

Report of:	Lead Executive Member for Children’s Services - Cllr Mike Carr Executive Director of Children’s Services - Helen Watson
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Submitted to:	Executive - 20 November 2018
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Subject:	OFSTED Focused Visit Inspection 7th & 8th August 2018
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1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Executive about the outcome of a focused visit inspection of Children’s Social Care by Ofsted in August 2018 through the new ILAC (Inspections of Local Authority Children’s Services) framework and the Council’s proposed action plan to respond to Ofsted’s findings and recommendations.

Proposed decision(s)
That the Executive notes the report regarding the outcome of OFSTED’s focused visit inspection of August 2018 and agrees the action plan (Appendix Two) to respond to OFSTED’s recommendations.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent?¹
Information and agreement	Yes	No	No

**Contribution to the delivery of the 2018-22 Strategic Plan:
Social Regeneration**

The action plan contributes to the Council’s Believe in Families approach: Achieving a step-change in children’s social care, moving to a strengths-based model with a change in underlying culture and practice.

Ward(s) affected

There are no specific ward implications arising from the report or action plan. However, the delivery of the action plan to strengthen safeguarding arrangements for children and families at the Front Door of Children’s Social Care will be of benefit to the whole town.

2. What is the purpose of this report?

- 2.1 To inform the Executive about Ofsted's findings and recommendations from their focused visit inspection of Children's Social Care in August 2018 and to secure the Executive's agreement to the action plan that has been put in place in response.

3. Why does this report require a Member decision?

- 3.1 The action plan forms the Council's response to the findings and recommendations of an inspection of its Children's Services conducted by an external government regulator, Ofsted. The action plan is intended to improve service delivery for all children and families and, as such, has implications for the whole of Middlesbrough.

4. Report Background

4.1 Inspection Framework for Children's Services

- 4.1.1 In January 2018, Ofsted launched a new inspection regime through a revised framework and guidance for the inspection of local authority Children's Services (ILAC – Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services). The new framework judges the effectiveness of local authority services including: -
- arrangements to help and protect children;
 - experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those who return home;
 - arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption;
 - experiences and progress of care leavers.

4.2 Focused visits

- 4.2.1 In addition to the standard two week on site inspections of Children's Services, as conducted through previous inspection frameworks, the ILAC framework includes two day focused visit inspections. Focused visits can inspect an aspect of Children's Services, a theme, or the experiences of a cohort of children.
- 4.2.2 Unlike standard inspections, inspectors do not make graded judgements (e.g. inadequate, requires improvement, good or outstanding). The findings of the focused visit inspection regarding strengths and areas for improvement are reported in a letter to the local authority.
- 4.2.3 Ofsted use their findings from focused visit inspections when planning the timing and focus of their next standard inspection. Where inspectors find serious weaknesses in service delivery, which can relate to either placing children at risk through inadequate protection or causing unnecessary delay for children in care, they will identify areas for priority action for the local authority and expedite a standard inspection.
- 4.2.4 Ofsted undertook a focused visit inspection of Middlesbrough Children's Services on the 7th and 8th August 2018, to evaluate the Council's arrangements at the Front Door of Children's Social Care, particularly the management of referrals and child protection concerns. The inspectors considered a range of evidence, including discussions with partner agencies, social workers and senior managers. They also

looked at performance management and quality assurance information and children's case records. The inspection team reported their findings in a letter to the Council, published on the Ofsted website on the 31st August 2018 (Appendix One).

4.3 Summary of the Visit

4.3.1 Inspectors noted a number of improvements achieved to service delivery in the Front Door in that: -

- Immediate child protection issues were responded to well with staff initiating child protection enquiries appropriately.
- Strategy meetings were well attended by all agencies and evaluated and responded to risk appropriately.
- Children were always seen, and their views sought, to ensure that their needs were integral to decision-making.
- Inspector scrutiny of a cohort of children who had come into care recently confirmed that it was appropriate that all these children should be in care.
- The inspection team's sample of those child protection cases reviewed by the Council in April 2018 confirmed that the Council's decision making was appropriate in most cases and unanimously supported by those partner agencies involved with the families concerned.
- Staff were positive about working for Middlesbrough Council.
- Supervision of staff was in place, welcomed by staff and focused appropriately on compliance.

