

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 10 July 2017

ITEM 6(g)

Title: The findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

Portfolio(s): Children, Young People and Learning

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ian Grayson

Report from Service Area:

Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

Responsible Officer:

Jacqui Old, Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding Tel 0191 643 7317

Wards affected:

All

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

Between 27 February 2017 and 23 March 2017 North Tyneside Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers were inspected by Ofsted as part of their national inspection programme. Concurrent to the inspection of services for children, Ofsted also undertook a review of the effectiveness of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB).

Ofsted published their findings by way of Report on 13 June 2017. Ofsted report that it judges the overall effectiveness of children's services in North Tyneside to be 'Good'. This overall judgment was based on the following findings:

- the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection were judged to be 'Good';
- the experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence were judged to be 'Good';
- adoption performance was judged to be 'Good';
- the experiences and progress of care leavers was judged to be 'Outstanding'; and
- leadership, management and governance was judged to be 'Good'.

This places North Tyneside Council within the top ten performing Children's Services within the country. Within the North East Region, of the ten local authorities to be inspected to date, North Tyneside is the top performing Children's Services.

The North Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Board (NTSCB) was concurrently inspected. Ofsted report that it judged the overall effectiveness of the NTSCB to be 'Good'. A comparison with the graded judgments of the 130 other Safeguarding Children's Boards that have been inspected to date by Ofsted establish that the NTSCB is one of 43 graded 'Good' within the country. Only a third of Boards have been graded 'Good'. Within the North East Region, of the ten Local Safeguarding Children's Boards to be inspected to date, the NTSCB is one of only three graded 'Good'.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet note:

1. the positive findings of the Ofsted Inspection of the Authority's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, in particular that children have benefited from high-quality social work and well-coordinated partnership working to improve their lives;
2. that the findings of the Ofsted Inspection place the Authority within the top ten performing Children's Services within the country;
3. the finding and commendation by Ofsted that 'improving outcomes for children and young people is at the heart of North Tyneside Council'; and
4. the areas for development identified by Ofsted and the commitment by the Authority Area to address these and to continue to improve and develop services for children and young people, parents and carers.

1.3 Forward Plan:

It has not been possible to give twenty eight days notice of this report and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 19 June 2017. The reason for the late submission for inclusion on the Forward Plan was the delay in publication of the Ofsted Report from 17 May 2017 due to the General Election. Eventual publication was 13 June 2017. This therefore required an expedited addition to the Forward Plan to enable the Report to be considered by Cabinet.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

The Our North Tyneside Plan states that 'Our people will':

- Be listened to, and involved by responsive, enabling services
- Be ready for school – giving our children and their families the best start in life
- Be ready for work and life – with the skills and abilities to achieve their full potential, economic independence and meet the needs of local businesses
- Be healthy and well – with the information, skills and opportunities to maintain and improve their health, wellbeing and independence
- Be cared for and safeguarded if they become vulnerable

The Ofsted Inspection of the Authority's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) confirms the quality and performance of Children's Services contribution to these priorities.

1.5 Information:

Background to Inspection

Between 27 February 2017 and 23 March 2017 North Tyneside Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers were inspected by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) as part of their national inspection programme. Concurrent to the inspection of

services for children, Ofsted also undertook a review of the effectiveness of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB).

The inspection of North Tyneside Council by Ofsted was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The review of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

This was the first inspection of North Tyneside's services since March 2012. The previous inspection of the Authority's services for safeguarding and looked after children was in March 2012. The inspection judged the Authority's services in March 2012 to be 'Good'.

The 2017 inspection took place over a four week period. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted and three additional inspectors. The inspection team consisted of:

- Lead inspector: Neil Penswick
- Deputy lead inspector: Lisa Summers
- Team Inspectors: Shabana Abasi, Fiona Millns, Lorna Schlechte, Pam Blackman, Graham Reiter
- Senior data analyst: Peter McLaughlin
- Quality assurance manager: Christine Williams

The inspection team were onsite for fifteen working days and read case files, observed staff working with children and families and other professionals and discussed with staff and safeguarding partners the help and care given to children and young people. They also talked directly to children, young people and their families.

