

Committee(s)	Dated:
Community and Children's Services – For Information	14 October 2016
Audit and Risks – For Information	08 November 2016
Safeguarding Sub-Committee – For Information	17 November 2016
Policy and Resources – For Information	17 November 2016
Subject: Ofsted inspection of the City of London's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers	Public
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Summary

This report provides Members with a summary of the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of the City of London's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in July 2016, carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The effectiveness of children's services in the City of London was judged overall to be 'Good' with a number of 'Outstanding' features. The individual judgements were as follows:

- The experience and progress of children who need help and protection is 'Good'.
- The experience and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence is 'Good'.
- The experience and progress of care leavers is 'Good'.
- Leadership, management and governance in the City of London is 'Outstanding'.

The City of London is the sixth local authority in London to receive an overall 'Good' judgement for its children's services, out of 22 London local authorities inspected so far. The City of London is also one of six local authorities in England to receive a judgement of 'Outstanding' for its leadership, management and governance.

A separate but concurrent review of the effectiveness of the City and Hackney Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) also took place in July 2016, carried out under the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Review) Regulations 2013.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.
- Note the Department of Community and Children's Services' (DCCS') plans to address the recommendations outlined in the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Ofsted single inspection framework (SIF) is a statutory inspection framework, introduced in November 2013, to evaluate the experience and progress of children and young people in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in all local authorities across England. A separate but concurrent review of all LSCBs in England usually takes place at the same time as the local authority inspection. All local authorities are due to be inspected under this framework by December 2017 and 110 local authority inspections have taken place so far.
2. The inspection framework tests the decision-making at all stages of a child's journey within the local authority, from accessing Early Help services through to leaving care. The inspection takes into account the full breadth of work to support children, young people and families in a local area and the difference that this makes to their lives.
3. An overall judgement of the effectiveness of children's services is given in addition to the following individual and graded judgements:
 - the experience and progress of children who need help and protection
 - the experience and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence:
 - a graded judgement in adoption performance
 - a graded judgement in the experience and progress of care leavers
 - leadership, management and governance.
4. Judgements are given on a four-point scale:
 - Outstanding
 - Good
 - Requires Improvement
 - Inadequate.

5. Of 110 inspection reports published so far, local authorities have received the following overall judgements for the effectiveness of children's services:
 - 2% of local authorities have been judged to be 'Outstanding'
 - 25% of local authorities have been judged to be 'Good'
 - 49% of local authorities have been judged as 'Requires Improvement'
 - 24% of local authorities have been judged to be 'Inadequate'.
6. The last inspection of the City of London's safeguarding arrangements and its services for looked after children took place in March 2012, at which time the local authority was judged to be 'Good'.
7. The DCCS senior leadership team has led an ambitious programme of child-focused service improvement to take forward the recommendations from this report and ensure improved outcomes for children and young people in the City.
8. Two independent children's safeguarding reviews were carried out in May 2015 and May 2016 using the SIF methodology to identify the necessary single and multi-agency improvements, including those for the City LSCB and for City health and police partners, to ensure effective safeguarding services for children and young people in the City of London.
9. An independently chaired Service Improvement Board has been established to provide appropriate scrutiny of and challenge to improvement planning for children's services. It meets on a quarterly basis and the membership includes the Director for Children's Services and the Assistant Director for People's Services, as well as senior managers from Early Help and Children's Social Care, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Strategy and Performance, and Commissioning.

City of London SIF inspection

10. Ofsted completed an unannounced SIF inspection of the City of London's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers from 4 to 28 July 2016.
11. The inspection team was composed of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, led by HMI Stephanie Murray. HMI Alison Smale carried out the separate review of the effectiveness of the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board's (CHSCB's) work in the City of London. HMI Sean Tarpey provided the quality assurance function for the inspection.
12. Due to the geography and demography of the City of London, the main inspection activity for the local authority was carried out in the first three weeks of the inspection period and the LSCB review was completed in the fourth week. The main inspection evidence was collected through:
 - reading Early Help and Children's Social Care case files
 - direct observation of practice, including home visits and children's reviews
 - talking to children, young people, carers and families
 - observation of meetings

- auditing, tracking and sampling cases
- shadowing staff
- focus groups and interviews with staff, multi-agency partners, elected Members and service users
- talking with providers of commissioned services
- reviewing documentation requested over the course of the inspection, including strategic documents, minutes of meetings, improvement plans and performance reports.

13. On 20 September, Ofsted published the City of London's report, which identified children's services in the City of London to be of an overall 'Good' standard with a number of 'Outstanding' features.

