

TITLE OF REPORT: Looked After Children Improvement Plan

REPORT OF: Interim Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the committee with an overview of the work being undertaken to improve services for looked after children following the Ofsted inspection and in response to ongoing performance reporting.

Background

1. The single inspection for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers was undertaken between 27th October and 19th November 2015 and was conducted under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The framework for this Inspection came into force in November 2013 and focuses on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, and children who return home. The framework also focuses on the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and the experiences and progress of care leavers.
2. All local authorities will be inspected under this framework within a three-year period. The inspection is undertaken over a four week period at short notice, the Local Authority being informed the day before the inspection team arrives on site. Prior to arrival the inspectors have already received an analysts' précis of the local authority with the analyst joining the inspection team on site at various points during the 4 week period.
3. The inspection was undertaken by seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) 2 additional shadow inspectors and an Ofsted Senior Data Analyst. The inspection team evaluated children's cases through audit analysis and through speaking directly to frontline practitioners, managers and other professionals involved in the cases. Inspectors shadowed staff observing the practice of duty social workers, the work of social workers with children and families and the work of the independent reviewing officers. The inspectors approach tested the decision making at all stages of the child's journey from early help, referral and assessment to permanence planning, placement decisions and leaving care.
4. Inspectors scrutinised over 200 cases and undertook in depth cases analysis of over 20 cases including interviews with staff and managers involved. Inspectors also observed practice, spoke with children, their families, social workers, managers and

other professionals to assess the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements. They analysed performance data, management information and strategy documents

5. The Inspection judgement overall was that **Children's Services in Gateshead are Good**. The detailed Grading in each judgement area of the Ofsted framework was;

- **Children who need help and protection – Good**
- **Children looked after and achieving permanence – Good**
 - Adoption performance – Good
 - Experience and progress of care leavers – Requires Improvement
- **Leadership management and Governance – Good**

6. **The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence was judged to be good.** The inspectors noted that decisions to look after children are generally timely, appropriate and in the best interests of the children. There were a number of areas of good practice highlighted in the inspection report which are attached at Appendix 1:

7. Recommendations

The recommendations specific to looked after children and care leavers are outlined below;

- Improve the quality of all children's plans, including pathway plans to ensure that targets for improvement are clear and that they focus on risk and the most important issues for children, young people and care leavers.
- Ensure that child protection conferences and looked after reviews are used to drive and progress plans through the use of effective challenge and robust risk analysis.
- Improve the attendance of education professionals at all children and young people's reviews and meetings, to ensure a robust focus on their educational outcomes.
- Support care leavers to understand their health histories more thoroughly and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services.
- Devise a more effective way of communicating legal entitlements to all care leavers.
- Establish a protocol with all education and training partners to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide proactive support for care leavers to stay on their courses and complete their qualifications.
- Ensure the adoption panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel and adoption performance.

8. Progress and implementation of recommendations:

Improve the quality of all children's plans, including pathway plans to ensure that targets for improvement are clear and that they focus on risk and the most important issues for children, young people and care leavers.

A working party developed new templates for CIN plans and CP plans. Staff were trained in writing outcome focussed plans to ensure the targets for improvement are clear and measurable. These documents are now implemented for all CIN and CP plans and will be evaluated in 6 months.

The working party are currently developing new LAC and Pathway plans, which will go into test on care first in May 2017. It is envisaged they will go live in June 2017, which gives the service time to ensure all staff attend training on completing outcome focussed plans.

Ensure that child protection conferences and looked after reviews are used to drive and progress plans through the use of effective challenge and robust risk analysis.

Work has progressed with the IRO's to ensure plans are progressed. The team attended the training on outcome focussed plans and they have also developed a new process to ensure any challenge is monitored and evaluated. Risk Analysis training is planned for later this year, with the IRO manager working closely with safeguarding and referral and assessment team managers and service managers to develop and implement this

Improve the attendance of education professionals at all children and young people's reviews and meetings, to ensure a robust focus on their educational outcomes.

The service has worked hard to ensure that Education professionals' views are obtained prior to a review if they are unable to attend or the young person has asked for specific people to attend their review. These views are recorded and outcome focussed targets are made at the review and progress is monitored by care team meetings. The attendance/input from education is monitored and if there are any issues with specific schools or professionals they are taken up by the Virtual School Head.

Support care leavers to understand their health histories more thoroughly and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services.

There has been a band 6 nurse in post since March 2016 and she has been working with the Looked After Team to develop a robust system to ensure all care leavers receive their health passports. There has also been ongoing training and support to Personal Advisors to ensure they have relevant information to give to care leavers regarding health services and how to access them. There are still some gaps in provision in relation to accessing mental health support for care leavers as there are no additional services or fast track referrals for young adults/care leavers. This has been raised with the CCG and work is ongoing to try and improve this.

Devise a more effective way of communicating legal entitlements to all care leavers.

The Looked After Children's team have worked closely with the children's rights officer to ensure all care leavers are aware of their legal entitlements. There are information leaflets information given to care leavers as part of their transition from care and 1:1 work is undertaken by the Personal Advisors to ensure all care leavers have the relevant information. The website has been developed so that information is accessible to all care leavers and the service is also considering purchasing The Care Leavers' App, which has been specifically built for local authorities looking to deliver their care leavers a tailored, purpose built offer. The App presents information, advice and guidance to young people using technology they are already using in their day-to-day life and is designed to guide and assist young people throughout complex process of leaving care.

Establish a protocol with all education and training partners to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide proactive support for care leavers to stay on their courses and complete their qualifications.

A steering group led by the Looked After Children's Service is working with partners in Gateshead and Newcastle college and Connexions to ensure support for looked after children and care leavers post 16.

The group are looking at;

- Improving the apprenticeship offer
- Improving traineeship offer
- Improving internship offer
- Working cohesively with colleges to ensure they know who our Looked after Children are and to ensure they receive the correct support
- Improving the offer and choices for care leavers

The steering group meets on a bi monthly basis to identify the children needing the most support, identify who will offer this support and monitor progress

Ensure the adoption panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel and adoption performance.

The adoption service has developed a Quality Assurance document to give feedback on a quarterly basis to the Agency Decision Maker. There is also regular meetings with the Adoption Manager, the Adoption Panel Chair and the Agency Decision Maker to ensure all issues of Quality are addressed.

9. Recommendation

Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- (i) Give its views on the progress of the Ofsted recommendations
- (ii) Agree to receive a progress update in March 2018.