

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC)

**REPORT OF:** Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Care, Wellbeing and Learning

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Cabinet with an update on the outcome of the ILACS Ofsted inspection which took place in April/May 2019.

### **Background**

2. In November 2017 Ofsted published a new framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers. This framework was formally launched in January 2019.
3. The inspections focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:
  - 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; and
  - the experiences and progress of care leavers.
4. In addition, Ofsted evaluate the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people, and the quality of professional practice.
5. The framework was first published in November 2017 and updated in April 2019. Gateshead was the first local authority (LA) in the country to be inspected under the new framework.
6. Ofsted's approach to ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) is underpinned by three principles that apply to all social care inspections.
7. Inspections should:

- Focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives.
  - Be consistent in our expectations of providers.
  - Prioritise our work where improvement is needed most.
8. ILACS is a system of inspection which uses the intelligence and information Ofsted has to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.
9. This system includes:
- Local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice;
  - An annual engagement meeting between our regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in the future;
  - Our local authority intelligence system (LAIS), (which brings data and information into a single record);
  - Focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children; and
  - Standard and short inspections where we make judgements using our four-point scale.
10. There is no fixed cycle or end date for the programme of inspections. Under the ILACS system, Ofsted uses the intelligence and information they have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.
11. Gateshead Council’s Children’s Services was last inspected in October 2015 when the judgement was ‘good’ so the LA received a ‘short’, two week ILACS inspection.

**Proposal and/or Issues for consideration**

12. Gateshead’s Ofsted inspection was led by Jan Edwards, Her Majesty’s Inspector, and consisted of a team of five additional HMIs. The inspection was also quality assured by the senior regional HMI, Sarah Urding. The on-site inspection dates were 29 April 2019 to 3 May 2019.
13. Judgements are made in relation to four key aspects as follows:
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - Good;
  - The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection - Good;
  - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers - Good; and
  - Overall effectiveness – Good.
14. Four main areas for improvement were identified through the inspection process:
- Managers’ and Independent Reviewing Officers’ challenge to the quality of social work practice, including more effective use of supervision when practice falls short;
  - The quality and focus of written plans to ensure that they are specific and targeted to meet the needs of individual children, to include pathway plans that are co-

produced with young people to address all risks and life-story work to help all children in care understand their histories;

- The pace of change in relation to, and the quality of services for, disabled children; and
- Access to services for those children in care who live out of the borough, including the timely return of personal education plans from schools outside of the borough.

## **Communications Implications**

15. The report confirms that children and families in Gateshead are benefiting from a good service from skilled and passionate social care staff who care deeply about them, according to the Ofsted report published on 11 June 2019.
16. The report highlighted that:
  - Social workers know children well, are aspirational for them and care deeply about helping and protecting them from harm;
  - Children benefit from the help and support they receive from highly skilled, committed and knowledgeable staff;
  - There is good practice within most areas of the service which has a demonstrable positive impact on improving children and families' circumstances; and
  - Children who are in need of early help and those on the edge of care are now receiving and excellent service.
17. The report also found that there is a shared ambition within the Council for children and young people who are encouraged to influence services provided for them. They are listened to; their concerns are addressed, and the Council is proud of their achievements and the progress they are making.
18. Staff across the service are described throughout the report as "skilled", "highly experienced", "well-trained", "committed", and "passionate about their work". Inspectors also noted that there is a "strong and effective" senior leadership team that has "delivered tangible improvements to both the quality and impact of social work practice and the experiences and progress of children, following a period of deterioration in the quality of some services, is now good".
19. This report highlights the Council's Early Help service as being a major strength and is in itself very positive for the reputation of the Council and therefore, should be shared with relevant partners as well as a summary provided for children and families.
20. The report states strategic partnerships are 'well-established' and 'developed' and are 'supporting effective multi-agency working'.
21. The report describes senior leaders and politicians as 'ambitious', 'committed' and 'effective' corporate parents and grandparents, ensuring children and young people are at the heart of decisions and service development.

22. The report recognises the work of One Voice, a sub-group of the Corporate Parenting Partnership, who have held senior leaders to account by challenging them annually to make their own individual pledges to children and young people. This has resulted in increasing work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
23. The Chief Executive employs care leaver apprentices in the service and the lead member acts as a mentor for a care leaver, with whom he meets regularly.
24. The Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive and the Lead Portfolio Holder have ensured that children and the work of Children's Services are corporate priorities. Strong political support has secured a protection of the budget and additional investment.
25. The whole Council's 'Thrive' agenda has given an aligned focus to meeting the needs of those most vulnerable and those 'just coping'. As a result, early help services have been reconfigured and are increasingly able to support families on a continuum of need and are preventing children and families from escalating to needing the help of statutory services.

## **Recommendation**

26. Cabinet is requested to note the Ofsted report appended to this report (see Appendix 2) and support a post-Ofsted action plan being monitored by the Children and Young People Portfolio.

For the following reasons:

- i. To ensure Cabinet is fully aware of the quality of services delivered by Children and Family Services in Gateshead.
- ii. To ensure locally elected members can continue to fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents to Gateshead's Looked After Children.
- iii. To ensure action is taken to address the areas Ofsted identified for improvement.

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### Policy Context

1. In January 2018, Ofsted launched the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' or ILACS, its new, flexible framework for inspecting children's services for local authorities. The ILACS replaces the Single Inspection Framework (or the SIF), which was in use 2013 - 2018.

### Background

2. In 2015, Ofsted carried out a full inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, under the Single Inspection Framework (this included a review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board). Ofsted rated services as good overall. LAs who are judged **good** or **outstanding** are subject to the following contact from Ofsted:

- Short inspection (once in a three year period)
- Up to two focused visits in between inspections
- Possible Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) (would replace a focused visit)
- Annual conversation
- Shared self-evaluation

### Consultation

3. The Cabinet Members for Children and Young People have been consulted.

### Alternative Options

4. There are no alternative options.

### Implications of Recommended Option

#### 5. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms there are no financial implications arising from this report.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resources implications.
- c) **Property Implications** - There are no property implications.

#### 6. Risk Management Implication - None

#### 7. Equality and Diversity Implications – None

#### 8. Crime and Disorder Implications – None

9. **Health Implications – None**
10. **Sustainability Implications - None**
11. **Human Rights Implications - None**
12. **Area and Ward Implications – None**

### **Background Information**

Ofsted Inspection Report