

Preparation for Childrens Inspection Readiness Activity

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 10 October 2023

From: Martin Purbrick, Executive Director Children, Education and Families

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Children and Young People Committee are being asked to consider the level of readiness being undertaken to prepare for future Government inspections of children's services

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

Note the preparations for future Government inspections of children's services, as detailed in the report.

Voting arrangements: Not applicable

Contact:

Name: Martin Purbrick
Post: Executive Director Children, Education and Families
Email: martin.purbrick@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel:

1. Background

- 1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council was last the subject of a judgement Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection in [January 2019](#). The resultant Ofsted judgement from that inspection was one of 'Requires Improvement'. Ofsted uses classifications for its judgements. 'Inadequate'; 'Requires Improvement'; 'Good' and 'Outstanding'.
- 1.2 Since 2019, Ofsted have undertaken two focus visits, one in February 2020 (subject was children in care) and the most recent in March 2022 (subject was children in need and children subject to a protection plan).
- 1.3 In addition, Cambridgeshire were inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in March 2017 under the Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Inspection (non-judgement inspection) and most recently, Cambridgeshire's Youth Justice Services were inspected by HM Inspectorate of Probation in August 2023 (judgement inspection) – the inspection report is currently going through HMIP's quality assurance process and a full briefing will be prepared for the Children and Young People's Committee once the final report has been published.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the current position of Children's and Education Services regarding readiness for the next ILACS and Area SEND inspections, which are currently expected to take place during 2024.

2. Main Issues

Local Authority Inspection of Childrens Services (ILACS) Framework Outline

- 2.1 The [Ofsted Inspection Framework](#) uses a 'proportionate and risk-based' inspection schedule that varies according to the most recent performance rating of the local authority. The components of this approach are judgement inspections, which can be standard or short, and generally occur every three years or focused visits, which occur in the period between inspections (a visit may be replaced by a joint targeted area inspection (JTAI). Notification will be given in advance of an inspection or visit, and inspection teams will generally consist of four inspectors (plus an education inspector and a social care regulatory inspector for two days) for inspections and two inspectors for visits.
- 2.2 Standard (judgement) inspections will last for up to two weeks and short (judgement) inspections for up to one week. Focused visits will normally be for two days.
- 2.3 Local authorities will receive an overall effectiveness rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good, or inadequate. Key judgements will also be made in the following areas:
 - 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 care leavers.

Inspectors will also evaluate:

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers.
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people.
- the quality of professional practice.

Area SEND Inspection Framework

- 2.4 In April 2023 a new [Local Area SEND Framework](#) was published. Devised jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) the revised arrangements have been implemented with immediate effect. The framework sets out the purpose and principles of inspection and its statutory basis, along with the inspection approach, model, frequency, and timing. The handbook sets out the evaluation criteria that inspectors use to make judgements, and examples of the kinds of evidence they gather and activities they carry out to evaluate the local area's arrangements for children and young people with SEND.
- 2.5 Inspections evaluate how well members of a local area partnership work together to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area
- 2.6 Inspections evaluate arrangements for all children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 covered by the SEND code of practice, including those who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and those who receive special educational needs (SEN) support. The scope of the inspection covers children and young people who live in the local authority area but attend education settings or receive services outside of the local authority's geographical boundaries. However, it does not cover those who live in other local areas but attend an education setting within the local authority's boundaries.
- 2.7 The inspection will consider whether local authorities' approach to commissioning and overseeing alternative provision arrangements for children and young people in the local authority area meets their duties as set out in section 19 of the Education Act 1996 and in statutory guidance.
- 2.8 The purpose of this inspection framework is to provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND and, where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements. The inspection system includes:
- Full inspections, which evaluate and report on the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND.
 - Monitoring inspections, which evaluate and report on progress in areas where Ofsted and the CQC have identified areas for priority action at a full inspection. Monitoring inspections may also be carried out at the discretion of Ofsted and the CQC where serious concerns have been identified.
 - Engagement meetings between Ofsted and the CQC's representatives and representatives of the local area partnership to review the partnership's self-evaluation and action plan and discuss what is happening in the area, including any challenges and how leaders are addressing them.