The Inspection focused on the overall effectiveness of services based upon judgments about:

- the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection;
- the experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence;
- adoption performance;
- the experiences and progress of care leavers; and
- leadership, management and governance.

Outcome of Inspection

Ofsted published their findings by way of Report on 13 June 2017. There was some delay to publication as a result of the restrictions placed on Government Departments in relation to announcements, also known "purdah", immediately before the General Election.

Ofsted report that it judges the overall effectiveness of children's services in North Tyneside to be 'Good'. Ofsted define this grading as being achieved when inspectors find work of good quality, with some outstanding elements and which is delivering measurably improved outcomes. This overall judgment was based on the following findings:

- the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection were judged to be 'Good';

- the experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence were judged to be 'Good';
- adoption performance was judged to be 'Good'; and
- leadership, management and governance was judged to be 'Good'.

Of note, Ofsted judged the experiences and progress of care leavers in North Tyneside to be 'Outstanding'. Ofsted define this grading as being achieved when inspectors find work of the highest quality which is delivering improved outcomes that exceed expectations.

A comparison with the graded judgments of the 130 other local authorities that have been inspected to date by Ofsted establish that North Tyneside Council is within the top ten performing Children's Services within the country. Within the North East Region, of the ten local authorities to be inspected to date, North Tyneside is the top performing Children's Services. Ofsted made seven recommendations for areas of development. All areas were known to Officers with improvement work on-going at the point of inspection. The Authority is required to provide an Action Plan for approval by Ofsted.

The North Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Board (NTSCB) was concurrently inspected. The Inspection focused on the effectiveness of the NTSCB in meeting its statutory functions. Ofsted report that it judged the overall effectiveness of the NTSCB to be 'Good'. Ofsted define this grading as being achieved when the characteristics of a good Local Safeguarding Children's Board are widespread and common practice. A comparison with the graded judgments of the 130 other Safeguarding Children's Boards that have been inspected to date by Ofsted establish that the NTSCB is one of 43 graded 'Good' within the country. Only a third of Boards have been graded 'Good'. Within the North East Region, of the ten Local Safeguarding Children's Boards to be inspected to date, the NTSCB is one of only three graded 'Good'. Ofsted made three recommendations for areas of development. The NTSCB is required to provide an Action Plan for approval by Ofsted.

Key Findings from Inspection of Children's Services

These findings are taken verbatim from the full Report.

Help and Protection:

- There is a broad and developing early help offer, which is of good quality and supports families, preventing children from needing to be referred to children's services.
- Significant harm is identified and responded to well. Assessments are timely and comprehensive, although in a small number of cases not always updated to reflect the changing needs of children.
- Planning for children is effective and driven by social workers who know children well and supported by effective operational partnership working, providing a wide range of services to support and protect children.
- Responses to children at risk of sexual exploitation and those who go missing are well developed and effective.
- A good range of accommodation informed by a prompt assessment is provided for 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless.
- Awareness raising of private fostering is good, but the social work response following notification is not always prompt.

- The designated officer coordinates agencies well when issues are raised about professionals who may be behaving inappropriately towards children. However, the completion of investigations is not always timely.

Looked After Children:

- North Tyneside Council is a highly ambitious and nurturing corporate parent for all of its children and ensures that there is an excellent range of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Edge of care services work well to support children to stay at home. Children only become looked after when it is in their best interests, and, in these instances, the response is timely and appropriate.
- A good range of permanence options combined with a wide range of local accommodation, including foster carers' and children's homes, means that most children maintain their local support networks. This promotes stability and security for children.
- Effective services from health, education and specialist support promote good outcomes.
- The caseloads of independent reviewing officers (IROs) who chair child protection conferences and children looked after reviews are high, and this impacts on their ability to monitor progress between meetings.
- Children and carers who met inspectors reported that they have too many changes of social worker.
- Achieving permanence for children is a key priority in North Tyneside.

