

## **Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024**

### **Ofsted Report**



#### **Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said,**

"Children Services in Staffordshire have been rated 'good' for a decade, so the result of this inspection requires careful reflection.

"However, we accept the findings, and I can assure everyone that protecting vulnerable young people is a priority.

"We are committed to improve our services and have already begun taking steps to do so."

#### **Report Summary:**

Staffordshire Children's Services were inspected in November 2023, and this report is to present the outcome of that inspection. The final report was published on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2024. Although the experiences and progress of children in our care was rated as good, Children's Services overall have been rated as Requires Improvement to be Good.

#### **Recommendation**

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers the information contained in the Ofsted report.

## **Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024**

### **Ofsted Report**

#### **Recommendation of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers the information contained in the Ofsted report.

#### **Local Member Interest:**

N/A

### **Report of the Director for Children and Families**

#### **Reasons for Recommendations:**

##### **Background**

1. Staffordshire Children's Services were inspected between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2023. This was a short inspection as per the ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) framework which focuses on the effectiveness of Local Authority services and arrangements across four key areas.
2. Our Children's Services overall have been rated as Requires Improvement to be Good. The final report was published on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2024. Whilst the inspection outcome is sobering, managers understand and accept as to what is needed to make the improvements highlighted by the inspection findings and are committed to achieving the same.
3. There are four key recommendations from this inspection where improvements need to be made are:
  - a. The quality and effectiveness of management oversight of contacts, referrals, and assessments in the 'front door'.
  - b. The effectiveness and impact of performance data and quality assurance to drive practice improvement.
  - c. The effectiveness and oversight of allegations against those in position of trust undertaken by the local authority designated officer (LADO) service.
  - d. The effectiveness of partnership working, particularly with housing and health partners, to improve children's access to dentistry and for children in care with more complex health needs to get timely

assessment and support and ensure that care leavers are not placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation even for a short period of time.

4. The breakdown of judgements across key areas of inspection framework are:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

5. There were areas of strengths identified by the inspection, some of which are:

- a. No children were identified to be at risk in Staffordshire.
- b. Our social workers, and practitioners in all other services like early help, exploitation, care leavers, and education know our children well, have developed meaningful positive relationships and support children and families to remain within their family networks as they support them to achieve good outcomes.
- c. Our fostering and adoption offer is robust.
- d. Children are being supported well to achieve good outcomes in education, training and employment.
- e. Services for our Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are robust.

- f. Children who are at risk of being exploited are being supported well.
  - g. We have a committed and stable workforce who feel supported in their roles.
6. It is recognised that there is a need to refine our approach for oversight on improvement within children's services. There are plans for development of a next generation of Childrens Improvement Board. The board will be sponsored by the Cabinet member and will be independently chaired by a technical expert to maintain focus and rigour around development and delivery of the Ofsted improvement plan.
7. Whilst work is progressing to set up the governance and new terms of reference for the new Children's Improvement Board, we have worked with the managers and the services to carefully consider the findings of the report, and improvements that are required to get to good and outstanding. A detailed improvement plan is being drawn up and will have oversight from senior leadership and the improvement board. The final plan is required to be submitted to Ofsted by 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2024.
8. Work is already progressing at pace to drive the improvements in the service. For example – we have liaised with Wolverhampton (rated as good by Ofsted and have power BI reporting) and are working with our IT services to develop systems and processes for strengthening performance management systems for our LADO service. Improvements around management oversight of contacts and referrals in the front door have been strengthened, and we are introducing robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure consistency in practice. The supervision policy is being implemented rigorously which will bring consistency in management oversight across the entire service with regular checks being built in.
9. Manager briefings have been organised following the inspection to ensure all managers were prepared for the final report and are able to support their services and staff appropriately. Face to Face and virtual staff briefings have been organised, led by the DCS, to offer information and support as well as the challenge about the task ahead. We will continue to monitor staff stability and ensure that stability in staffing and service delivery is maintained at all times.
10. The findings from this inspection will be shared and discussed with the partnerships in detail now the report is published. However initial discussions have already taken place.

## **Legal Implications**

11. The Ofsted report may result in increased litigation activity with an expected increase in threats of judicial review and threats of litigation. There is also likely to be an increase in FOI and data subject requests.
12. The Legal Services will be engaged to review and provide support to the action plan and any legal implications will be kept under review.

### **Resource and Value for Money Implications**

13. The results of the OFSTED inspection will now be considered as part of the finalisation of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It is clear that the council's financial plans need to contain sufficient flexibility to be able to support the development and implementation of the improvement plan. It will also be necessary to consider any increased risks of non-delivery of cost reduction programmes already included in the MTFS. This will be taken into account as part of the overall financial resilience considerations included in the MTFS report to Cabinet later this month. It will also be necessary to consider the report from OFSTED when finalising the Annual Governance Statement and audit arrangements for the council.

### **Climate Change Implications**

14. N/A

### **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Ofsted Inspection Report

### **Contact Details**

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