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| Committee(s): Community and Children Services Committee Safeguarding Sub Committee Audit and Risk Management Committee | Date(s): 17.06.2020 24.06.2020 14.07.2020 |
| Subject: Ofsted Inspection 2020 | Public |
| Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community & Children's Services | For Information |
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Ofsted conducted an inspection of children's social care services in March 2020.

Their findings were published on 6 April 2020. This report summarises key findings and appends their findings in full.

Children's social care services received an overall judgment of 'Outstanding'.

Summary

Ofsted found that 'social workers are well supported. They do good work, which is making a difference to children's lives'.

'Children's Services in the City of London are outstanding. Children benefit from a strong and highly effective social work service which has continued to significantly improve since the previous inspection. Senior leaders and council members have been proactive in addressing new challenges and improving services, particularly for children in care and care leavers. The needs of children are consistently prioritised and valued and are effectively addressed in a timely way. Social workers are very well trained and highly skilled. They are able to form meaningful, long standing and trusting relationships with children that improve the children's experiences and progress. [Children's] views are sought and clearly influence service improvements' (Ofsted, March 2020 p1¹).

The inspection report had two recommendations; a need to improve management overview of cases stepping down from social care to early help and; to improve the recording of management decision-making at all stages of a child's journey.

This report highlights the key findings and appends an action plan to further improve services to children and families.

¹ Children's Services Inspection. City of London. Ofsted: 6/3/2020 <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50149902> accessed 4 June 2020

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Inspections of children's social care focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:
 - to help and protect children
 - the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
 - the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
 - the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
 - the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people, and the quality of professional practice².
2. The last full inspection of children's social care took place in July 2016. The overall effectiveness of the service was found to be good, with leadership, management and governance assessed as outstanding.
3. The Children's services focused visit took place in November 2018, in overview the inspectors found that:

'Care leavers in the City of London benefit from a strong service that ensures that they are very well supported. They receive effective help which enables most to achieve good outcomes. There is a determined and appropriately ambitious political and corporate focus to sustain and improve outcomes for care leavers. The service knows itself well and is aware of the areas in which further improvement is required'³.

² Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services. Ofsted Published 29 November 2017, updated 9 August 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851935/Framework_evaluation_criteria_and_inspector_guidance_for_the_inspection_of_local_authority_children_s_services.pdf accessed 4 June 2020

³ Children's Services Focussed Visit. Ofsted. 16 November 2018. <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50038639> accessed 4 June 2020

Ofsted findings

The following sets out the specific findings from the 2020 Inspection

Experience and Progress of Children Who Need Help and Protection: good

4. Key findings are that children in need of help and protection receive a good service that is proportionate and enables positive change. Partner agency working is strong. Children with disabilities receive a well attuned service.
5. Initial contacts are responded to quickly and well. Assessments are good and services and interventions well planned and clearly articulated. Management and oversight is very effective, with detailed reflective supervision notes. Children are seen often and their social workers know them well.
6. There is a well led focus on ensuring children are in and remain in education. Responses to children going missing are robust, with a clear understanding of the additional vulnerabilities of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) with potential for exploitation and trafficking.
7. In a minority, tighter timeframes could have meant a shorter period of intervention for the family. There was no data set for Early Help and some decisions were on file without the full rationale.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: outstanding

8. Key findings included:
 - Children in care and care leavers are extremely well supported
 - Commitment to ensuring that needs are met is demonstrated by senior leaders, councillors, health partners and children's social workers, resulting in an extremely good level of service
 - Adoption, where the plan, is progressed in a timely way, with careful matching
 - Extremely strong involvement and interest from council members
 - Particular sensitivity shown regarding cultural needs and diversity
 - Strong use of advocacy and independent visiting
 - Children are creatively and well supported to access leisure and interests
 - Virtual school is creative, relentless and effective in making sure children in care do well
 - Rich range of opportunities in the arts, culture and sport
 - Good housing offer, with support and moving only when ready

Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding

9. The independent inspectors found high quality services have been sustained and improved for some time, with services improved because of committed and effective leadership. Practitioners are able to do good work with committed and effective leadership, and good partnership working. The City

of London is found to be a learning organisation open to scrutiny and committed to continuous improvement, through the use of independent audit, quality assurance and the move to an achieving excellence board.

10. Ofsted found that the lead member and deputy chair of the safeguarding sub committee had an impressive knowledge of children's services and were proactive in meeting young people to understand their individual circumstances. Furthermore performance management was strong, and the service therefore responsive, by increasing with a (pilot) deputy team manager role and commissioning.

11. Caseloads are manageable and enable strong relationships, which has been enhanced by systemic practice being embedded.

12. The Ofsted report concludes;

'Social workers are well supported. They do good work, which is making a difference to children's lives'.

The overall judgement for the Inspection was Outstanding.

Proposals

13. An action plan has been drawn up in response to the findings by Ofsted and is appended to this report.

14. The two recommendations outlined a need to improve management overview of cases stepping down from social care to early help, and to improve the recording of management decision-making at all stages of a child's journey.

15. Subsequent to the inspection, an Early Help workflow within our database is operational. This workflow enables the running of management reports that shape and support our service and managers can see a snapshot of progress.

Conclusion

16. Children's Social Care services are outstanding. Children and families receive timely good quality support that makes a difference to their lives.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Ofsted report
- Appendix 2 – Action Plan

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