Adoption:

- There is strong oversight of children to ensure that children find their 'forever homes'. Although it has taken a long time to secure permanence through adoption for some children, this is due to the additional time required to find adoptive families for older children and sibling groups. Overall, adoption timeliness is improving.
- There is a wide range of effective post-adoption support available, including therapeutic assessments of attachment to enhance adopters' understanding of children's needs.
- Life story work and later life letters, however, take too long to complete and are of variable quality.
- Adopters who met inspectors reported that they feel extremely well supported and prepared throughout the process.

Care Leavers:

- The services for care leavers are outstanding. This is because council leaders and senior managers have high aspirations for all care leavers and consistently listen to the views of young people and value their contribution.
- The care leavers' team has an excellent focus on working proactively with the young people. As a result, all care leavers are in touch with their workers, live in suitable and safe accommodation, take increasing responsibility for their health and have excellent support to continue their training and to find jobs.
- They benefit from highly effective individual support, including through their pathway plans, and many of them have benefited from apprenticeships with the council. The result is that the vast majority have the skills and knowledge that they need to become successful adults.

Leadership, Management and Governance:

- Children have benefited from high-quality social work and well-coordinated partnership working.
- There is an excellent focus on seeking the views of children to shape services and to ensure that individual targeted services meet their needs.
- Strong political and senior manager leadership ensures that improving outcomes for children and young people is at the heart of North Tyneside Council. This shapes its strategic priorities and effectively influences partners in sharing their ambition and commitment to improve children's lives.
- Engagement and participation are a particular strength and children are not only heard, but their views are shaping and driving service improvement.
- Good workforce development, commissioning of services and performance monitoring contribute to delivering effective services and solid social work practice.
- At the last Ofsted inspection in 2012, safeguarding and services for children looked after were judged to be good. The quality of those services has continued to be developed and improved
- Inspectors saw evidence of robust social work practice that is improving the lives of children in North Tyneside.
- Despite much good work across children's services, the recording of social workers' involvement with children is inconsistent. There are variable approaches to social work recording and completion of key documentation.
- The quality of supervision notes is also variable and, for a small number of cases, this means that it is not always possible to evidence reflective and directive management oversight.
- These issues are due to an electronic client database, which is barely fit for purpose.
- The local authority is well aware of the issues and is procuring another system, which will become live in 2018. In the interim, it has put in additional support to address current deficits and to ensure that the problems with recording do not impact on the high quality of support that social workers provide to children and their families.

Formal Recommendations resulting from the Inspection to North Tyneside Council

The Authority is required to submit copies of the post inspection action plan to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector no later than 20 September 2017.

These recommendations are taken verbatim from the full Report:

1. Ensure that assessments are regularly updated to reflect the changing needs of children and that they fully consider children's identities, contingencies and research.
2. Ensure that support to children who are privately fostered is timely, managed well and effectively meets the needs of children.
3. Improve the timeliness with which designated officers complete investigations.
4. Improve the oversight of IROs of the progress of plans between child protection conferences and between children looked after reviews, and evidence this on the child's records.

5. Ensure that life story work and later life letters are of consistently good quality and completed in a timely way to ensure that children and their adopters have a clear understanding of a child's history in preparation for placement and for later life understanding.
6. Ensure that supervision for all staff is consistently of good quality because it is reflective, directive, regular and well recorded.
7. Ensure that actions identified as a result of audits are specific and measurable and have timescales.

Key Findings from Review of North Tyneside Safeguarding Children's Board

These findings are taken verbatim from the full Report:

- The North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) is an efficient and reflective Board, meeting its statutory requirements, and effectively coordinating and assuring itself of the quality of multi-agency safeguarding work.
- Governance arrangements are strong, and constructive working relationships between senior partnership managers ensure multi-agency ownership and prioritisation of safeguarding.
- The chair of the NTSCB is central in developing a culture of openness and challenge, along with the business manager, who has ensured that efficient board processes are in place to support effective board functioning.
- Focused multi-agency performance information, audit activity and specific reports mean that the Board is appropriately sighted on all areas for which it has responsibility, and this supports the effective prioritisation of board activity.
- There is positive identification and dissemination of learning and a wide-ranging flexible training programme is linked to board priorities. However, clear actions with timescales, including ways in which the impact of learning will be evaluated, are not consistently in place to further support improvements in frontline practice.
- The voice of children and young people is evident in discrete areas of work, but does not sufficiently inform wider board activity and developments.
- The Board is influential in multi-agency service planning, through rigorous scrutiny of plans and evaluation of practice. This ensures that safeguarding practice is not compromised and the implementation of strategic developments is effectively supported.
- The annual report 2015–2016 comprehensively describes services. However, further improvements could be made in the Board's evaluation of their effectiveness.

