

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

1ST JUNE 2011

SUBJECT:	SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INSPECTION REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DAVID ARMSTRONG
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR MRS SHEILA CLARKE
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report summarises the outcome of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection which was undertaken by OFSTED between 24 January and 4 February 2011.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are requested to note the positive and successful outcome of the inspection by OFSTED and the action plan which has been produced to meet the areas for development.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

3.1 OFSTED is the regulator for childrens social care services under the Children Act 2004 and will be responsible, through subsequent inspections, for monitoring ongoing compliance with statutory duties for children who need safeguarding and who are looked after by the local authority. Members have a responsibility to assure themselves that the council is taking appropriate action in addressing the areas for development identified by OFSTED.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 The inspection was led by a Lead Inspector with 3 Inspectors, a shadow Inspector and an Inspector from the Care Quality Commission who inspected health services.

4.2 The inspection took evidence from a number of sources. These included discussions with children and young people and their families who receive services, social workers and their front-line managers and senior officers including the Interim Head of Safeguarding, the Head of Branch for Children's

Social Care, the Interim Director for Children’s Services, and the then Interim Chief Executive. Elected Members and a range of community representatives were also seen by the inspection team.

- 4.3 The inspectors undertook a structured review of 20 case files and took evidence from a further 29 cases which they randomly selected. They also reviewed a number of documents, reports and procedures. This enabled the inspection team to form a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken.
- 4.4 The grades which OFSTED use to judge services are: inadequate (fails to meet minimum requirements); adequate (only meets minimum requirements); good (exceeds minimum requirements) and outstanding (significantly exceeds minimum requirements). The following chart sets out the grades received in this inspection.

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	Good
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Outstanding
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Good
Partnership working	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Adequate
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Good
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Good
Economic well-being	Adequate
Quality of provision	Good
Services for looked after children	
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Good
Equality and diversity	Adequate

Safeguarding Services

- 4.4 In Safeguarding Services, the overall effectiveness of services was rated as good, and capacity for improvement was rated as good. The inspectors noted the council and its partners were able to demonstrate improvements in service provision, and leadership at all levels across the partnership was active, visible and effective. It was also noted that there was outstanding multi-agency commitment to service development, and workforce planning to develop managerial and professional expertise is outstanding with a healthy culture of investment in staff development. The inspectors commented positively on the range of services and support for disabled children and their families through Aiming High.
- 4.5 The inspectors also grade safeguarding outcomes for children and young people. In this area, the inspectors said that children and young people were safe and feel safe, and rated this outcome as good. The quality of provision provided to support children to feel safe and be safe was rated as good. Performance management and evidencing how services were monitored and overseen was also rated as good.
- 4.6 Four safeguarding outcomes were rated as outstanding - the contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe, partnership working, leadership and management and ambition and prioritisation. In each of these areas the inspectors highlighted outstanding work in supporting children and families. These included the active role of health visitors in the childrens centres, the senior strategic commitment to developing services across agencies, the political consensus in ensuring services are appropriately resourced, the support and direction provided to frontline staff by senior managers and workforce planning in ensuring there are sufficient numbers of qualified and experienced staff. The Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Childrens Trust were seen as providing clear leadership and direction.

Services for Looked After Children

- 4.7 The inspectors graded the overall effectiveness of services for looked after children as good and the capacity for improvement as good. In particular, the inspectors commented on the strong leadership of the Corporate Parenting Group and the shared political commitment across all parties and key partners to improve outcomes for looked after children. The inspectors also commented on the strong track record of improvement and the clear vision and strategy for looked after children.
- 4.8 The inspectors graded each of the outcomes for looked after children. Being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution were graded as good. The inspectors undertook a survey of looked after children and of those who responded, 94% reported that they felt very safe and 91% said there was at least one person they could talk to if they felt unsafe. The report reflects the finding that access to specialist health support was quick and health needs were addressed through good health plans. A significant number of placements were stable and foster carers reported good support and
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access to training. Inspectors view was that high priority is given to improving the educational outcomes for all looked after children, and there were robust systems to monitor the attainment and progress of all looked after children from the early years foundation stage to the final year of compulsory schooling. The Children in Care Council were praised for their involvement in the strategic planning for the delivery of services. The survey of children in care revealed that more work is required to publicise the existence of the Children in Care Council to all looked after children. Children and young people reported that they felt well supported by their social workers and carers and were able to express their views.

