

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 15 June 2022
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Report title	Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, City of Wolverhampton Council	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director for Families	
Originating service	Children's Service	
Accountable employee	Alison Hinds	Deputy Director, Children's Social Care
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Report to be/has been considered by	Executive Team	23 May 2022
	Strategic Executive Board	18 May 2022

Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Celebrate the 'Good' overall judgement from the recent Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services and note our continued excellent position in the West Midlands and the country.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services and details actions required for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The inspection by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) of Children's Services took place between 21 March and 1 April 2022. The inspection was conducted under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework. This inspection was a short inspection lasting two weeks as we had previously been inspected by Ofsted in 2017 and found to be Good. Previously inspected authorities graded as Good overall receive a short inspection of two weeks as opposed to a standard four-week inspection.
- 2.2 The ILACS inspection covers the experience and progress of children who need help and protection, the experience and progress of children in care and care leavers, and the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families. All these areas receive a separate grading with an additional grade for overall effectiveness.
- 2.3 The inspection team led by Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) Andy Waugh undertook preparatory work for the first week commencing 21 March and were on site in Wolverhampton for the second week beginning 28 March.
- 2.4 As part of their preparatory work the inspectors read and analysed a wealth of information available to them through national data collection sources but also information that we sent to them as part of the ILACS framework requirements, including our Self Evaluation Framework (SEF). They also received case information from a selection of children's files recently audited in Wolverhampton.
- 2.5 During their second week on site, they chose a number of children and arrangements were made for them to meet with children's social workers and young person's advisors. Additionally, they met with key colleagues responsible for the management oversight and delivery of certain areas of practice.
- 2.6 An Education and a Regulatory inspector joined the team for one day They focussed on: the educational experience and progress of our children in care and the arrangements for children missing education; and the impact of our fostering service and adoption service (through our regional Adoption Agency Adoption@Heart).

3.0 Outcome of the Children's Service Inspection:

3.1 The table below shows the outcome of the inspection with gradings.

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

- 3.2 These gradings demonstrate the overall improvement in services delivered to children and families in the city. Services for children and families in the City of Wolverhampton needing help and protection have improved and are now good.
- 3.3 There is outstanding practice in relation to care leavers, with services for children in care remaining good.
- 3.4 Since the previous inspection in 2017, inspectors noted that senior leaders have led a relentless drive to improve services, this 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.
- 3.5 Wolverhampton are the second highest performing local authority in the wider West Midlands, second only to Telford and Wrekin and one of only two councils that has achieved 'Good' in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). 12 of the 14 wider West Midlands LA's and five of the seven WMCA councils have now been inspected under the current regime of Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS).
- 3.6 Wolverhampton is the only local authority in the WMCA to achieve an 'Outstanding' in any of the sub-judgement categories.

Overall and sub-judgement ratings for West Midlands Authorities

Overall effectiveness	Telford & Wrekin	Wolverhampton	Warwickshire	Shropshire	Staffordshire	Walsall	Dudley	Solihull	Birmingham	Worcestershire	Herefordshire	Stoke on Trent	Coventry	Sandwell
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate				
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Inadequate								
													Still to be inspected	Still to be inspected



Overall and sub-judgement ratings for West Midlands Combined Authorities

Overall effectiveness	Wolverhampton	Walsall	Dudley	Solihull	Coventry	Sandwell
Overall effectiveness	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good	Good	Good	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
					Still to be inspected	Still to be inspected



3.7 133 local authorities have now been inspected under the current ILACS framework, 15% have achieved 'Outstanding' and 39% have achieved a rating of 'Good'.

Current Rating / Position	Number of Councils	% of those inspected
Outstanding	20	15.0%
Good	52	39.1%
Requires Improvement	43	32.3%
Inadequate	18	13.5%

3.8 The summary of findings of this Wolverhampton's inspection are as follows:

- 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.
- 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.

4.0 Recognition of innovative, good and improved practice:

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

- 4.1 MASH24 (the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) has effective systems for accepting and processing information to ensure accurate identification of risks to children and adults.
- 4.2 Children benefit from comprehensive early help assessments.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 Children's assessments are analytical and effective in identifying risks and needs and management oversight of assessments is strong.
- 4.5 Children benefit from effective planning.
- 4.6 Social workers visit children frequently and build trusting relationships.
- 4.7 Disabled children have social workers who understand their needs well.

Experience and progress and children in care and care leavers

- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 Children benefit from timely applications to the family court. Assessments, statements and care plans are of a good quality.
- 4.10 Social workers spend meaningful time with children and build positive relationships. Creative direct work with children enables them to understand their experiences.

- 4.11 Children are supported and encouraged to attend their reviews. Their voices help inform their plans, which helps them progress with their independence and aspirations.
- 4.12 Achieving permanence is a priority.
- 4.13 Children in care who are preparing for independence receive effective support to move on to independence.
- 4.14 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.
- 4.15 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 (YPAs). Young people consistently told inspectors that their YPAs are significant people in their lives, that their YPAs don't give up on them and that they could not have succeeded without them.
- 4.16 Young people in custody receive an excellent service through the Always Hope project.
- 4.17 Young people are introduced to their YPA at the age of 15 years and nine months, enabling the development of strong relationships.
- 4.18 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.
- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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.
- 4.21 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

- 4.22 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.

- 4.23 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.
- 4.24 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.
- 4.25 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.
- 4.26 Staff consistently described feeling valued and well supported by managers and senior leaders, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.27 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.
- 4.28 Senior leaders have been relentless in engaging partners effectively, which has resulted in strong and effective strategic partnerships.
- 4.29 Children, families and workers benefit from leaders who are committed to co-production and who incorporate their views when developing services. The Children in Care Council is routinely engaged in shaping new services.
- 4.30 Elected members are committed to and prioritise the needs of vulnerable children in the city.
- 4.31 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.

5.0 Five areas of improvement

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

6.0 Next Steps

- 6.1 Action plan to progress recommendations to be submitted to Ofsted by 26 August 2022.
- 6.2 Progression of actions to be monitored by Children's Social Care Leadership team.

7.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 7.1 Cabinet are asked to note the outcome of the inspection of our Children's Service, with overall effectiveness being grade as Good with outstanding and innovative areas of practice. It is strong external assurance that our children and young people in the city are being safeguarded and cared for.

8.0 Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.
- 8.2 Any costs associated with the recommendations will be met from within existing budgets in Children's Services and Education.
[JG/31052022/X]

9.0 Legal implications

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.
[TC/31052022/A]

10.0 Equalities implications

- 10.1 The work of children's services is to provide the right level of support to children young people and their families at the right time, strengthening opportunities for children to live within their own family whilst supporting improved outcomes for children and young people.
- 10.2 The Ofsted report reflects positively through innovation and good practice that children are receiving the right support to meet their individual needs.
- 10.3 Inspectors noted that for children referred through MASH24 their identity, including culture, race, and how identity applies to presenting concerns, is routinely considered. They also noted that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who are supported into accommodation are wherever possible placed in placements that meet their religious and cultural needs.
- 10.4 Inspectors found that disabled children have social workers who understand their needs well and work creatively to seek their views using a variety of tools to support children's communication needs. Where disabled children are at risk of harm, risks and needs are well understood and responded to effectively.

11.0 All other implications

- 11.1 There are no other implications to be considered.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 There are no background papers.

13.0 Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1: Inspection of City of Wolverhampton Local Authority Children's Services.