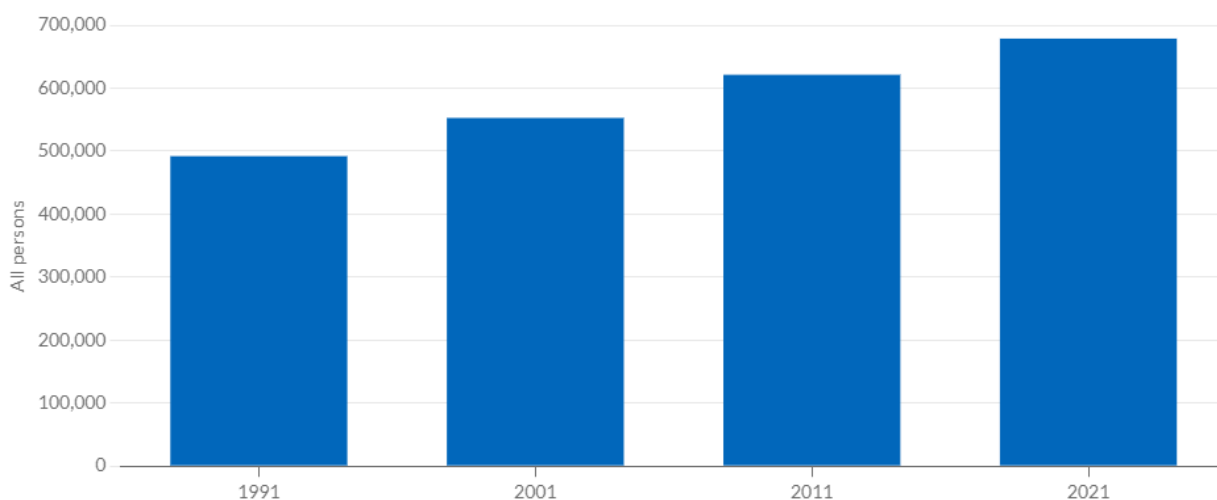
- Area SEND thematic visits to a small number of areas, with the aim of investigating a particular aspect of the SEND system in depth. Ofsted and the CQC will share learning from these visits in national reports.

2.9 There are three outcomes:

- The Local area partnership's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.
- The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.
- There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.

The current position – Children, Education and Families

- 2.10 Whilst inspectorates apply a context-free approach to evaluating Children's Service i.e., they do not necessarily take into account wider contextual factors, it is vitally important it is understood the background against, and landscape within, which improvement is required is exceptionally challenging.
- 2.11 A significant period of time (since the 2019 ILACS judgement inspection) has been spent under pandemic-conditions. This placed significant strains on safeguarding services across the nation, forcing them to operate in ways that they were not used and stripped of many of the protective factors for children and families that would usually be there (e.g., schools). It also placed understandable pressure on frontline social work services to maintain services and effectively safeguarding children and young people in ways that they were not ordinarily used to. These factors have been further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, with already low levels of resilience amongst many of our families pushed beyond breaking point.
- 2.12 Cambridgeshire is a growing county with pockets of deprivation, which is leading to growing demand on services. All districts population grew by a larger percentage than the England average (6.2%) between 2011 and 2021. Cambridge City had the highest increase 12.2%, East Cambs lowest increase 7.5%. Most deprivation is within the northern areas of the county but there are pockets of deprivation within Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire.



2.13 The Social Care and Education workforce markets are under enormous pressure and Childrens and Education Services in Cambridgeshire continue to feel the impacts of this. Recruitment remains a challenge locally and nationally. Services work hard to contain budgets as best as they can, but this is increasingly difficult in a competitive recruitment climate and, in particular, a placements and provider market that has seen very significant inflation in costs over recent years.

