

Outcome of Ofsted Inspection

Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Service

21 March – 1 April 2022

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Children's Social
Care Services

Ofsted rated Good

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Judgement and Grades: Ofsted inspection of Children's Services 18 May 2022

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Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Ofsted Recognition of our Journey of Improvement:

- Services for children and families in the City of Wolverhampton needing help and protection have improved and are now good.
- There is some outstanding practice in relation to care leavers.
- Services for children in care have been sustained.
- Since the previous inspection in 2017, senior leaders have led a relentless drive to improve services, which has led to innovative social work practice. This work continues, underpinned by senior leaders' determination to keep improving the experiences and outcomes for all children in the city.

Summary of Findings:

- A strength-based practice model is supporting social workers to make good decisions for children, which enables the majority of children to receive the right help at the right time.
- This is underpinned by a strong corporate and political commitment through additional financial investment, which allows for the development of innovative projects that make a positive difference for children.

Summary of Findings continued:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented the development of services and has enhanced relationships with partners.
- Children increasingly receive interventions through an embedded early help offer, which has reduced the number of children requiring statutory services.
- A mostly stable permanent workforce, along with manageable caseloads, enables positive relationships to be built with children and families.
- Several successful projects, such as Power2 and the House Project, have had a positive impact on children , diverting them away from risks of exploitation and supporting them to live independently

What Needs to Improve:

- The arrangements for tracking and monitoring children who are missing from education.
- The recording of return home interviews to identify wider patterns and trends.
- The virtual school should improve the quality of PEP's and address the persistent absence for some children in care.
- The virtual school needs to ensure that children in care receive career advice earlier so they can make better informed decisions about their futures.
- The quality of information provided to 16 and 17 year old homeless children about their rights and entitlements including to become looked after.

Recognition of innovative, good and improved practice: The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

- MASH24 has effective systems for accepting and processing information to ensure accurate identification of risks to children and adults
- Children benefit from comprehensive early help assessments,
- Children at risk of exploitation in Wolverhampton are benefiting from effective, prompt and careful consideration of their risks and needs and receive high-quality, intensive support to successfully reduce risk
- Children's assessments are analytical and effective in identifying risks and needs and management oversight of assessments is strong
- Children benefit from effective planning
- Social workers visit children frequently and build trusting relationships
- Disabled children have social workers who understand their needs well

Recognition of innovative ,good and improved practice: Experience and progress and children in care and care leavers

- When children do come into care, they benefit from effective social work practice, supported by constructive management oversight and a clear focus on early permanence planning
- Children benefit from timely applications to the family court. Assessments, statements and care plans are of a good quality.
- Social workers spend meaningful time with children and build positive relationships. Creative direct work with children enables them to understand their experiences
- Children are supported and encouraged to attend their reviews. Their voices help inform their plans, which helps them progress with their independence and aspirations.
- Achieving permanence is a priority
- Children in care who are preparing for independence receive effective support to move on to independence
- Most children in care live in foster homes. Placement stability for children is strong. Children live with carers who understand their needs and promote their health and well-being

Experience and progress of children in care and care leavers continued:

- Care leavers benefit from high-quality services that make them feel valued and listened to. They experience positive and trusting relationships with tenacious and highly dedicated personal advisers (PAs). Young people consistently told inspectors that their PAs are significant people in their lives, that their YPAs don't give up on them and that they could not have succeeded without them
- Young people in custody receive an excellent service through the Always Hope project
- Young people are introduced to their YPA at the age of 15 years and nine months, enabling the development of strong relationships
- The care leavers independent collective and the Children in Care Council are a force for change and are fully integrated into commissioning, tendering, strategic overview, the corporate parenting board and interviews for all social work posts at all levels.

Experience and progress of children in care and Care leavers continued:

- Pathway plans are regularly updated. They include reference to the local offer to ensure that young people understand the support and entitlements available. PAs prioritise young people's culture and identity when understanding their experiences and worries, to bolster resilience and challenge discrimination. PWP's are written to, and in collaboration with, young people, with clear objectives and measures of success
- Most young people are engaged in education, employment or training (EET). This is against a backdrop of poverty, high local unemployment and the COVID-19 pandemic
- The housing offer and associated commissioning is an area of significant strength in Wolverhampton. In partnership with local providers, care leavers have a range of housing options, from carefully scrutinised supported accommodation and emergency options through to independent living

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families:

- Leaders at all levels have continued to drive forward improvements, which has resulted in the delivery of consistently good-quality services that meet the needs of children and families.
- Senior leaders show determination and insight into how they use learning to constantly challenge themselves and improve services. At a strategic and corporate level, children's needs are prioritised.
- An aspirational transformation programme, supported by substantial financial investment, has been embedded and has improved services and practice. This is having a tangible impact on improving the experiences for vulnerable children and families.
- Creative projects are now established services and are effective in supporting children and families at the right time. These include: the innovative MASH24; the multi-agency exploitation hub and Power2 team, helping to support and divert children away from being exploited; and the House Project, which is highly effective in supporting young people to successfully live independently
- Staff consistently described feeling valued and well supported by managers and senior leaders, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families continued|:

- Leaders and managers continue to encourage the strength- and relationship-based restorative social work model and, as a consequence, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children requiring statutory interventions
- Senior leaders have been relentless in engaging partners effectively, which has resulted in strong and effective strategic partnerships
- Children, families and workers benefit from leaders who are committed to coproduction and who incorporate their views when developing services. The Children in Care Council is routinely engaged in shaping new services
- Elected members are committed to and prioritise the needs of vulnerable children in the city
- Senior leaders know themselves very well and endeavour to meet the needs of children and families through high-quality effective services. They have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, which has led to a culture that is open to challenge and learning

Next steps:

- Action plan to progress recommendations to be submitted to Ofsted by 26 August 2022.
- Progression of actions to be monitored by Children's Social Care Leadership team and CYP Scrutiny
- Presentation to Cabinet 15 June 2022 and Full Council 20 July 2022 detailing positive outcome of inspection
- Thank you event planned for all involved in Ofsted, SEND and YOT inspections

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