



**TITLE OF REPORT:** **Ofsted – Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILAC): Self-Evaluation and Annual Conversation update**

---

### **Purpose of the Report**

This report updates the Health and Wellbeing Board on the outcome of the annual conversation held with Ofsted on the 5th December, held under the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework. Central to the conversation was a review of our self-evaluation (SEF) and supporting performance dataset. This report includes key details from the SEF which were shared with Ofsted as part of the annual conversation.

The report asks the Board to note the contents of this report and identified key strengths of Service. The board are also asked to identify and agree how it can support the CWL group in achieving the key improvement priorities.

### **Background**

The ILACS is a ‘system’ of inspection that allows Ofsted to be proportionate, flexible, and bespoke to each area they inspect. Each feature of the system informs how the rest of it works. A local authority’s current Ofsted grade will determine the kind of inspection it has next time, and the contact and support it receives in-between visits will help focus these inspections.

The ILACS system includes:

- Local authorities previously judged to be good or better will get a one-week short inspection every three years (this is what Gateshead will receive)
- Our short inspections will result in judgements on the established four-point scale and will result in a grade
- We will receive Focused visits to identify good practice or areas for development (these are not graded inspections)
- Each year we will have an annual conversation between Ofsted and local authority lead by our Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning
- To support our annual conversation and improvement journey we will complete a self-evaluation (SEF) of social work practice

Regular contact with local authorities is at the heart of the new ILACS system. Ofsted state the new system allows for more frequent opportunities to identify any issues of concern, allowing local authorities to take swifter action to address them. They argue this will help to prevent situations where they have to wait until the next inspection to find out that practice has deteriorated and help to support LAs to prevent this happening in the first place.

Central to the new inspection system is an ‘annual conversation’ between Ofsted and local authorities. This formal discussion, alongside self-evaluation (SEF), helps local authorities to critically evaluate their own performance and articulate what they think is working well for children in our area. It will also form part of the intelligence Ofsted uses to decide where, when and what to inspect. Where self-evaluation identifies weaknesses in practice and the local authority has credible plans to take appropriate and effective action in response, Ofsted state they will treat this as effective leadership rather than an automatic trigger for an inspection or focused visit.

### **Key points of our Self-Evaluation and Annual Conversation**

Our SEF sets out our vision that “*Children and families are at the heart of everything we do, ensuring all children can thrive and reach their full potential*”. It describes our approach to achieving this, and how successful we have been in doing so. We have described how Gateshead is on a continuous improvement journey which is predicated on our desire to reflect the values and culture of a service focused on delivering high quality frontline practice with a skilled and stable workforce, embedding well-managed, mutual support and effective challenge.

We set out how senior leaders and Council Members share this ambition and seek to provide services that improve and enhance the lives of children, young people and families.

Our annual conversation was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> December in York. As part of the meeting we set out progress from our last annual conversation (held in October 2017), which were as follows:

- Our Strategic Director of CWL was appointed September 2017 meaning we now have a stable senior leadership team
- Our Early Help Service now well embedded, caseload capacity has been increased and we have developed a single integrated Early Help Structure
- We have strengthened our Edge of Care service through the Complex CiN and Rapid Response Teams
- Our Domestic Abuse services have been reviewed and a new service put in place
- We have strengthened our performance management information to ensure comparator data is included and commentary provided
- Regular service performance clinics ensure detailed scrutiny of data, and this now informs robust self-challenge and targets quality assurance work
- We have reviewed the appropriateness and timeliness of all children subject to Section 20 looked after arrangements which has resulted in a reduction of the cases from 22.3% last year to 16.7%
- The Jewish Community is now actively engaged in the safeguarding agenda via LSCB representation and safeguarding training with LA
- We have had our focused visit of the Care Leavers service in March 2018

The meeting also focused on the information set out in our SEF. The full document sets out significant detail in relation to activity across the service. However, in summary the following have been identified as key service strengths, and reflected to Ofsted:

1. Children in Gateshead are safe they receive timely and effective help and protection which is supported by our performance workbook data
2. Early help is everyone's business, the CAF assessment process is well embedded across the partnership
3. We know our children and young people well, showing tenacious focus, effective advocacy and engagement to support the voice of the child
4. Placement stability for LAC is a core strength, which is important given it is the cornerstone of emotional wellbeing, supporting best outcomes for LAC.
5. Innovative edge of care services have been developed, with a focus on older young people, wrap around intensive support for families in crisis, working in community-evenings and weekends in response to family need. These are showing some positive, measurable impact
6. Stable workforce as the result of strong strategic planning which has retained experienced social workers. A dynamic partnership developed with 'Frontline' to 'grow our own' social work staff which is ensuring high quality social work practice of newly qualified social workers. There is a strong focus on investing in our workforce - recruiting and retaining high caliber, confident and skilled social workers and managers – which has resulted significant reductions in vacancy rates and use of agency staff
7. Building social workers' skills and knowledge through developing a systemic and relational practice culture. Employee feedback highlights high job satisfaction and demonstrates social workers feel they are supported to make a positive difference to lives of vulnerable children in Gateshead
8. Managers supported in practice leadership with a focus on 'leading from the middle'. Our Quality of Social Work practice lead is proactive in developing and leading delivery of a Quality of Practice Improvement Plan for the service focusing on skills development for the frontline workforce
9. Evidence of good partnership working, again a core strength, with honest and open challenge between agencies. Elected members and senior council leaders, Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) are all involved in the reviewing the provision of children's social services
10. Strong Senior Leadership and Lead Member for Children which includes scrutiny, engagement, oversight and challenge through regular performance clinics, case discussions and portfolio meetings

