

Ofsted Action plan and update on Sector Led Improvement Programme

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 8 October 2024

From: Executive Director: Children, Education & Families (CEF)

Electoral division(s): Countywide

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Executive Summary: The report provides an overview of the sector led improvement work across Children Services and outlines an action plan following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) in March 2024.

Recommendation: The Children and Young People Committee are asked to note the report.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This report reflects Ambition 7: Children and Young People have opportunities to thrive, of the Council's Strategic Framework.

2. Background

2.1 In March 2024, Cambridgeshire received a full Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) which the local authority had been expecting. Ofsted graded inspections of local authorities are every 3 years and there are different types of inspection that take place in the interim period, this framework consists of:

- Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) (the main graded inspection)
- Joint Targeted Area Inspection targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children and their families who need help in a local authority area (these are thematic and the theme changes regularly)
- Focused Visit – evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children
- Annual Conversation – Between Ofsted and local authorities is a formal discussion, alongside self-evaluation, will help local authorities to critically evaluate their own performance and articulate what they think is working well for children in their area.

2.2 Prior to Ofsted and with new leadership in place from mid-2023, it was recognised that Cambridgeshire Children Services needed a review of its services to fully understand the strengths and areas for development in the social care system. In July 2023, the Department of Education (DfE) approved funding for Sector Led Improvement (SLI) partnership with Essex. The SLI programme provides an opportunity for Local Authorities to utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of another Local Authority to gain valuable insight and learning to help with their improvement. Essex County Council is already rated as 'outstanding' from Ofsted for its children services.

2.3 In Cambridgeshire, the SLI programme included Essex colleagues undertaking various 'diagnostic' visits to teams and services within Children frontline Services to review their key strengths, the areas for development and suggested set of recommendations. In addition, Essex County Council would also undertake a staff survey and provide two practice learning events for staff in early 2024, toolkits and guidance's such as 'wheels of discussions' for practitioners.

2.4 Each diagnostic visit consisted of Essex colleagues visiting each team (one team per day) to meet staff members individually to ask questions on their processes, practice and arrangements, followed by case sampling held by the team. Initial verbal feedback would be given to Team Managers on the day and a finalised report being sent within 3 weeks of the visit. Cambridgeshire Team Managers also joined Essex panel for each other's diagnostic visits which provided opportunity to identify areas for join up across teams.

2.5 Phase 1 of the SLI took place from August 2023 to March 2024 and the following teams and services were visited. To note that there are normally 4-5 different teams in each service area as they are geographically spread across Cambridgeshire District areas. Each of the services visited are outlined below.

- Assessment Services
- Family Safeguarding Services
- Children in Care
- Leaving Care
- Children with Disabilities 0-25 service
- Child Protection Conferencing
- Independent Reviewing Service
- Missing & Exploitation (thematic diagnostic)

2.6 In addition, Phase 2 started in April 2024 after the DfE agreed additional funding to continue the SLI which included several diagnostic visits of the following services, some of which are still being undertaken to date.

- Targeted Support Services
- Clinical Services
- Fostering Services, including special guardianship orders
- Adoption Services

3. Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLI)

3.1 The staff survey which formed part of the SLI highlighted the following areas:

- More time with children and families advocating for them and understanding their needs
- Improve partnership working with other agencies
- Continued professional development
- Lower caseloads
- Better time management and more admin support
- Quicker approvals for funding
- Smoother transitions to other teams
- More focus on creating the right capacity
- More visibility and access to Senior Managers

3.2 The key strengths from the SLI included:

3.2.1 The workforce:

- Professionals spoke about their children and young people they are supporting with confidence and passion, really care about outcomes for them
- Team Members have a wealth of professional experience between them and feel there is a good investment in staff wellbeing
- Managers know their teams well and support staff well

3.2.2 Relationship with children, young people and their families:

- Children and young people's voice are clear showing the worker's aspirations for them in records and planning
- A strong sense that trauma informed practice is being understood and undertaken in the service
- Teams are passionate about the young people they work with and know them well and form good relationships with them

3.3 The key areas for development include:

3.3.1 Recording:

- Recording was inconsistent on children's files
- Consent to share could be recorded in Liquid Logic system more often and more clearly
- Review records for children and young people who have been in care for extended periods of time appeared to duplicate recording over multiple reviews

3.3.2 Genograms and Chronologies:

- Some teams had no genograms whilst others are not systemic and do not always provide a good picture of the child's family and lacks cultural identity
- Inconsistencies in some chronologies with long lists, rather than clear summary of events and some requiring updating

3.3.3 Supervision:

- Supervisions could be opportunities to expand on curiosity and challenge or encourage forward planning for consistency
- Supervision recording was inconsistent and varied across teams

3.3.4 Cultural Identity:

- Although cultural and identity needs are noted, there could be further scope to explore how these are being considered more and curiosity around relationships
- Expanding the knowledge of social graces to understand better the child's cultural and religious needs on their day-to-day support needs

3.4 The other areas for improvement included the need to plan more effectively to ensure actions are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely). It also highlighted that there are inconsistencies of quality, knowledge and timeliness in different teams.

3.5 During November 2023, half-way through the diagnostic, Cambridgeshire launched its Spotlight Big Six areas which outlined a set of priority areas along with toolkits, guidance's and training for all teams and services to focus on, as outlined below.



3.6 Essex County Council outlined that they were impressed by Cambridgeshire's proactive approach and highlighted that it was unusual for a Local Authority to respond to these reflections half-way through the SLI.

3.7 Phase 2 of the SLI started in April 2024 with diagnostic visits to Targeted Support and further visits with clinical services, fostering and adoption planned for September and October 2024.

4. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) in Cambridgeshire

4.1 Cambridgeshire's last full Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) was in 2019. In March 2024, Cambridgeshire received an ILACS inspection which ran over a 3-week period. Week one, Inspectors were offsite and requesting key documentation such as our self-evaluation. Weeks two and three, Inspectors were onsite at various local team offices and focus groups and staff meetings were arranged.

4.2 In May 2024, Ofsted's judgement for the overall effectiveness for Cambridgeshire Children Services was 'Requires Improvement to good'. The full outcome can be found [here](#) and an outline of Ofsted's recommendations are:



4.4 Ofsted commented that although there had not been overall improvement since the last inspection, they outlined that 'This inspection, however, did find evidence of concrete and significant improvement in recent months.'

4.3 In response to these recommendation's, Cambridgeshire children services have developed and submitted an action plan to make these improvements over the next year, this can be found as Appendix 1.

4.4 Some work and improvements have started to make progress, including launching the Spotlight Big Six to ensure consistency and quality within assessments. In addition, due to the changes to working arrangements, including processing assessments, caseloads are at the lowest they have been for quite a few years and progress has been made in the recruitment of a permanent workforce with less use of agency staff. The residential strategy focuses more on placement sufficiency within the County.

4.5 It should be noted that Cambridgeshire has now received the judgement 'requires improvement to good' twice in a row. In line with Ofsted and DfE guidance, if the next full inspection outcome is either Requires Improvement or Inadequate then the DfE will consider intervention with Cambridgeshire.

4.6 Cambridgeshire County Council is fully committed the ongoing improvement journey ensuring better outcomes for children and their families, learning from quality assurance work and developing a stable, skilled and permanent children's workforce.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 CYP Committee are asked to note the content of the report.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

There are no significant implications

6.2 Legal Implications

There is a possibility of a significant implication, please note 4.5 within this report.

6.3 Risk Implications

There is a potential risk, please note 4.5 within this report.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications

6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications (Key decisions only)

There are no significant implications

7. Source Documents

7.1 None