

12 October 2021		ITEM: 10
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Ofsted Focused Visit on children at risk from extra-familial harm: 30 June – 1 July 2021		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This Report is: Public		

Executive Summary

Ofsted introduced the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection framework in January 2018, which replaced the previous Single Inspection Framework (SIF) of children's services. Thurrock children's services' SIF inspection was held between 22nd February and 17th March 2016 and the service was graded 'Requires Improvement' across all judgement categories. Thurrock children's services received a full ILAC inspection between 4th and 22nd November 2019 and was rated Good across the four domains of the inspection. This report is to update the Committee on Thurrock's recent Ofsted ILACS Focused Visit undertaken between 30th June and 1st July 2021, on the local authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial risk.

The ILACS inspection is a very detailed and robust review of all areas of practice in children's social care, early help services and education services for children educated at home as well as for children missing education. All local authorities receive a form of inspection from Ofsted once a year under the ILACS framework. The Focused visit is an opportunity for Ofsted to come into the authority and focus on one area of practice to see if practice is secure and to check the local authority is safeguarding children.

The Focused visit was announced on the 16 June 2021, two weeks before the Focused Visit began. During those two weeks the inspectors were provided with over 100 documents, copy of audits undertaken relating to the topic area in the last six months, performance data and they undertook inspection meetings with the Children's Portfolio Holder, the Chief Executive and partners working with children affected by extra familial harm. The focused visit was very thorough and inspectors examined the experience of children through the lens of social work interventions, by talking directly to social workers and examining their case work files in detail. They also met with children and young people and met with partners. The inspectors were

focused on evidence of outcomes for children subject to extra familial harm and the impact social work intervention is having for children and their families. The two days of 'on-site' inspection was very intense, it thoroughly tested the practice of the service and the corporate support and commitment from the Council as a whole for our most vulnerable young people.

The focused visit is not a judgement inspection; Ofsted as an outcome of the focused visit publishes a letter. The focused visit letter is attached as Appendix 1 and was published on the 9 August 2021. The letter states; 'Thurrock Council continues to provide effective, responsive services for vulnerable children. Children have remained a key focus for elected members and they continue to be a corporate priority.' The focussed visit letter reflects the hard work and commitment of all those striving to ensure children and their families receive good services within the Council and from partners. Ofsted commented, 'They (the local authority) have strengthened their oversight of services in response to feedback given at the last inspection, to better identify and engage with vulnerable children exposed to the risk of extra familial harm, and improved their offer of support to them and their families.' As with any inspection of services, Ofsted noted some areas for continued improvement. There are three recommendations for improvement and the partnership will be incorporating these recommendations into action plans.

The outcome of the inspection evidences that Thurrock Council and its partners, continues to provide a good service to vulnerable young people.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the Ofsted Focus Visit letter and provide comment or challenge in respect of the outcomes

1.2 That the three areas for improvement identified by Ofsted are considered by the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and support offered to deliver against these recommendations

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 In January 2018, a new universal inspection framework came into force for Children's services. The Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) focuses on the local authority (LA) functions regarding the help, care and protection of children and young people. The ILACS is a 'whole system' approach to inspection. The aim of the ILACS is to drive up improvement and catching LAs before they fall over as the underpinning principles of the framework, which is described as a system rather than a programme of inspection. ILACS attempts to take a proportionate, whole system approach to inspecting a service and this inevitably involves greater contact between Ofsted and LA's. In addition to on-site inspection activity (full inspection and focused visit inspections), the ILACS is supported and informed by an annual self-evaluation, the annual conversation and Ofsted's LA intelligence system.

The Focused Visit is part of the whole system Ofsted approach to inspection of local authority children's services. The focused visit was on the local authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial harm. This focus includes, children missing from home or care, children involved in criminal exploitation and by gangs, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The inspection included partnership working, as young people subject to extra-familial harm, require the support from police, schools and health colleagues. In the two weeks lead up to the 'on-site' inspection (the inspectors conducted the inspection virtually) documents, as requested, were sent to the inspectors, audit documentation was also provided. The inspectors conducted some interviews with key partners, the Children's Portfolio Holder and the Chief Executive. The two days 'on-site' activity included interviews with social workers, front line social work managers, reviewing case files, meetings with children and young people subject to extra-familial harm.

Whilst the focused visit is overall very positive (please see letter attached as Appendix 1), there are three recommendations to further improve practice for children subject to extra-familial harm. These are:

- ✓ Earlier transition planning for children in care and care leavers who are exposed to risk of child exploitation, gangs and extra-familial harm.
- ✓ The involvement of children in the take-up of return home interviews and the information the authority relies on to capture activity and the impact of these interviews.
- ✓ The arrangements for support and engagement with children at risk of extra familial harm; in particular, the agility of services to meet the diverse and complex needs of these children and their families.

These recommendations are being taken forward within partnership and service plans. The Health and Well Being Board are an important partner to assist with moving forward these recommendations.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Focused Visit Letter is attached as Appendix One

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Board are aware of the Ofsted Focused Visit and the recommendations to further improve practice. For the Board to have oversight of the plans against the recommendations, to support and challenge progress as appropriate.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The Ofsted Focus Visit letter is an agenda item on the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 12 October 2021.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

None

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal

None

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

The focused visit assessed the local authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial harm involving children missing from home or care, children involved in criminal exploitation and by gangs, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Whilst feedback from the focused visit is overall very positive three recommendations to further improve practice for children subject to extra-familial harm are set out in section 2.1 for delivery in partnership and as part of wider service plans.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Thurrock Focused visit of local authority Children's Services June21

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Children's Services