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| <p>London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham</p> <p>CHILDREN AND EDUCATION POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE</p> <p>13 June 2016</p> |  |
| <p>SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS FOLLOWING OFSTED INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS</p> | |
| <p>Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services</p> | |
| <p>Open Report</p> | |
| <p>Classification - For Information Key Decision: No</p> | |
| <p>Wards Affected: All</p> | |
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of planned improvements to be made by the Family Services Directorate following the Ofsted inspection of services in January and February 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. The Committee is asked to review and comment upon the contents of this report.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1. Ofsted carried out an unannounced inspection of the borough's services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers between 12 January and 4 February 2016. The inspection was the most in depth inspection undertaken by Ofsted with 8 Inspectors allocated to review activity in Hammersmith and Fulham and a number of other inspectors inspecting services which are shared with Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster (which were also being inspected at the same time). The cases of over 300 children and young people were reviewed as part of the inspection process.
- 3.2. Ofsted raised the bar with their expectations and judgements in this round of inspections with the result that most Local Authorities to date have been judged as "requires improvement".
- 3.3. The outcome judgements give Hammersmith and Fulham the third best result in the country out of the 95 inspections to date. Ofsted's overall conclusion was that Children's Services in Hammersmith & Fulham are good. A number of sub-judgements were made. The borough's adoption performance and leadership management and governance were both judged to be outstanding. Services for children who need help and protection and for children looked after and achieving permanence were both judged to be good, as was the experience and progress of care leavers.
- 3.4. Six recommendations were made by Ofsted. The Ofsted Single Inspection Framework includes a requirement for the local authority to prepare and publish a written statement of the action it intends to take in response to the inspection report. This statement should be sent to Ofsted within 70 working days of receiving the final report.
- 3.5. This report summarises the recommendations made by Ofsted and the actions planned, as well as wider service developments that are being actioned.

4. RESPONDING TO OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1. The recommendations made by Ofsted and the actions that are planned in response are as follows:

Recommendation 1: *Collate information drawn from return home interviews of children who go missing from home to identify patterns and trends and assist disruption activity.*

Missing children has been a particular focus of the current Ofsted inspection framework. Ofsted noted that in Hammersmith & Fulham, the children at risk from going missing were known and well supported including follow up from social workers when they returned home. However it was felt that better use could be made of information emerging from return home interviews to

identify patterns of behaviour, support proactive planning and reduce risk. In response to this, an audit is taking place of cases where children frequently go missing and where interventions have been effective. A Missing Action Plan is already in place and this will be updated to include and implement any learning from the audit. There are also plans locally to develop a proportionate process to provide effective, targeted interventions for children who are most at risk from going missing.

Recommendation 2: *Review out of hours arrangements to ensure that children and young people are offered a standard of practice consistent with daytime services.*

This recommendation resulted from a concern identified by inspectors that children referred out of hours to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) were not immediately subject to the same formal statutory child protection procedures and processes compared with children referred during the day. While Ofsted was not concerned that the children were unsafe, it was pointed out that these children were not being immediately assessed. There were also concerns that, although the decision making was undertaken by EDT social workers and managers some children were placed in care without being seen by a social worker due to capacity issues and were being taken to foster carers by police. An immediate review of the EDT has now taken place and reported to the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team. Additional resources are being put into the service to ensure that there is an effective social work response.

Recommendation 3: *Ensure that children who are subject to the child protection process have access to a suitable independent advocate if they want one, to help them make their views known and understood, and inform decisions about their life.*

Ofsted noted that children referred because of child protection concerns received a good service in terms of a timely response with assessments capturing their views. However, there was not routine access to an independent advocate to support them through the child protection process. The options and costs for making independent advocacy available are being explored as well as developments to case management systems are now being improved to enable production of data on participation, representation and attendance at case conferences by children. This will be monitored by the Safeguarding, Review & Quality Assurance team who will provide challenge should there be evidence that children are not being effectively encouraged to engage in conferences. A review of various services which provide opportunities for advocacy and participation has completed. The recommendations of this, once agreed, are expected to improve access to such services for children who need them.