4.3.2 Ofsted identified no areas requiring priority action and no child was found by them to be at risk of inadequate protection or harm during the inspection.

4.3.3 Inspectors identified a range of areas requiring improvement and made four specific recommendations to the Council to address these. These include: -

- Improved management oversight and decision-making on contacts and referrals received at the Front Door specifically on those cases where there are less serious concerns so that children's holistic needs are understood promptly and they are not waiting too long for an appropriate service
- Strengthened relationships between the local authority and partners which results in a robust joint agreement regarding respective responsibilities and contribution to the Front Door including a shared understanding of consent and a consistent application of thresholds for services.
- More sophisticated analysis of demand on services and the provision of appropriate levels of staffing.
- To further refine the Council's improvement plan to focus on strengthening practice across Children's Services, including at the Front Door.

4.4 Action Plan

4.4.1 We have developed an action plan for Children's Service's (including wider corporate input) (Appendix Two) to address the areas for improvement identified by the inspection and this has been shared with the lead inspector for information. Work has already commenced to complete these identified actions including: -

- A Strategic Partnership Board chaired by the Chief Executive to hold partner agencies to account regarding child protection issues has been established and two meetings have been attended by senior leaders.
- Agreement from partner agencies for the South Tees Front Door (Multi Agency Children's Hub) to go live in April 2019.
- We have established the post of Director of Business, Performance and Change to strengthen leadership capacity and to drive performance, improvement and business efficiency.
- Reintroduction of daily multi-agency decision making meetings and the introduction of Signs of Safety meetings with Early Help services at the Front Door to strengthen information sharing and a consistent application of thresholds for services.
- Strengthening the use and understanding of the Middlesbrough Children Safeguarding Board's (MSCB's) Threshold in Need guidance, reinforced by the proactive contribution of partner safeguarding leads to support their own workforce to make appropriate referrals through use of a revised referral process
- The application of the highly regarded Signs of Safety model to case and risk management in the Front Door.
- Refinement of the LCS case management system to facilitate a more sophisticated approach to demand management
- Increased social work, management and administrative capacity in the Front Door to improve the analysis of risk and reduce delays
- Increased management oversight of child protection conferences
- Production of a detailed Practice Improvement plan to drive practice improvement at pace (Appendix Three).

4.4.2 The Council's monthly Improvement Board chaired by the Chief Executive and the MSCB will monitor progress against the action plan.

4.4.3 Update reports will be provided to the Executive and to the Overview and Scrutiny Board regarding progress against the action plan.

5. What decision(s) are being asked for?

5.1 That the Executive notes the report regarding the outcome of Ofsted's focused visit of August 2018 and agrees the action plan (Appendix Two) to respond to Ofsted's recommendations

6. Why is this being recommended?

6.1 The Executive is recommended to note and agree the format and content of the proposed action plan and to receive further updates reviewing the progress of its implementation along with the overall improvement plan for Children's Services. This is to provide the Executive with assurance that improvements in safeguarding

and Children's Services are secured and that outcomes for children and families in Middlesbrough are improving.

7. Impact of recommended decision

7.1 Legal

7.1.1 The adequacy of the Council's response to the findings of the focused visit inspection and delivery of its action plan will be taken into account by Ofsted in its future inspections of Children's Services undertaken through the ILAC framework.

7.2 Financial

7.2.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

7.3 Equality and Diversity

7.3.1 The delivery of the focused visit action plan is intended to improve outcomes for children and their families and should bring positive benefits for all sections of the community.

7.4 Risk

7.4.1 An Impact Assessment is not applicable to this decision as the recommendation is to note and agree the action plan, progress against which will be examined by Ofsted in line with statutory requirements through its future inspection activity in Children's Services. .

8. Actions to be taken to implement the decision

8.1 Progress against the action plan will be monitored by the Council's monthly Improvement Board chaired by the Chief Executive and by the MSCB.

8.2 Update reports will be provided to the Executive and to the Overview and Scrutiny Board regarding progress against the action plan.

9, Appendices

9.1 Appendix One - Letter dated 31st August 2018 from Ofsted to Middlesbrough Council regarding the Focused Visit

9.2 Appendix Two – Focused Visit Action Plan

9.3 Appendix Three – Practice Improvement Action Plan

10. Background Papers

Body	Report title	Date
OFSTED	Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspections of local authority children's services	14 th September 2017

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