2.14 Despite these challenges, children and education services continue to support families to make positive changes and to focus persistently on service improvements, with some stand out features including:

- Social Care Academy launching in November 2023
- Fully recruited experienced permanent senior leadership team
- Focus on Cambridgeshire social care practice following decoupling
- A full review of our Quality Assurance processes embedding a journey of continuous learning and improvement.
- Social workers and leaders continue to be passionate about doing their best for vulnerable children and families with a high staff morale.
- A comprehensive training and career progression pathway offer.
- A high support high challenge quality assurance approach, with robust quality assurance activities informing improvement plans.
- Safety Valve Programme funding from the Department for Education which has provided additional resources to deliver a sustainable position for our children and young people with SEND, without impairing their education.
- Process mapping and updated front door processes.

2.15 Our Self Evaluation is clear about where our focus needs to be in the coming months, setting out as it does our priorities for 2023/24. These are: -

- Improved timeliness and better evidenced decision making at the front door.
- Ensuring the child's voice is evident in our assessments and plans.
- Clear and well understood pathways for supporting children at risk of exploitation.
- Improving workforce stability.

- Improved impact of Quality Assurance processes to drive forward service development.
- Better quality and better recording of supervision.
- Supporting the Safety Valve process.
- Improving timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP's).

Inspection Readiness

- 2.16 In order to prepare for these two key inspection frameworks, a considerable amount of work is taking place to ensure services are delivering/performing across the system.
- 2.17 Monthly inspection preparation groups (including a multi-agency group for the Area SEND inspection). These groups bring together senior managers across children and education services into one 'reflective' space to talk through preparations. These managers then deliver key messages throughout their teams to ensure all staff are kept informed of key activity.
- 2.18 Each month, the groups receive updates on the inspectorates/frameworks, members provide position updates on readiness across their services, focused discussions take place on planned themes, review of risks and members receive feedback on impact of inspection activity, peer reviews, service reviews and audits.
- 2.19 In addition, the groups co-ordinate a number of activities to support with readiness, to include:
- Persistent and unerring focus on improving services.
 - Essex "full system diagnostic" as Sector Led Improvement Partner.
 - Regular 'mock runs' of key datasets to prepare staff when under inspection conditions and check data quality/accuracy.
 - Monthly analysis of the Childrens Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) to ensure data matches our systems. The ChAT was developed by a group of LAs and Ofsted to better visualise the data that is shared between the local authority children services and Ofsted during an inspection.
 - Refresh of service improvement plan and self-assessment – key headlines will be communicated throughout all children and education services with feedback/responses fed into the preparation group and service plans.
 - Circulation of inspection briefing pack for children and education services (to include ILACS factsheet, notification process flowchart, preparation briefing and presentation) to support team managers/head of service to discuss 'what to expect' during an inspection, general expectations of staff, inspectorate behaviour 'dos and don'ts' etc.
 - Position statements are being written for each service area identifying strengths, areas for improvement, key improvement activity, impact etc which will be discussed at the monthly preparation groups and fed into improvement activities.
 - Regular highlight reports to be discussed at director management team and service improvement meetings.

- 2.20 In November 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) will undertake a SEND system peer review. The fundamental aim of each challenge is to support councils, integrated care boards, and their partners, which includes parents/carers, to reflect on and improve the lived experience and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. A feedback report from the Local Government Association (LGA) will follow the peer review and this will be tabled at a future Committee meeting, supported with an action plan.

3. Alignment with ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

Ensuring children and their families get the right help at the earliest opportunity will mean that they are best placed to achieve their full potential as residents of Cambridgeshire

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

Ensuring children and their families get the right help at the earliest opportunity will mean that they are best placed to achieve their full potential as residents of Cambridgeshire.

4. Significant Implications

- 4.1 Resource Implications –

A negative Ofsted inspection will have a detrimental effect on the Council's ability to recruit permanent staff which in turn will have an impact on the Council revenue budget.

An unstable workforce increases the risk of poor case planning for children and this in turn will mean children do not achieve the best they can.

- 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There is a risk of negative regulatory inspection if there is no inspection readiness or ongoing improvement activity.
- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.7 Public Health Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority Areas (See further guidance in Appendix 2):
 - 4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral
 - 4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral
 - 4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral
 - 4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral
 - 4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral
 - 4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status:
Explanation: Neutral

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial?

Name of Officer:

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Name of Officer:

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Martin Purbrick

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Name of Officer:

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Name of Officer:

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 None.