as there were under the SIF.

Focused visits will cover one of the following topics:

- Front door
- Children in need and children subject to child protection plans
- Contextual safeguarding – including vulnerable adolescents, female genital mutilation (FGM), county lines (drug trafficking)
- Children in Care
- Permanency
- Care leavers

Leadership will be a feature of all focused visits, with inspectors looking at the impact of leaders on practice.

In focused visits, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- Performance management
- Management oversight
- Supervision
- Quality assurance
- Continuous professional development of the workforce

The outcome of these visits is a published letter, covering strengths and areas for development. Any serious weaknesses identified will be noted as areas for priority action.

Summary

Ofsted state that they have designed the framework to make inspections less of a burden, more intelligence-led and proportionate. However, in order to make this approach viable, there will need to be increased frequency of contact between Ofsted and the LA.

At the ILACS launch event in January, Ofsted confirmed that there would be far fewer set-piece interviews during the inspection: “[inspectors will] focus almost exclusively on practice with children and families. Meetings will be kept to a minimum, will only look into matters arising from case evaluations and only take place at the lead inspector’s request.” This may change the perception of inspection for front line workers and managers: in our recent SIF, we received positive feedback from staff who felt that the inspection didn’t impact too much on their day to day work, and that things felt very calm. However, feedback from an ILACS pilot authority was that the managers found the process very intensive - Ofsted estimate 80% of inspector’s time will be spent with workers and team managers. Almost all inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual and young people’s experiences; this will be largely through meeting with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work with children and families, including scrutinising electronic records.

Two of the areas which came under intense scrutiny in our SIF are both now explicit areas under the ILACS: permanence and pre-proceedings work. Ofsted will require evidence as part of the Annex A of both areas under ILACS:

- 3.3 The arrangements for permanence planning and any associated strategy, action plan and management information used to monitor performance
- 3.11 Information the local authority uses to track and manage cases in the public law outline (PLO)

Permanency is now referred to by Ofsted as an “obsession”; and we saw signs of this during our recent SIF.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) will not themselves be inspected under the new framework, although the host authority (Bolton, in our case) might see greater frequency of contact. Instead, Ofsted will look at whether the RAA is a help or hindrance to each local authority and focus on how we are promoting permanence for our children. As such, our review process in this area, including escalation processes should we feel there is any drift post-SHOBPA (decision that the child should be placed for adoption), will come under scrutiny. The key question will be around the arrangements we have in place to assure ourselves that the RAA meets the needs of local children and how we can demonstrate this. In short, how are we holding the RAA to account?

Finally, there is an even greater focus on local authority self-evaluation being tested through inspection. The Department’s continued focus on performance and QA needs to intensify. Under ILACS there will be no self-audit process, as per the SIF audit of 20 cases. Instead, inspectors will ask for a list of all cases audited in the last 6 months (as well as overarching QA reports) and they will look at those audits to assess whether they agree with our own evaluation.

In summary, the new inspection framework places a greater emphasis on the local authority’s own processes and leadership; and seeks to strike a balance based on an annual risk assessment process (necessarily largely data/desk based), but also based on ongoing discussions with the local authority. The degree to which Ofsted feel confidence in the leadership of the local authority will matter more than ever before. On-site visits by Ofsted will be more frequent than before - likely to be once every 12 to 18 months - but for a shorter duration. Their time on site will be more focused than before on the work of social workers and team managers, with the structure of the inspection - all inspectors focusing on the same area at the same time - making it likely to be more difficult to change their views about an area. The new framework brings the social care inspection more in line with school inspection in their risk-based approach and assumption of continued ‘good’ standard of service from those already deemed so. It is this underlying assumption that is most likely to be tested in the future, given the budget challenges faced by local authorities (and, increasingly, schools); and the age profile of leadership in both sectors.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications arising as a result of this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no resource implications arising from this report.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION: 1

CONTACT OFFICER:	Beth Speak, Service Lead – QA, Inspections, Systems & Sector Led Improvement
DATE:	1 st March 2018
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Ofsted framework for the inspection of Local Authority Children's Services https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018