

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18th August 2014

Unannounced Ofsted Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Recommendation

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the briefing on the County Council's preparation for to unannounced Ofsted inspection.

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Ofsted have produced a new single inspection framework and all local authorities will be inspected under this framework within a three-year period. However, we will only be notified 24 hours before inspectors arrive on-site so we need to ensure we maintain our high standards of practice and are fully prepared. The inspection team will normally be on-site for 11 working days across a four-week period.
- 1.2 The inspection will focus on the effectiveness of the local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, and children who return home. It will also focus on the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and the experiences and progress of care leavers. The leadership, management and governance judgement addresses the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people, and the quality of professional practice locally. They will be looking to ensure that practice is based on being person-centred and outcome-focussed.
- 1.3 Inspectors will target their inspection activity where they are most likely to gather robust evidence within the time available. This will involve attending meetings, such as child protection conferences and reviews, strategy discussions and planned child protection monitoring visits to observe practice; scrutinising case files and interviewing colleagues across the Council and external partners.

2.0 Preparation

- 2.1 To prepare for the Inspection, in line with the framework and evaluation schedule and the handbook published by Ofsted, the following preparation has taken place:

- **Logistics:** Project Plan produced to take forward all the practical arrangements as soon as we get notification, i.e. IT equipment, office space, car parking.
- **Data:** Reports in line with Annex A in the handbook are ready to be produced.
- **Information:** A document library with requested evidence has been created.

3.0 Communication

- 3.1 An email has been drafted to notify all relevant people once we get notification. People, Communities and Resources Groups will be notified as well as all Members.
- 3.2 A communication tree has been set up for the Inspection Steering Group and they have individual responsibility to notify specific groups to ensure that all stakeholders are informed.
- 3.3 Briefings have been sent to all stakeholders to give advance warning of the inspection and include details of what the Inspectors will be looking for in terms of evidence, the kind of meetings they will attend and tips for preparing.
- 3.4 A further briefing is ready to go to staff and one for children, young people and families who will be interviewed during the inspection.
- 3.5 A video and presentation has been sent to all stakeholders to emphasise the existing good practice that Inspectors will be looking for, including: evidence that we are listening to the views, needs and wishes voice of the child; making a positive difference through planned outcomes; working with partners ensuring that our process for decision making is robust and rationale for intervention is clear.
- 3.6 Rehearsal – a rehearsal took place during the week of 28th July 2014 to test our readiness. Data was produced in line with Annex A, communication was tested, and we carried out case file audits to identify strengths and weaknesses of practice. Data was produced promptly in line with the criteria set out by Ofsted; all communication sent to staff was well received and our case file auditing identified areas of strengths, areas for improvement and best practice. All the learning will be fed back to teams through our Inspection Steering Group, which includes stakeholders from all services that will be involved in the Inspection.

4.0 During the Inspection

- 4.1 The Lead Inspector will meet with the DCS and Heads of Service on the Wednesday morning (following the notification call) to outline how the inspection will run and to:

- Provide an opportunity for the LA representatives to explain the authority's local context, key strengths and challenges.
- Outline the format and methodology of the inspection – practice observations and shadowing meetings and visits, and scrutiny of case files with appropriate workers – clarifying that evidence gathering will be focused on tracking children and young people's experiences and any meetings will be kept to a minimum and concerned with matters arising from case-tracking at the lead inspector's request.
- Explain the process and arrangements for visits to children living in residential children's homes out of the local authority's area.
- Clarify whether there are any serious incidents that are awaiting notification or have been notified to Ofsted recently.
- Discuss how the experiences of children, young people and families can be directly part of the inspection.

5.0 Following the Inspection

- 5.1 The Lead Inspector will write a report about the findings of the inspection. The inspection report will be sent to the LA to check factual accuracy and will be published on the Ofsted website five weeks after the end of the inspection. The LA is required to prepare and publish a written statement of the action it intends to take in response to the report.

6.0 Information for Members

- 6.1 Inspectors will be looking for evidence that:

- i) **Local authority senior managers, leaders and elected members discharge their individual and collective statutory responsibilities. There are clear lines of accountability and governance with a clear distinction between political, strategic and operational roles.**

Reference

- Scheme of delegation as outlined in part 2 of The Constitution
- Structure chart showing political, strategic and operational governance and **Appendix A**.

- ii) **The Director of Children's Services (DCS), the lead elected member and the senior management team have a comprehensive knowledge about what is happening at the 'front line' to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.**

Reference

- Quarterly performance reporting submitted to Cabinet
- People Group Annual Review 2013/14
- Regular supervisions ensure that critical issues are raised in a timely way

- Case file audits
- Senior members meetings with Strategic Director and key Heads of Service

iii) Leaders, both professional and political, drive continuous improvement so that the local authority is consistently effective as the lead agency for the protection and care of children and young people and as a corporate parent.

Reference

- Lead Members event on Sector Led Improvement on 7 March 2014 to identify and address regional priorities
- One Organisation Plan linking to People Group Outcomes Framework
- Governance Framework used to demonstrate governance of projects with a quarterly report to Cabinet showing progress on savings plans
- Responsibilities of the Elected Member as a Corporate Parent Include:
 - Being aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the needs of the looked after children and care leavers are met.
 - Having a knowledge and interest in the profile, needs and outcomes for looked after children.
 - Understanding the impact on looked after children of all council decisions.
 - Receiving (and requesting) information about the quality of care and services that children are experiencing.
 - Considering whether the care would be good enough for their own child/ grandchild or if not, to ensure improvements are made.

What you should know:

- To ensure that actions are taken to address any shortcomings in services and to constantly improve the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
- In 2009, the DCSF launched new statutory guidance 'The roles and responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services'.

What you should do:

- It is part of Lead Members' leadership role to satisfy themselves that the discharge of the authority's statutory children's services functions is effective. The Lead Member should use that intelligence to help ensure that the DCS and other senior officers in the local authority are held to account for their contribution to improving children's well-being.
- Leaders should hold Lead Members to account by ensuring Lead

Members regularly update the Leader on their analysis of this information and intelligence, identifying risks in the system that need attention and their plans to address these.

- Children in Care Council
 - The active involvement and participation of children and young people looked after and leaving care is underpinned by the Warwickshire County Council Corporate Parenting Strategy, Warwickshire Children and Young People's Plan, The Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 12 that states: "Every Child or young person has the right to express his or her views on all matters that affect them and their views should be given due weight in accordance to their age and maturity".
 - The UK has ratified the UN Convention, and as a Council we are required by law to take seriously the wishes, views and feelings of children and young people.
 - Participation is the process of involving children and young people in decision making. Participation can happen in lots of different ways, for example, individual conversations, group discussions, questionnaires, art based projects and many more. All participation must influence what we do and how we do it as a local authority.
 - As a County Council, children and young people are listened to about their experiences of the services they receive and the issues that are important to them. The Council is committed to working creatively with children and young people to deliver improvements that reflect their experiences and views.

iv) There is effective engagement with the relevant local partnerships including the Health and Well-being Board. The DCS works closely with the LSCB chair. The Chief Executive, drawing on other LSCB partners and, where appropriate, the Lead Member will hold the chair to account for the effective working of the LSCB.

Reference

- WSCB ensures sound arrangements are in place to protect children
 - annual report is shared with scrutiny and HWB
 - Cabinet Member attendance at both Children's & Adults Safeguarding Boards
 - DCS sits on both WSCB & HWB
 - DCS meets regularly with the Independent chair of the WSCB

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