Recommendation 4: *Ensure that assessments and care plans for children looked after are updated following significant events.*

This followed an Ofsted comment that this was not always evident for “a minority of assessments and care plans”. A detailed looked after children and care leavers service improvement plan has been developed and is being implemented for Hammersmith and Fulham children and young people to address required service developments identified by the service as well as Ofsted. This includes an expectation that risk assessments and plans will be routinely updated to ensure that these respond to changes in circumstances of children, with clear evidence that strategies are put in place to reduce risks. The plan is being overseen by a multi-agency Service Improvement Group who will monitor and support progress. The form which social workers use for reviews of looked after children is being redesigned to incorporate social worker assessments for the review, and to more clearly identify decisions and changes to the care plan that need to be considered and agreed. To ensure these developments are consistently responded to, Independent Reviewing Officers are to identify plans that do not reflect the current direction of the child’s journey and take robust action where required, as part of mid-point reviews that they routinely carry out.

Recommendation 5: *Improve the quality of the minority of pathway plans that are not yet good, so that outcomes are improved and the results of actions can be assessed more effectively.*

The inspection report noted that the quality of pathway planning and reviews for care leavers has improved markedly with two thirds of such plans assessed to be “good”. This was seen as a rapid and sustained improvement over the last two years. However a small number of plans were seen to be “insufficiently clear regarding plans for the future. Targets are not clear enough and target dates are not tightly linked to actions.” Ofsted also observed that managers are fully aware of this and where improvements are needed “with plans in place to address this area of improvement”. This recommendation is also addressed through the previously mentioned looked after children and care leavers service improvement plan. Plans are currently reviewed every 6 months and this is noted on the case management system. In addition, quality audits of pathway plans will now be undertaken at regular intervals and reported to the Service Improvement Group for additional action where required. As the majority of pathway plans are already of good quality, these will be used as examples to inform good practice guides.

Recommendation 6: Increase the range and number of apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers to reduce further the proportion who are not engaged in education, employment or training.

Inspectors reported that the borough’s care leavers enter a range of full-time vocational training, employment and higher education institutions but that staff recognised “the need to improve the options and progression pathways for care leavers” including the “insufficient range of apprenticeship opportunities”.

Using the smarter budgeting programme, to address and improve this situation, a review is taking place to identify and implement common financial support opportunities for care leavers, not only for those in apprenticeships

but also for those in work, those aged 21 or older, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those in Higher Education. The Virtual School will provide advice and guidance to the borough's Leaving Care team on good practice in Education, Employment and Training (EET) planning. A range of employability and work experience programmes are to be implemented, linked into internal and external partnerships. A more robust system is to be developed for tracking and monitoring the education, employment and training of care leavers and an EET adviser in the Virtual School will support care leavers in accessing and sustaining apprenticeships, employment, education or training. We are also making a funding bid to develop supported internship and employment programmes for care leavers.

5. WIDER SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

5.1. With specific reference to services to Looked after Children and Care Leavers, there has been a substantial re-organisation of our specialist social work teams for this vulnerable group. This has seen the development of two 16 plus teams that have social workers allocated to Care Leavers as oppose to Personal Advisers. Ofsted acknowledged the positive trajectory of this service, which was implemented in July 2015. They recognised that this has helped to improve service standards and quality; however, ultimately it will mean that children and young people can benefit from sustained working relationships as they will no longer have to transfer to another team and will remain with their allocated Social Worker up until 21 or 25 years of age if in higher education. The recent announcement of the Children and Social Work Bill will mean it is likely that all care leavers will be entitled to support from a Personal Adviser should they request this.

Additional plans to further enhance partnership working include the co-location of the Virtual School with the Specialist Looked after Children and Care Leavers service, where it is envisaged a number of opportunities will be promoted to co-facilitate workshops and develop group work initiatives aimed at promoting education, attainment and social development. Additional strategies to work with some of the most challenging children and young people are being developed. This includes plans to provide intensive support mirroring that already provided by the Family Assist model which was highly praised by Ofsted. It is envisaged that this will support a reduction in increased placement costs and more opportunities to return children to their families when it is safe to do so.

6. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Children and young people receiving services from Family Services are likely to include service users who have a number of protected characteristics as identified under the Equality Act 2010. Case management systems provide some opportunity to track the impact of the service improvements outlined in this report on particular groups of children.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT

None.