



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People & Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director, Children's Services & Education
<b>DATE:</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> April 2022

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Children, Young People & Education
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

**SUBJECT: Update on Children's Services ILACS Inspection**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services received an Ofsted 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILCAS) across the three week period 24 January 2022 and 4 February 2022. The report was published on the Ofsted website on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022 with confirmed judgements across four categories and recommendations for improvement.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

1. Notes the Ofsted report findings (Appendix A);
2. Acknowledges areas of good practice and areas for development;
3. Notes the development of the Action Plan in response to the Inspection findings and the establishment of a multi-agency partnership board to monitor improvements and build on existing strengths.
4. Notes that further updates will be provided on the financial implications and in year investment as the Action Plan is refined and finalised for submission to Ofsted.

## 3. BACKGROUND

The last full Safeguarding Inspection of Children's Services was in September 2017 under the previous Single Inspection Framework (SIF). Following this, the inspection framework changed to the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS). In February 2020, Children's Services received an Ofsted Focused Visit, which was just before the start of the pandemic.

The structure of the Ofsted ILACS Inspection comprised one week of off-site activity to consider Blackburn with Darwen data, strategies and plans. Additionally the quality of audit activity and the impact of audits on practice and outcomes for children and young people was used to determine key lines of enquiry. This was followed by 2 weeks of onsite activity by a team of four Social Care Ofsted Inspectors, one Education Inspector and a Quality Assurance

Inspector. Additionally a virtual Regulatory Inspector considered Fostering and Adoption support and services.

The judgements across the 4 categories are:

- **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection** – ‘requires improvement to be good’
- **The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers** – ‘requires improvement to be good’
- **The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families** – ‘requires improvement to be good’
- **Overall Effectiveness** – ‘requires improvement to be good’

The report is clear that the Council’s response is timely and appropriate when children are at immediate risk of significant harm. Inspectors confirmed that children who are in local authority care need to be in care, and that most children and their families receive early help and support when they need it.

Additional areas of strength highlighted include:

- **The relationship between the local authority and schools is strong** with effective and positive working relationships with social workers and the impact that this has for children
- **Caseloads have reduced-** children in need of help and protection benefit from social workers who have the time in getting to know them and ensuring that their needs are met
- **The response to risk outside the family home is strong** - children who are at risk from or who have experienced criminal or sexual exploitation receive an effective well-coordinated multi-agency response
- **Children in foster care have their needs met** and a good recruitment strategy is in place
- **Children benefit from effective early adoption planning**
- **Staff describe a supportive culture** - they are encouraged to learn and develop. “Staff feel that managers care about their well-being and have supported them to feel safe throughout the pandemic while they continued with ‘business as usual’ in their work with children.”

*Areas of recommendation for improvement are:*

- The multi-agency response to concerns that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, particularly timely strategy discussions.
- Practice relating to securing or dispensing with parental consent during child protection investigations.
- The response to neglect and domestic abuse to ensure child-focused practice which measures impact through the difference made to children’s lives.
- The quality of planning for children and care leavers across the service.
- The quality of life-story work and direct work with children in care.
- The timeliness of the discharge of care orders for children living at home with their parents.

- The quality of support, advice and guidance offered to care leavers over the age of 18.
- The provision of information for care leavers about their entitlements and health histories.
- The range and impact of participation and advocacy opportunities for children and care leavers.
- The effectiveness and impact of internal auditing and monitoring processes.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

Immediate actions have already been taken to address some of Ofsted's findings. Lancashire Constabulary have committed to providing resource to support timely strategy discussions and the management of the Leaving Care Team has been changed as of the 28 February. A post-inspection Action Plan will be submitted to Ofsted by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022 which will continue to build on the Council's commitment to supporting the most vulnerable. The plan will address the key concerns around multi-agency strategy discussions, data and assurance, and our services and support for care leavers up to the age of 25.

The plan will be driven by a multi-agency 'Achieving Excellence' partnership board which will be chaired independently to oversee the delivery of the response and actions identified. The inaugural meeting of the Board is at the end of April.

*The additional investment will cover improvement activity including:*

- Working with high performing children's services teams learning from good and outstanding practices
- Investment in the Leaving Care Service and quality assurance activity
- Extra joint working for preparation for adulthood between children's and adult services
- Enhancing the Advanced Practitioner roles in Children in our Care and Safeguarding Teams
- Providing training for staff to improve practice in key areas including risk assessments and family meetings

*Areas highlighted as strengths within the report and which will continue to be built on include:*

- Response to Child Sexual Exploitation
- No young person in care living in an unregulated setting
- Children benefit from strong relationships with social workers who visit them regularly and who are passionate about improving children's lives
- Decisive action when neglect is identified, family and friend carers identified early and skilfully assessed.
- School leaders speak highly of the guidance that they receive
- Caseloads have significantly reduced since the introduction of children's advice and duty service (CADS)

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Governance arrangements have been reviewed and a Children's Services Improvement Board will be established by the end of April 2022 with an independent Chair. This strategic board will oversee and drive the delivery of the actions in the Action Plan to address the recommendations in the Inspection report and improve the impact on outcomes for children and young people in the borough.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The estimated cost of delivering the Action Plan is being developed in conjunction with the work to refine the actions required to deliver the necessary improvements in the service. Given this ongoing work, it is too early to say what the overall costs of delivering the improvements will be, suffice to say that the intention is any such investment will be contained within the budget (and related contingencies) set at Finance Council in February 2022.

In this context, it should be noted that some elements of the Action Plan comprise one-off measures to deal with acute matters arising from the Inspection (auditing of activity, training etc) and other longer term investments.

It is intended to fund the Action Plan to deliver all required improvements using part of a contingent amount of Social Care grant, of £1.0m held back in anticipation of demand pressures in Social Care during 2022/23 (and on an ongoing basis). This should be sufficient to fund the necessary investment in 2022/23 and on an ongoing basis without any additional drawdown from the Council's reserves. However, where this is not the case and to the extent that those demand pressures arise, the Council will need to consider what other measures may be necessary.

As indicated above, the Action Plan will be subject to further refinement as the financial year progresses acknowledging that the Council's response needs to be both immediate to deal with some of the issues raised in the Inspection and developed to ensure that the improvements in the service are sustained to deliver the best outcomes for Children in a way that remains affordable for the Council.

Finally, to ensure that the Executive Board is sighted on the outcomes being achieved by this investment, and aside from any updates provided on progress with the delivery of the Action Plan, this matter will be considered as part of the regular Budget Monitoring reports submitted to the Executive Board. Equally, the extent to which additional investment is sustained and any measures to mitigate the financial impact for the Council will be considered as part of the development of the Council's budget for 2023/24.

## **7.LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The action plan has been drafted in compliance with The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities Regulations 2007) following publication on 18th March 2022 by Ofsted of the report on their inspection into the effectiveness of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Children's Services.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

A benchmarking exercise has been undertaken to address areas for improvement.

Staffing levels and entitlement offers for young people have been reviewed. This includes staffing models and capacity and strengthened management oversight to improve the quality of practice and effectiveness of the service.

## 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.

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.

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

The Strategic Director of Children's Services has engaged with Local Government Association Improvement Leads for Children's Services in the North West. This consultation activity has supported with the strategic direction of the plan, which is to embed high standards of practice with a focus on quality, and the impact of the support to achieve improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. The views and experiences of children and families will be central to shaping the action plan, and focus groups are planned to explore key areas. This is in addition to routine participation activity delivered as part of the Children & Young People Participation Strategy (2021-2024).

## 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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>4</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Jayne Ivory, Justine Westwell</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> April 2022
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix A Ofsted ILACS Report
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