Formal Recommendations resulting from the Inspection to North Tyneside Council

The Authority is required to submit copies of the post inspection action plan to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector no later than 20 September 2017.

These recommendations are taken verbatim from the full Report:

1. Ensure that the outcomes of all learning activities are supported by clear actions with timescales, including ways in which the impact of the activity will be evaluated.

2. Ensure that the voice of children and young people effectively informs wider board activity and developments.
3. Ensure that the annual report rigorously and succinctly reflects the evaluation and effectiveness of safeguarding services in North Tyneside.

1.6 Decision options:

The following options are available for consideration by Cabinet

Option 1

Cabinet accepts the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2 above.

Option 2

Cabinet does not accept the recommendation set out in paragraph 1.2 above, and provides an alternative response to the Report by Ofsted following the Inspection of Children's Services.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The recommendations support an acknowledgement by Cabinet of the positive findings by Ofsted and the performance of North Tyneside in comparison with other local authorities both regionally and nationally.

1.8 Appendices:

Ofsted Report on the Inspection of North Tyneside Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board published 13 June 2017

1.9 Contact officers:

Jacqui Old, Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding. Tel. 0191 643 7317
Nik Flavell, Senior Manager for Quality Assurance, CYPL. Tel. 0191 643 7219

1.10 Background Information

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author. This report is appended and is also available electronically at:

- [Ofsted Report - Inspection of Children's Services.](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no direct financial implications as a result of implementing the proposed recommendations.

2.2 Legal

The inspection of North Tyneside Council by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The review of the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board (NTSCB) was carried out under section 15A of the Children Act 2004.

The Authority is required to submit copies of the post inspection action plan to the Secretary of State and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector no later than 20 September 2017 (The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007).

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

A detailed Communication Plan was developed (April 2017) and has been implemented by the Authority's Communications and Marketing Team from 13 June 2017.

The objectives of the Plan have been to:

- Clearly communicate the Ofsted result - and any related implications - to all stakeholders (detailed below)
- Thank staff in Children's Services, and supporting services across the Authority, for their hard work during the inspection and in delivering Children's Services on a day-to-day basis
- Raise awareness of the positive and/or best practice delivered by Children's Services in North Tyneside
- Reiterate positive messages about living in North Tyneside, specifically around the safety of children

The target audiences for communications have been:

- Children's Services staff
- Key contacts at partner organisations
- All North Tyneside Council staff
- Councillors
- Schools/Head Teachers
- Children in Care Council
- Local media
- National and trade media

Key messages which have been communicated are:

- North Tyneside's support for care leavers has been judged as outstanding by Ofsted
- Children's Services overall were rated good and deemed to have a direct impact on improving the lives of children in the borough
- The Authority was praised for supporting care leavers with work experience and apprenticeship opportunities in its own organisation
- Children and young people are listened to by the Authority and are directly involved in shaping and improving services

- Social workers were commended for their dedication and knowledge, while the Authority's support for adopters was also highlighted
- These results place North Tyneside amongst the best performing children's services departments in the country, and make it one of the highest rated councils in the North East

2.4 Human rights

There are no direct human rights issues arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

There are no direct issues of equality and diversity arising from this report.

2.6 Risk management

The Ofsted Inspection of North Tyneside Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers focused on the management of risk to children and young people. The report found services manage risk well, including responses to child abuse and neglect, child sexual exploitation, missing children, and radicalisation.

The management of allegations against professionals who work or volunteer with children will be subject to an Action Plan following the recommendation by Ofsted that North Tyneside Council improve the timeliness with which designated officers complete investigations.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability issues arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Deputy Chief Executive
- Head(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Corporate Strategy