The SEF process has also identified for us the following key service improvement priorities, again these were reflected to Ofsted:

1. Strengthen our Child in Need service delivery offer through restructuring resources to strengthen practice and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children in need of help, building on our complex child in need team and Rapid response service.
2. Continue to improve the quality of our plans, as a mature learning organisation we are working with other local authorities as part of our improvement journey to assess and develop our practice in this area. We will continue to listen to children and young people using their voice to improve and impact on the focus of plans.
3. Improve the impact of feedback from children and young people and maximise the evidence of the voice of the child to improve the quality of all elements of frontline social work.

4. Increase the % of children who are looked after placed with carers in the local area by increasing placement choice and provision through a Commissioning Strategy which is seeking to increase the capacity of residential and fostering provision locally.
5. Strengthen our permanence planning through Early Permanence Group (EPG) reviewing and overseeing admissions into care, long term matches, and all children with exit order plans. We anticipate arrangements for children through going through the adoption process will be enhanced with a regional approach through the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency which goes live in December.
6. Strengthen performance management by developing data and performance tools that continue to build on the progress already made to provide accurate real time information to support manager's oversight of frontline practice, enable robust self-challenge and target quality assurance work.
7. Improve the quality of frontline supervision predicated on well-embedded and understood expectations and practices which have been clarified through the revision of our core practice standards.
8. Improve the progress of children at Key Stage 4

### **Feedback from Ofsted Annual Conversation 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

Our annual conversation was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> December. Key headlines from the feedback and letter and meeting were as follows:

- Our self-evaluation describes very well the vision for children and families in Gateshead, including key service strengths and priorities for improvement
- Ofsted reflected back the SEF could be enhanced with: less description about what has been done and more about what difference this has made for children and their families
- The data provided to support the SEF was seen as a good evidence base
- However, they supported our objective to further develop performance management arrangements to provide more accurate real time information to assist front line managers' oversight of practice
- Our SEF and the discussion at the meeting provided a picture of an outward looking service seeking to learn from best practice, sector led improvement groups and local partners to improve outcomes for children and young people
- Performance data reflects timely responses to key safeguarding activity (e.g. contacts and assessments)
- We identified, and they recognised we have more to do to continue to improve the consistency of children's plans.
- They supported that we are exploring ways to create more opportunities for children and young people to contribute to quality assurance processes
- Recognised that we are adapting services to challenging demands on statutory services by strengthening your early help and edge of care offer
- Placement stability for LAC seen as a key strength, wherever possible we keep children in care living locally
- Timeliness of Care Proceedings performance is good, but we need to ensure we are equally able to monitor performance for pre-proceedings
- The Educational Inclusion Panel (EIP), involving all secondary schools working together to reduce permanent exclusions and while there has been good progress, there remains more to do
- Ofsted noted progress measures 16-year old pupils suggests room for further improve in attainment given the above average outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2

- We highlighted the stability of your workforce and the strong political support for recruiting and retaining experienced social workers and managers.
- We have a strong focus on building social workers skills and knowledge and supporting your front-line managers in practice leadership, recognising a need to improve the quality of front-line supervision
- Ofsted reflected back that while the findings of a recent social worker staff survey are positive, the return rate was low, and we may wish to explore why more than half of your staff did not engage in the survey

Importantly the letter concludes by saying that the last inspection of Gateshead's Children's Services was in October 2015. The outcome was good. Currently, there are no identifiable risks and therefore, we can anticipate our next inspection activity being a short inspection under the Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS) framework during 2019

The feedback from the annual conversation will be used to steer the focus of our evidence base and development work over the coming weeks and months.

## **Proposal**

Our SEF sets out our vision for children and families in Gateshead, our key strengths and identified areas for improvement. The Board are asked to consider the findings of our SEF, and the feedback from Ofsted to identify and agree how they can support CWL to in achieving its key priority actions for improvement.

## **Recommendations**

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the content of this report and:

1. identify and agree how the Board can support the CWL group in achieving the key improvement priorities

---

**Contact:** Jon Gaines (0191) 4334234