

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Report to: Children and Education Policy & Accountability Committee

Date: 09/11/2020

Subject: Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

Report of: Bev Sharpe, Director Children and Young Peoples Service

Responsible Director: Jacqui McShannon

Summary

The report provides an overview of the Ofsted framework for inspecting Children Services, improvements from the last inspection of H&F Children Services and the feedback from the annual engagement meeting on 30th September 2020

Recommendations

For the Committee to note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: All

H&F Values

Please state how the subject of the report relates to our values – delete those values which are not appropriate

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Building shared prosperity	Delivering strong practice and effective services that improve outcomes for children and young people, and are rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Doing things with local residents, not to them	Involving children, young people and families in decision making and service development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Evidence based, targeted and innovative services that improve outcomes and effectively manage demand

Contact Officer(s):

Name:

Position:

Telephone:

Email:

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

Inspections of Local Authority Children Services

1. Ofsted is the regulatory body that inspects services for children. Inspections focus on the strength of practice and the impact of practice on improving outcomes for children and young people.
2. A new framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) was launched by Ofsted in 2017. Where all or part of a local authority's functions have been delegated to a third-party provider, these are included as part of the inspection of the local authority. For example, Family Support and shared services with Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster will be part of H&F inspections.
3. The scope of the inspection is broad and covers the local authority's functions regarding the help, care and protection of children and young people. Services are evaluated under three categories:
 - experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
 - experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
 - impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
4. The framework has different inspection pathways for local authorities depending on how they performed in their last inspection. Local authorities are rated outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate following an inspection. Good or outstanding local authorities receive a short inspection once every three years, up to two focussed visits in between inspections (a Joint Targeted Area Inspection will replace a focussed visit), and an annual conversation.
5. The framework asks local authorities to share their internal annual self-evaluation of their social work practice. The self-evaluation shows how well the local authority knows itself and assists Ofsted to see whether leaders and managers have a good grip on practice and are taking suitable action. The self-evaluation is guided by the following questions:
 - What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice with children and families in your authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - How do you plan to maintain or improve practice?
6. The self-evaluation is discussed in detail at the annual conversation and then triangulated during the inspection process. Other available intelligence is drawn into the conversation, for example statutory data returns, serious incident notifications, serious case reviews, whistleblowing reports, press coverage, published minutes of meetings, etc. This exercise informs focused visits, and the timing of and key lines of enquiry for a full inspection. The Director of Children Services receives a letter following the meeting which sets out a factual summary

of the items discussed. The letter is not published, nor does it contain any judgments about practice.

Inspection of H&F Children Services

7. H&F Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted, from 9th September 2019 to 13th September 2019. This was a short inspection because the Council was rated Good at the previous inspection. The report can be accessed from Ofsted's website via <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80497>
8. Ofsted found that "the newly established senior leadership team, with good support from corporate and political leaders, has focused on sustaining and improving the quality of work with children and families. As a result, direct work with children is strong and the overall experiences of children and their families in receipt of services continue to be good".
9. The overall effectiveness of the Service was rated Good with good graded judgements in all the assessment categories: impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers.
10. Whilst the overall effectiveness was rated Good, five areas were identified as needing improvements. The five areas and a summary of actions taken to improve them are outlined below

A. Availability of robust performance data.

There have been significant investment of resources enabling us to provide access to a wider range of reliable data and live tools, and to strengthen our performance framework.

Availability and access to performance reports are leading to a better understanding and responses from managers including improvements in the timeliness of visits, assessments and supervision

B. Capacity within the early help and contact and assessment services

Family Support has implemented new centralised allocations and workload management systems.

Timely and improved performance reporting is enabling managers to track allocations and capacity and allowing flexibility when needed. This has ensured that social workers have manageable caseloads and assessment timeliness has significantly improved.

C. Quality of planning for Children in Need (CIN)

There has been some increased oversight by team managers and improvement in the quality of CIN plans.

We have commissioned an external auditor to review CIN work and thresholds who will report in November 2020. This will further inform the improvement work.

D. Consistency of multi-agency information-sharing and participation at strategy discussions

We have worked with the Safeguarding Partnership to increase participation at strategy discussions. This work is reviewed quarterly at the Safeguarding Partnership Meetings and with CCG and Police leads.

Participation and attendance at strategy discussions/meetings by partners from Health and Police have significantly improved, enhanced by the switch to virtual meetings since COVID-19.

E. Case recording, including supervision records and robust recording of the management of allegations

Changes have been made to the case management system and regular training is offered to social workers and managers to strengthen practice and oversight by managers.

Performance information and audits show sustained improvements in practice, including timeliness of assessments, supervision, visits, case recording, updated chronologies, and management oversight.

11. A comprehensive learning and improvement plan, addressing the five identified areas, was developed and submitted to Ofsted in January 2020. The delivery of the learning and improvement plan is overseen by the performance management board and monitored and reviewed by the improvement board.

Annual Self-Evaluation – 2020

12. An annual self-evaluation was completed and submitted to Ofsted on 25th September 2020. Appendix 1 is the detailed self-evaluation report.
13. The self-evaluation was comprehensive and covered wide ranging areas including the strength of our practice, impact of our work with children and families, participation and engagement of children and young people, outcomes and achievements of children and young people, oversight of practice and the performance management framework, our response to emerging issues including the COVID-19 pandemic and our priority areas for improvement.
14. The key priorities identified for learning and improvement from the self-evaluation included adolescents on the edge of care, permanence planning and oversight,

preparation for independent living and transitions, disproportionality, and business intelligence. A learning and improvement plan has been developed to deliver these priorities.

Annual Engagement Meeting

15. The annual engagement meeting with Ofsted took place on 30th September 2020. The meeting discussed the self-evaluation, progress made on the last inspection's recommendations, the operating context of Children Services and the local authority's response to emerging issues including COVID-19.
16. Ofsted praised the comprehensiveness of the self-evaluation and reflected on the good progress made against the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection in September 2019.
17. Ofsted commented that our self-evaluation was *"interesting and enjoyable to read, clear, well-evidenced and had strong ethos of innovation and ambition"*.
18. They were impressed with our focus and involvement on participation and outcomes and stated that *"The views, involvement and achievements of children were embedded in the self-assessment from the outset, putting them first and foremost in your understanding and planning. We enjoyed the visual images and videos, that reflected the participation and development work with and for children"*.
19. Overall, they confirmed the strong progress we have made *"your report reflected the strong momentum for continuous progression that you spoke of during the meeting"*

List of Exempt Appendices:

Appendix 1 – self-evaluation executive summary