

Title of report: Ofsted ILAC inspection and action plan

Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 10th March 2026

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

All

Purpose

To provide a progress update on the outcome of the ILACS inspection and next steps

Recommendation(s)

- a) **Scrutiny note the outcome of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and Ofsted action plan and make any additional recommendations for inclusion in the action plan to be considered**
- b) **Scrutiny note the decision of the Improvement Board to step down and Cabinet authorisation for 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 into a Children's Services business plan with future governance and monitoring in line with other council directorates.**

Background

1. Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022 under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.
2. 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

3. The Secretary of State issued a [Statutory Direction](#) to Herefordshire Council on 21 September 2022, and appointed a Commissioner for Children’s Services.
4. An interim Corporate Director for Children’s Services (DCS) was appointed who started post on 1 July 2024 who was subsequently appointed on a permanent basis in July 25. Lead by the DCS, Cabinet endorsed Phase 2 of the improvement plan September 2024 and Phase 3 in July 2025

Current Situation

5. Good progress with renewed pace was noted in the Ofsted monitoring visits in November 2024, February 2025 and June 2025, leading up to the full ILACS in November 2025.
6. The full ILACS inspection report found Herefordshire Children’s Services to have **good overall effectiveness with outstanding impact of leaders on practice.**
7. The report was published on 12 January 2026 is available at Appendix 1.

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 latest report completed by the DfE commissioner, Ms McMillan, was presented to an internal senior executive group July 2025. This was not a published report. The next review report is planned for Feb/March 2026. 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.
10. The Children’s Improvement Board, independently chaired by the Department of Education Commissioner Deborah McMillan, met on 12 January 2026. Given the outcome of the ILACS report the board has promoted a transition enabling monitoring of Children Services, including the Children’s and Young People’s plan and the Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Annual business plan, to be monitored by the safeguarding partnership governed and monitored through the usual channels in line with other non-inadequate councils. This would include the council’s corporate leadership team, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet as required.

Areas for focused development.

11. 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.
12. These two areas for improvement are required to form a post Ofsted Inspection action plan that is submitted to Ofsted
13. The service has reviewed the detail of the ILACS report and considered feedback given through the inspection. We have identified a further eight areas of focus for development. All ten areas, listed below, have been developed into our Ofsted Action plan. The full plan can be found at Appendix 2.
 - While allegations against professionals who work with children are managed in a timely way with appropriate outcomes, there are inconsistencies in the quality of written records, which do not consistently reflect the discussions that take place or the support available and provided. Data is also limited and reliant on manual tracking. This means the service has been unable to complete a comprehensive overview of patterns, trends and outcomes of this work. (Ofsted)
 - Special guardianship orders (SGOs) are made when it is in children's best interests, and carers and families are well supported and included in planning for these. However, there has been some confusion in the SGO financial offer and how long this support is provided for, which has dissuaded some carers from pursuing this.
 - Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are held when required to strengthen children and families' support networks. Those family members providing support are not always involved in key meetings, which limits the contribution they could make.
 - For a small number of children who have experienced neglect, the written plans do not always address the impact of cumulative harm and do not start from the lived experience of the child, resulting in plans that are adult focused.
 - Children who take on a caring role are not always clearly recognised by statutory services, and this can mean that their needs are not sufficiently understood.
 - There are very few children identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. Current arrangements to identify, assess and support children living in such arrangements are not effective
 - The virtual school has robust systems and procedures in place to provide effective oversight of the education of children in care. This work is having a positive impact on the educational experiences and the progress of most children, with them making good progress from their starting points. A minority of children do not attend school regularly enough, which limits their achievement.
 - Foster carers, including kinship carers, are supported well with improved training opportunities. However, the unique needs of kinship carers are not accommodated in this generalised training.
 - The limited English for speakers of other languages provision in Herefordshire is a challenge, which means that those care leavers who choose to return to the area, must travel to access these courses. Leaders are encouraging growth in college-based classes, and new courses are planned for January 2026.

- Care leavers who are disabled receive support from workers from the 'Young Adults' team, who work with care leavers' PAs. For a few of these care leavers, the decision and plan for where they will live are not always in place well before their 18th birthday. This does not provide the certainty care leavers need to be assured about where they will be living. Leaders are aware of this and are working with colleagues to address this

14. In line with process, this plan will be formally shared with Ofsted though there is no ongoing reporting requirement. Instead, the action plan and progress against it will form part of future Ofsted reviews and inspections with the service through Annual Conversation, Joint Area Targeted Inspections (JTAI) and focused visits leading up to our next full inspection timetabled for completion in three years.

Herefordshire Childrens Services Statutory Direction

15. The multi-agency improvement board made a decision in January 2026 that based on the inspection findings, the board have no further role and agreed to step down.
16. The Commissioner remains in place and will complete a further review report in March 2026. The Commissioner continues their work to meet with stakeholders and observe forums and activity. The Commissioner also receives regular quality assurance reports regarding progress of the service.
17. Once Herefordshire Council has appointed its new Chief Executive, a review meeting will be held with the Department for Education / Commissioner / Chief Executive / Leader / Lead Member and Director of Children's Services to confirm the request and timeline for secretary of state to make a decision on removal of the direction.

Community impact

18. The ILACS report provides assurance to the children and families of Herefordshire that Herefordshire Children's Services are offering them a good quality service to support and protect children and young people.
19. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to support all children to have the best start in life. Sometimes children and families need our help. We are committed to improving children's services and providing support to families who need it.

Environmental Impact

20. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.

Equality duty

21. 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.
22. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Whilst this is an update to the scrutiny committees and will in itself have minimal equalities impacts, consideration has been made in the consideration of executive decisions and the executive responses provided by the Cabinet.

Resource implications

23. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report which is for information and discussion.

Legal implications

24. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report which is for information and discussion.

Risk management

25. There are no specific risks directly associated with activity referred to in this report. The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and Children's Services each maintain their own risk registers.

Consultees

26. None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services report
Appendix 2 Ofsted Action Plan

Background papers

- None