

Committees: Department of Community and Children's Services Grand Committee – For Information Safeguarding Sub Committee – For Information	Dated: 23/01/2023 09/02/2023
Subject: Ofsted Focus Visit Inspection of Children Social Care and Early Help	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1. People are safe and feel safe 2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing.
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	NA
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	NA
Report of: Clare Chamberlain, Interim Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Chris Pelham , Assistant Director People	

Summary

From 8 to 9 November 2022, Ofsted undertook a two-day Focus Visit of Children's Social Care and Early Help services to look at services for children in need of help and protection via the 'front door' of the service. As part of the Ofsted inspection framework, a Focus Visit does not generate a judgement but instead identifies strengths and areas for improvement which are set out in a published letter. The letter was published on 12 December 2022.

The visit generated positive feedback across all areas that were inspected, with no areas for improvement identified. This report summarises the main findings with the published letter provided as Appendix 1.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. On 1 November 2022, Ofsted contacted the Director of Community and Children's Services to confirm that the organisation would be undertaking a two-day Focus Visit of the services for children in need of help and protection via the 'front door' for Children's Social Care and Early Help services. This took place on 8 and 9 November 2022.
2. The visit was undertaken as part of the Local Authority Children's Services Inspection Framework (see link at Appendix 2) and was the first visit under this framework since the full inspection in March 2020. The Inspection in March 2020 resulted in an overall judgement of 'Outstanding'.
3. The visit did not result in a graded judgement but instead generated a published letter that sets out the findings about strengths and any areas for improvement. This letter was published on 12 December 2022 – see Appendix 1.
4. The visit focused on the following areas:
 - Application of thresholds
 - Early Help pathway
 - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements
 - Contacts
 - Referrals
 - The effectiveness of supervision, quality assurance, performance management and management oversight.

Current Position

5. The Inspectors considered a wide range of evidence via: review of case notes; meetings with Social Workers and Managers; audit reviews; meetings with partners; meetings with the Town Clerk and the Chair and Deputy Chair of Community and Children's Services.
6. Full details of their findings can be seen in the published letter at Appendix 1. The letter sets out the following overarching headlines:
 - Inspectors found high-quality practice that ensures that children benefit from effective and responsive 'front door' services. Children in need receive the right support at the right time, provided by highly skilled and committed practitioners.
 - Leaders are creating the right environment for social work to flourish. Social workers benefit from manageable case loads, leaders are visible and approachable, supervision is effective and supports staff to drive forward plans for children. Staff have a good range of learning and development opportunities. The City of London has a stable workforce, with very low turnover rates. This means that children are able to form and sustain meaningful, consistent and stable relationships with their workers.

- External quality assurance activity and oversight by the Achieving Excellence Board provide additional scrutiny and assurance, supporting effective practice and decision-making for children at the front door.

7. Additional points of feedback from Ofsted include:

- The City of London Corporation provides effective front door arrangements through a MASH. Thresholds are clearly understood by professionals. Partners have good access to social work consultation. This helps to ensure that children are referred for the appropriate level of service, and that intervention is timely.
- Children who require statutory services receive a timely assessment of need. Assessments are child-centred, of high quality and clearly identify and analyse risk, need and strengths. This supports effective care planning.
- Children at risk of harm are identified promptly. Strategy discussions are timely and are well attended by multi-agency professionals.
- Visits to children known to both Early Help and Children's Services are timely and purposeful. The recording of visits reflects the child's circumstances and lived experiences.
- Managers provide high-quality management oversight. Direction is consistently recorded at referral and allocation stages, and follows the completion of children's assessments. Supervision records are comprehensive, with evidence of reflection, hypothesising, and with a focus on reviewing previous actions and identifying next steps to ensure that children's plans progress and that their needs are met.
- Intelligence and data from partners is used well by leaders to inform a multi-agency response to risk of extra-familial harm.
- The local authority designated officer provides a robust service, taking a forensic approach to analysing current and historical information, and making timely and effective decisions.
- Social workers spoke very positively about working for the City of London. They described leaders and managers as being visible, approachable, and supportive.
- Leaders have addressed the two areas of practice identified at the last inspection as needing improvement. Robust systems and processes are now in place to ensure that families stepped down to Early Help receive support within a timescale that is right for them. Also, management decision-making is now being recorded at all stages of the child's journey.
- Good political and corporate support for children's services has helped children's leaders deliver a remarkable service to Afghan children and families through their resettlement programme.

8. While there were no recommendations for additional action set out by Ofsted , as a result of engaging in the process, learning regarding how audits are signed off and shared with social workers will be reviewed and feature as part of a review of the Quality Assurance Strategy.

Resource implications:

9. There are no resource implications linked to this report.

Legal implications:

10. There are no legal implications linked to this report.

Risk implications:

11. There were no risk implications linked directly to this report. There were no recommendations or a requirement to report back to Ofsted on an improvement plan. The service will continue to drive its improvement agenda forward via the use of the Service Development Plan, with support and oversight via the Achieving Excellence Board, the Safeguarding Sub-Committee and the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Equalities implications:

12. No implications regarding equalities are linked to this report. During the two-day Focus Visit, Ofsted were presented with evidence of the work undertaken by the service in respect of anti-racist practice.

Climate implications:

13. There are no climate implications linked to this report.

Security implications:

14. There are no security implications linked to this report.

Conclusion

15. As noted, Ofsted carried out a two-day Focus Visit of the 'front door' of Children's Social Care and Early Help services. The findings of the visit were published in a letter which is appended to this report. The findings were extremely positive, recognising the City of London's ambition to deliver excellent Children's Social Care and Early Help services in partnership with other agencies, including the City of London Police, Education and Health.

16. Ofsted noted that leadership and management was strong, including the support and oversight from Lead Members.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Letter from Ofsted
- Appendix 2 – [Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services.pdf)

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