



# Title of report: Children's Services: Ofsted Inspection outcome and Improvement plan phase 3

**Meeting:** Cabinet

**Meeting date:** 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Ivan Powell, Children's and Young People

**Report by:** Corporate Director, Children's and Young People

**Report author:** Corporate Director, Children's and Young People

**Classification**

Open

**Decision type**

Non-key

**Wards affected**

(All Wards);

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present cabinet with the outcome of the Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) that took place 10-21 November 2025 and was published 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

**Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) Cabinet note the outcome of the ILACS – Appendix A
- b) Cabinet authorises the Corporate Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the council's Corporate Leadership Team and Partnership to lead the completion of the Phase 3 improvement plan and Ofsted outcome action plan, bringing this work together in a Children Services business plan for 2026/27 with future governance and monitoring in line with other council directorates.

**Alternative options**

1. To require a continuation of additional reporting into Cabinet by Children's Services.

## Key considerations

### Background

2. Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.
3. The inspection report found Herefordshire Children's Services to be Inadequate in all areas. The report was published on 21 September 2022

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

4. An interim Corporate Director for Children's Services was appointed who started post 1.7.24 who was subsequently appointed on a permanent basis July 25. Cabinet endorsed Phase 2 of the Improvement plan September 24 and Phase 3 July 25
5. The Secretary of State issued a [Statutory Direction](#) to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and appointed a Commissioner for Children's Services..

### Current Situation

6. Good progress with renewed pace was noted in the Ofsted monitoring visits Nov 24, Feb 25 and June 25 leading up to the full ILACS Nov 25.
7. The inspection report found Herefordshire Children's Services to have **Good overall effectiveness with Outstanding impact of leaders on practice.**

The report was published on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026 is available here at appendix A

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

8. The ILACS report found:

- Leaders have firmly established a culture within the organisation to ensure that children are at the centre of service delivery and that the views of children and their families inform the development of services.
- Leaders have worked diligently, using effective and mature partnerships to influence and improve the quality and consistency of practice.
- Recruitment and retention initiatives have successfully stabilised the workforce and leaders have nurtured and coached their teams to deliver improvements and good practice, leading by example.

- A comprehensive quality assurance framework has enabled leaders to have an accurate understanding of the quality and impact of services delivered to children and families.
- As corporate parents leaders were described as “effective and who understand what children in care and care leavers need” and that “Their ambitious and child-focused approach has ensured that children’s voices are sought and heard”
- Leaders had a clear plan in place to manage the changes needed as a result of the social care reforms.
- Families benefiting from effective early help and family support delivered by a multi-agency network of professionals.
- Across the services Ofsted found “well considered, comprehensive assessments by social workers, that are informed by the views of children, families and other professionals, and that demonstrate an understanding of the strengths in families, balancing this against presenting risks and needs” with additional recognition that assessments for children with disabilities and complex needs show workers understand needs that are responded to well.
- Appropriate thresholds for Care and Protection being applied effectively with strong management oversight at all tiers demonstrating evidence-based rationale for further action.
- A workforce of staff who are committed to building relationships with children and young people through creative and individualised direct work.
- Effective support in place delivered by “skilled practitioners” to keep children living with their families, or return to their care, where it is in their best interests.
- For those children and young people at risk or experiencing exploitation Ofsted found an established and impactful multi agency service that reduces risk to children.
- Thorough assessments and tailored support for foster carers, including kinship carers, who are well supported and have improved training opportunities.
- A strong service to care leavers with a clear and comprehensive ‘Local Offer’ delivered by persistent and creative personal advisors who are committed to understanding the young people’s lives and helping them achieve their aspirations.

9. The report noted two areas where development is needed: Management oversight of the local authority designated officer (LADO) function and identification and assessment for children living in Private Fostering arrangements. Inspectors acknowledged that leaders were aware of the strengths in their services and areas for development and noted arrangements are already in place to address issues they identified for development

10. The latest report completed by the Dfe commissioner, Ms McMillan, was presented to an internal senior executive group July 25. This was not a published report. The next review report is planned for March 26. This report, alongside the outcome of the ILACS inspection, will inform the Secretary of State decision regarding the existing statutory direction and next steps for Herefordshire

11. The Children’s Improvement Board is independently chaired by the Department of Education Commissioner Deborah McMillan met 12<sup>th</sup> January 26. Given the outcome of the ILACS report the board has agreed to stand down promoting a transition enabling monitoring of the Children Services, including the Children’s and Young People’s plan (Appendix B), and the improvement plan phase 3 to be governed and monitored through the usual channels in line with other non inadequate councils including Corporate Leadership, Children’s Scrutiny and Cabinet as required

**Community impact**

12. The Ofsted inspection judgement of ‘Good overall effectiveness’ has a direct and indirect effect

on the lives of children and families in Herefordshire.

13. Ensuring co-ordination and golden thread between the Council Priority Plan, The Children and Young People Strategic Partnership plan and the Safeguarding Partnership Business Plan will ensure Children's Services contributions to the Council ambition '*to do everything we do, well*' and drive forward our committed ambition to be '*Child Friendly Herefordshire*'

## **Environmental Impact**

14. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.
15. Any transformation activity will be undertaken with consideration to minimise waste and resource in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

## **Equality duty**

16. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

17. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

In particular, the council must have due regard to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.

18. Children and young people who are assessed to be 'in need' of support, protection and care are additionally vulnerable, often as a result of abuse, neglect, exploitation and a range of personal and family circumstances.
19. As individual improvement projects and service delivery progresses, and changes are designed, equality impact assessments will be undertaken, as necessary and appropriate.

## **Resource implications**

20. There are no resourcing implications to this decision report. Performance against the agreed revenue budget for the Children & Young People Directorate is reported quarterly to Cabinet.
21. The resource implications of the transformation programme have been outlined in Revenue and Capital budget reports to Cabinet.

## Legal implications

22. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## Risk management

23. The following risks have been considered.

Risk	Mitigation
Partnership prioritisation and engagement in the context of their own agency challenges and changes – recognising a joint responsibility to deliver high quality services that make a difference to their lives	Extensive partnership engagement activity and key partnership work has and continues to take place in a wide range of operational and strategic forums to promote relationship based joint working, learning and development.

## Appendices

Appendix A – Ofsted ILACS report

Appendix B – Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Plan

Appendix C – Improvement Plan Phase 3

## Background papers

A Ofsted's Publication - [Ofsted Inspection Report July 22](#)