



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Cabinet

**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020**

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Ofsted Monitoring Report</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Children and Young People
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Nova Charlton
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 As a consequence of the 2019 Ofsted ILAC, which judged Children's Services to be Inadequate, a series of monitoring visits are required prior to a full reinspection. In addition, as a consequence of this judgement the Department for Education (DfE) has made St Helens Council the subject of formal intervention.
- 1.2 The first of the Ofsted monitoring visits were conducted in early August, the outcome of which is attached as Appendix 1. The department has identified a number of areas requiring improvement. They have been developed as part of the wider improvement plan.
- 1.3 Further to this the Department is to be subject to a detailed Focused Visit between January and March 2021. The subject of the visit will be to review the 'the quality of decision making in social care practice'.

## **2. Recommendations for Decision**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- i) To note the findings of the Ofsted Report**
- ii) To comment upon the planned actions of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and the department**
- iii) To receive further reports on the progress of the department in addressing the areas identified in the Monitoring letter that require improvement**

## **3. Purpose of this Report**

- 3.1 To provide feedback to Cabinet following Ofsted's Monitoring Visit.
- 3.2 To update on progress being taken in relation to required improvements arising from the Ofsted Monitoring Report.
- 3.3 To share the work of the Council and the Children's Improvement Board in preparing for future Ofsted engagement.

## **4. Background /Reasons for the recommendations**

4.1 The findings from the 2019 ILACS were:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - Required improvement to be good
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection - Required improvement to be good
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers - Inadequate

Due to the judgement of inadequate for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers (Permanence) the overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate. Consequently, the DfE has made the authority the subject of formal intervention. This has required the Council to establish an Improvement Board and for its work to be overseen by Intervention Managers from the DfE. In addition, Ofsted are required as part of the ILAC

process to undertake Monitoring Visits to ascertain progress. The first of these visits were undertaken between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

- 4.2 The visit was conducted virtually without any face to face contact with social workers or their managers. Extensive information was provided as part of the preparation arrangements. This was the first remote inspection undertaken by Ofsted nationally and provided a good opportunity for future learning.
- 4.3 The attached letter identifies that considerable progress has been made by the service. It is pleasing to note that both frontline practice and leadership have been identified positively. There are however as with all inspection reports areas that require improvement. These include:
- **Challenge**  
Whilst progress has been made in this area the lack of challenge by managers in relation to practice is still a concern.
  - **Supervision**  
This is now occurring in nearly all cases however there is a need to move beyond a 'tick box approach' in a number of areas.
  - **Recording**  
Most case records are up to date however there are several cases that need to improve quality
  - **Improving consistency**  
There remains a concern that practice is still too variable and common standards need to be addressed
  - **Compliance**  
Historically the lack of compliance in social work practice continues to be a hurdle to improvement
- 4.4 The above issues require significant hands on 'practical improvement'. As part of the priorities of the Children's Improvement Board these are issues at the forefront of future work. A detailed action plan will be prepared as part of the department's Principal Social Worker brief and will be reported monthly to the Children's Improvement Board.
- 4.5 In addition to the required improvements to practice the Monitoring Visit along with the DfE review identified several wider strategic/policy initiatives. These include:
- The future shape of Early Help and Child in Need services.
  - Improvements in the development of alternative to care initiatives.
  - The creation and implementation of a placement sufficiency strategy.
- These matters are currently being addressed either as part of the wider Council's reorganisation arrangements or a dedicated project development plan as part of the placement strategy. These matters are however complex and have proven to be difficult to implement.
- 4.6 As part of the ongoing inspection regime Ofsted are to introduce over the Autumn and Winter period a series of Focused Inspections. The theme of these is to review the quality of decision making in Children's Social Care. It is likely to concentrate on three major areas:

## **Help & Protection**

- Effectiveness of front door, with reference to any rise in & response to referrals, S47 enquiries & strategy discussions.
- Progress of children subject to CP and CIN plans.
- Progress of those recently stepped up or stepped down to early help & the exercise of thresholds.

## **Children in Care & Care Leavers**

- Edge of care/pre-proceedings.
- Focus on physical & mental health of children in care & care leavers, including how LA has maintained contact with them & facilitated contact with families.
- Placement decisions, including quality of matching, particularly where sufficiency is a challenge.

## **Impact of Leaders**

- The quality assurance of practice & “line of sight” to the quality & impact of practice with children & families.
- Management & workforce capacity, including responses to staff wellbeing.
- Effectiveness of leaders in leading & contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective social work practice.

The intention of Ofsted is to evaluate a range of key issues in relation to ‘quality of decision making’. Further detail in relation to this is shown in Appendix 2.

## **5 Consideration of Alternatives**

5.1 Not Applicable.

## **6 Conclusions**

6.1 The Ofsted Monitoring letter in Appendix 1 provides the authority with its first opportunity to have independently assessed its progress in improving practice since the ILAC inspection of 2019. There is much to be positive about. The service is now clear as to its priorities and has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to be judged as good. The Monitoring letter is essentially a progress report on the work that has been undertaken over the last six months. Whilst more is needed, this is a good beginning. The service now needs a step change in its improvement journey. Whilst Ofsted recognised the emphasis placed upon being child focused; this now needs to be sustained.

## **7 Implications**

### **7.1 Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from the Ofsted Monitoring report. The consequences of delivering a service improvement agenda however requires significant additionality. In setting the 2020/21 Revenue Budget the need for improvement was recognised. In delivering the future placement strategy there will be a significant Capital requirement. This will be addressed separately.

### **7.2 Legal Implications**

Not Applicable.

### **7.3 Staffing/HR Implications**

In delivering the required improvement agenda significant training and staff development arrangements have been identified. In the medium term there will be a need to change the ways in which staff are currently working.

### **7.4 Impact on our customers/residents**

Not Applicable.

### **7.5 Community Impact Assessment**

Not required

### **7.6 Asset / Property Implications**

Not Applicable.

### **7.7 Environmental implications**

Not Applicable.

### **7.8 Policy Framework Implications**

Not Applicable.

### **7.9 Risks**

Not Applicable.

### **7.10 Link to council's priorities**

Improvement to Children's Services accords with the delivery of wider Council priorities.

## **8. Background papers**

- ILAC Report 23<sup>rd</sup> September – 4<sup>th</sup> October 2019
- Revised Ofsted Focus Visit Regulations

- Priorities and Terms of Reference of Children's Improvement Board

**9. Appendices**

Appendix One: Ofsted Monitoring Report August 2020

Appendix Two: Ofsted Focused Inspection Key Areas of Work