- 4.9 Economic well-being was graded as adequate. The inspectors acknowledged that the strategy and procedures were in place to improve performance, but were yet to have a positive impact on outcomes. Care leavers reported that they were very satisfied with the support they receive and accommodation options for care leavers were well developed with partners. The inspectors noted that compared with care leavers regionally and nationally, fewer care leavers in Wirral were in education, employment or training and that too many young people drop out of their chosen courses and find work hard to find. The quality of pathway plans was also inconsistent, in planning for appropriate targets and support. However, the inspectors noted a number of initiatives are now underway and that the service knew the young people leaving care very well.
- 4.10 The inspectors graded the quality of provision and performance management as good. They commented that there was robust scrutiny of independent placements and there was very good support for children based on individual needs. Progress in responding to the last adoption inspection was positively commented upon and the reviews for looked after children by independent reviewing officers were well attended by relevant partner agencies.
- 4.11 The inspectors graded the ambition and prioritisation and leadership and management for looked after children as outstanding. Multi-agency planning at the Childrens Trust Board and the Corporate Parenting Group were seen as delivering effective, integrated multi-agency working and there was an excellent focus on user engagement.

Equality and Diversity

- 4.12 In both the Safeguarding and Looked After Children elements of the Inspection, equality and diversity were rated as adequate. The needs of children were often identified, but the inspectors commented that there was a lack of depth in the assessment, planning and recording in the case files, evidencing how these needs affected each individual child; and how their individual needs would be met. Also, inspectors found that a full picture of the child did not come across in as much detail as required in their records.
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Areas for Development

4.13 The inspection report gives a number of areas for development. These are areas which will be reviewed and progress monitored, in future inspections. There are no areas for priority action, which would mean a higher degree of monitoring by OFSTED in future inspections.

4.14 In the Safeguarding part of the Inspection, there are three areas for development.

Within 3 months:-

- ensure the records of assessments include the risk and protective factors

Within 6 months:-

- keep under review the capacity of the current electronic recording arrangement to ensure it is fit for purpose
- ensure all records of assessments, plans and reviews reflect a focus on the child's views and wishes and the cultural and identity needs of children and their families.

4.15 In the Looked After Children part of the Inspection, there are four areas for development to be completed within three months. These are to:-

- promote awareness among all looked after children of the opportunities presented by the Children in Care Council
- ensure children's files give a clear picture of their life story and the reasons that decisions are made as well as reflecting their individual identity
- Improve further the effectiveness of strategies used to ensure that more young people complete their chosen course of study or training successfully post 16
- Improve the consistency of the quality of the personal education plans for the youngest children in care and pathway plans for care leavers

4.16 A detailed action plan has been drawn up by the department encompassing the areas for development and also additional actions extracted from the body of the OFSTED report, which will support the continuous improvement journey to make the transition to outstanding, in all areas. This action plan will be developed in team and Branch plans and will be monitored on a monthly basis by the department. Progress on the action plan will also be reported to the Council's Safeguarding Reference Group.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

5.1 Safeguarding children at risk of harm, and parenting children in the care of the local authority are statutory responsibilities. Failing to fulfil these statutory duties exposes children to risk of harm and the potential for the local authority to be sued by the children and their parents for failing to protect them. Failing to meet the standards set by OFSTED as the regulator can lead to intervention by

the Department for Education to monitor improvements or in extreme cases to direct the takeover of services by another local authority or contractor.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 No other options were considered as this was an external inspection undertaken by the regulator of social care, OFSTED.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The inspectors consulted with a wide range of children and young people, their families and carers, staff and partner agencies.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 The voluntary, community and faith sector were part of the meetings that the inspectors had with a wide range of service providers.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 The action plan recommends training for staff in particular areas which will be met within current resources. The review of the capacity of the electronic recording system will involve WITS as part of making the adjustments to the system as planned. There may be a need to purchase services from the current provider Northgate (or an alternative provider) given there are likely to be further changes made following the Munro review into child protection. This review is critically examining if the current IT systems are fit for purpose. The government is currently making funding available through the Social Work Improvement Fund in anticipation of changes in social work practice and recording systems.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no legal implications.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The inspection report highlights this as an area that is currently adequate. The action plan addresses how this will be improved.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required?

No

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no carbon reduction implications.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no planning implications

13.2 The community expects that the authority provides appropriate and timely services to safeguard children and care for children in the councils care.

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APPENDICES

INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES - OFSTED 11 MARCH 2011

SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INSPECTION ACTION PLAN

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date