14. The overall 'Good' judgement for the City of London's children's services was composed of the following individual judgements:

- The experience and progress of children who need help and protection is 'Good'.
- The experience and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence is 'Good'.
- The graded judgement for the experience and progress of care leavers is 'Good'.
- Leadership, management and governance in the City of London is 'Outstanding'.

15. Although arrangements to provide adoption services were considered, there was no graded judgement for adoption performance as, at the time of the inspection or within the timescales for judging adoption performance, the City of London had neither commenced adoption proceedings nor placed any child for adoption.

16. The City of London is the sixth local authority in London to receive an overall 'Good' judgement for the effectiveness of its children's services. The City of London is also one of six local authorities in England to receive a judgement of 'Outstanding' for its leadership, management and governance.

17. In terms of the City of London leadership, management and governance, the report noted that "Determined and inspiring leaders within the City of London take a detailed and ambitious approach to continuous improvement. For this reason, services provided for vulnerable children are consistently good and, in some instances, very good. As a result of outstanding leadership, management and governance, the trajectory is positive, with all the key components in place to enable the City to achieve exceptional outcomes for children."

Inspection findings

Children needing help and protection

18. The inspectors found the experience and progress of children who need help and protection to be 'Good'.
19. Children in the City of London who need help are identified early. All new parents in the City receive an early help visit, which is usually a joint visit by a family intervention worker and a health visitor. Such early identification has led to a complete take-up of two-year-old children's free childcare places. Families have access to a wide range of helpful services that make a tangible difference to their lives.
20. Early help assessments are generally of a good standard, and lead to helpful and valued support. Increasing the number of children and their families taking up early help services is a priority in the City of London. Although numbers remain low, determined work across the partnership at a strategic and operational level has led to a doubling of the number of new early help assessments completed over the last year.
21. A consultation conducted on behalf of the City indicates that parents are very positive about the help they receive. For example, parents have increased confidence, manage their children's behaviour better, strengthen their children's routines and improve their children's speech. Parents who spoke to inspectors said that staff are 'fantastic', services are provided quickly and the help that they received 'sorted things out'.
22. Inspectors found that social workers in the City of London listen to the children with whom they work and develop good relationships with them. The Children and Families team is settled and stable and all social workers have manageable caseloads. Managers at all levels provide practitioners with good formal and informal oversight and guidance.
23. When children are, or may be, at risk of significant harm, information is shared appropriately. Decisions are sound and are made promptly, and assessments are consistently good. They take into account risk, family history, children's diverse needs and relevant research. Children's views and experiences are well reflected.
24. Multi-agency work is well co-ordinated and has a positive impact on outcomes for children, including those living with parental mental ill health or learning difficulties, or domestic abuse. Child protection conferences and plans are effective in understanding, addressing and reducing risk within families.
25. Very few children are known to be at risk of sexual exploitation, go missing, live in private fostering arrangements or become homeless. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to identify and support any children who present to social care in these circumstances. Practitioners are well trained and well informed to ensure that they can deal with new situations and presenting problems as they may arise.

Children looked after and achieving permanence

26. The inspectors found the experience and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence to be 'Good'.
27. All of the children looked after spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the services and help that they have received. Children are provided with highly individualised care and support, leading to them settling well and achieving consistently good outcomes. Social workers and managers care about the children and know them very well.
28. All children are placed within 20 miles of the City in fostering placements judged to be 'Good' or better by Ofsted. Children live in families and communities that meet their diverse needs well, with interpreter services and helpful English language and educational support.
29. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) provides a strong, creative and sensitive service. All reviews of children looked after are held within national timescales. The IRO visits children between reviews and closely monitors the progress of care plans. The IRO also regularly meets with the Virtual Head Teacher, health commissioners and providers to ensure that high-quality support is provided to children looked after.
30. Potential risks for children are considered well. On the rare occasion that children go missing, follow-up is swift and effective. Good information briefings are used well to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, among foster carers, children looked after and care leavers.
31. Children use a number of routes to express their views. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is well attended and has effective links to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Adoption performance

32. As no City of London child has had a plan for adoption since 2012, the City did not receive a graded judgement for adoption performance. However, secure and comprehensive commissioning arrangements are in place to ensure that any child or adult who requires an adoption service can access it.

Care leavers

33. Inspectors found the experience and progress of care leavers to be 'Good'.
34. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors were very positive about the assistance that they receive. All are allocated to a social worker who sees them, in most cases, regularly and flexibly, depending on the young person's wishes and needs. Social workers support children and young people through their time in care and throughout their transition to adulthood. This supports enduring and trusting relationships.

35. The quality of support provided to care leavers is consistently good. No young people leave care before the age of 18. Specific care leaver support starts at age 18 and continues at least until the age of 25, whether or not they are in full-time education. Those care leavers who are at university are supported beyond the age of 25. The City is in touch with all of its care leavers.
36. Accommodation for care leavers is good, and young people are supported well to remain with their carers into adulthood. High-quality independent accommodation is provided in the City or where care leavers choose to stay. The virtual school provides valuable support to children, including to care leavers at university. Employment and training opportunities are also good.
37. Most Personal Education Plans and pathway plans are comprehensive, but a few could be improved by more focused targets and better recording of young people's views. Health support is timely and meets the needs of children. However, not all young people have received a summary of their health histories upon leaving care. Senior managers are working with health managers to progress this.

Leadership, management and governance

38. Inspectors found leadership, management and governance in the City of London to be 'Outstanding'.
39. All aspects of strategic, political and operational leadership are keenly focused on achieving the best outcomes, not just for children who live in the City but also for children or parents who spend time there.
40. The City of London is a caring and aspirational corporate parent. Children looked after and care leavers consistently do well, and sometimes exceptionally well. Most children looked after are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. They are provided with good education and healthcare, many leisure opportunities, high-quality independent fostering placements and effective social work support.
41. The strong and stable senior management team has ensured a clear understanding of the quality of frontline practice. Analysis and evaluation of performance are meticulous. Quality assurance, including case auditing, is robust and leads to sustained improvements, although the voices of children and partners are not always evident. Leaders and managers are responsive to challenge and make focused improvements at a timely pace. The City Service Improvement Board has been effective in addressing areas for development.
42. The Safeguarding Sub-Committee, in its capacity as a Corporate Parenting Board, receives good-quality data and information about children's experiences, and this enables members to challenge practice effectively. The chair has a 'no nonsense' approach to getting to the heart of critical issues.
43. Leaders listen to what children think about their lives and go to great lengths to provide them with very good care.

Recommendations for improvement

44. The City of London received the following recommendations for improvement in the report:

- Further improve the quality and consistency of written plans for children, including early help plans, child in need plans, Personal Education Plans and pathway plans. These should be clear and simple, fully integrate the views of children and young people and clearly state what is to be achieved by when.
- When families disengage from services and the threshold is not met to escalate the case further, ensure that any ongoing work is purposeful and that case records clearly evidence managers' rationale for ceasing or continuing support.
- Ensure that permanency planning records include a record of decisions about legal permanence for children, along with the rationale for these decisions.
- Expedite the provision of health histories for all care leavers.
- Increase opportunities for direct contact between children looked after, care leavers and councillors, and between these children and the chief executive, in order to establish even more meaningful personal relationships.
- Strengthen the inclusion of the perspective of children, families and partners in case auditing, in order to improve services.

Current Position

45. Following the publication of the report, the City of London is required to submit a post-inspection action plan to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007 by 30 December 2016. This action plan will outline how the City of London intends to address the recommendations made in the report.

46. The recommendations from the Ofsted report have already been incorporated into the Service Improvement Plan and are currently being progressed. An action planning session to consult with the cross-cutting services in the City of London that support the Early Help and Children's Social Care team will take place on 18 October. A multi-agency partnership event will also take place on 22 November to ensure that key partners receive an update on the outcomes of the inspection and can contribute to the action planning process.

47. Once the action plan is finalised, its progress will be monitored by the Children's Service Improvement Board and updates will be provided to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee to ensure timeliness in addressing the recommendations, as well as providing appropriate scrutiny and challenge.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

48. The City of London's commitment to provide effective Early Help and Children's Social Care services aligns with the Corporation's strategic aims of:

- providing modern, efficient and high-quality local services, including policing, within the City for workers, residents and visitors
- providing valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.

49. The ongoing improvement work for the City of London's children's services underpins the first priority of the DCCS business plan: 'Priority one – Safeguarding and early help: Ensuring effective arrangements are in place for responding to safeguarding risks, promoting early identification and support to prevent escalation of issues and keeping children and vulnerable adults safe.'

50. Safeguarding and early help are also key priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan and the City of London Corporation Safeguarding Policy.

Conclusion

51. The DCCS senior leadership team is committed to taking forward the recommendations outlined in the Ofsted report to ensure that we have the key components in place to consistently achieve exceptional outcomes for children. This work will be done in conjunction with our multi-agency partners and the CHSCB to ensure effective services for children across the City of London.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Ofsted single inspection framework report of the City of London's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers

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