

Title of report: Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	19 December 2024
Cabinet member:	Ivan Powell, children and young people
Report by:	Corporate Director Children and Young People
Report author:	Corporate Director Children and Young People

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To share the feedback letter from Ofsted following their fifth Monitoring Visit conducted on 22 - 23 October 2024

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Cabinet receive and note the feedback from Ofsted Inspectors' Monitoring Visit letter, at appendix a.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options. Herefordshire Council Children's Service is judged to be inadequate by Ofsted and will be subject to monitoring visits until the next Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) where a re-grading will be considered.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire's fifth monitoring visit took place 22nd and 23rd of October with a focus on children at risk of extra familial harm. Ofsted findings in full can be found in appendix one. The summary of findings is set out below with service response where appropriate.
3. **Get Safe specialist team**
Ofsted found that "*Children at risk of extra familial harm in Herefordshire benefit from a committed specialist team, which reduces risk for many of these vulnerable children*". They found the Get Safe team to "*work effectively to reduce risks for children and young people and their work to be timely and well structured*". Ofsted recognised these staff "*form trusting relationships with children and the quality of these relationships serve as a positive foundation to reduce risks for many children*".
4. **Early Help, Support, and identification of risk**
Ofsted found that a range of early help services were available to support children at risk of exploitation and that for most children who come to the attention of children services their needs and risks are promptly identified through effective systems in place in MASH. These systems enable the service to "*undertake prompt screening and allocation*", and through close work with the targeted early help there is a "*coordinated approach to how best support the child*".
5. **Partnership Working**
Ofsted found the external partnership collaboration is helping to protect vulnerable children through targeted interventions and or disruption activity and that this collaboration and information sharing between partners was improved since previous visits.
6. Multi Agency Child Exploitation meetings are held for all children identified as experiencing exploitation and Ofsted found these partnership meetings, chaired by the Safe Team Manager provide a "*structured and embedded multi-disciplinary analysis and evaluation*" and the outcome of these meetings were described as "*a collaborative approach to risk management leading to reliable decision about next steps*".
7. **Working with Children, Young People and Families**
Ofsted noted that children and families are encouraged to attend MACE meetings, which they noted increases their understanding and ownership of planned intervention. The Safe Team hold a weekly referral meeting to which children and families are not invited and we use as part of the management of the referral process informing next steps. Ofsted asked us to consider how this initial information meeting might be more productive if we gain parental and young person consent and engagement at this very early opportunity.

8. The service will take this into consideration though we also note importance of the professional partnership information sharing of police intelligence, which can be confidential / soft Intel, alongside the wider partnership information known about an individual child and any connections with other young people or known parties presenting risk. This valuable information sharing must not be compromised through the presence of children young people and families at this first information-sharing meeting.
9. Ofsted identified the children are engaged in their assessments and their plans. They noted that some plans can present as formulaic and would benefit from better use of the child's own words being recorded and more tailored plans described in the written document that would in fact better reflect the verbal account of plans in place that staff were able to present to Ofsted.
10. **Quality of practice**
We were pleased that Ofsted found that the child and family assessments that they had reviewed in other parts of the service, from front door to children in care and care leavers and completed in recent months, were "*an improved quality*" to those they have historically observed. Ofsted found these assessments as being "*detailed and reflecting overarching needs, with an exploration of risks to the child*". Ofsted found that these quality assessments lead to "*risk being well understood, leading to effective protection action and support*".
11. Ofsted noted for a small number of children with complex needs and in care who have experienced placement disruption, including some who are placed a long way from home, they have presenting risks not sufficiently well managed and this constant disruption in placement is causing delay and disruption to their needs being understood and met. In response, the service is undertaking a senior management lead case review in each of these cases. This will provide critical reflective challenge to ensure that we are identifying, managing and minimising risks as we attempt to stabilise these children and progress their permanency plans. These reviews will include considerations for a change of plan to permanency via rehabilitation at home if it is safe and in line with the young person and parents wishes.
12. Ofsted recognised the service had already identified the need to increase the number of children taking up missing from home and care interviews and found when these interviews are completed they are "*timely and enable the child to share valuable information as they explore risk factors that influence children going missing from home and care*". We were reminded about the need to always have professional curiosity.
13. Ofsted noted that the revised judgement guidelines for case audits had resulted in "*more accurate understanding of practice*" and for the first time Ofsted agreed with all the services own audit judgements. Recognising the quality assurance process is new and needs to embed Ofsted fed back how we could improve how we more consistently provide feedback and learning. As a response the service has developed a single record of the audit outcome, which takes account of both the peer and the lead auditor reports and identifies not just case learning but service learning more explicitly.

14. The service has also developed process and communication to go to young people and parents at the beginning of the month when the audits are identified, giving us more opportunity and flexibility to engage the child of the parent in the feedback during that audit process.
15. **Management & Leadership**
Ofsted reported, *“since the last monitoring visit in February 2024 a new interim director of children’s services has been appointed who has brought renewed focus to areas of the service which need to improve. A refreshed improvement plan is being implemented and there are some early signs of improvement”*. Ofsted found *“staff are consistently positive about the leadership of the new DCS and wider senior managers”* and that they reported a sense of an improving service, being able to access a range of training and development opportunities. Staff told Ofsted that they feel well supported and positive about recent changes taking place. Ofsted recorded finding of a workforce wide feeling of a *“drive to improve”* with staff reporting *“visible and approachable leadership in recent months who seek views of staff, meaning they feel invested in and listened to”*
16. Ofsted findings include *“a significant focus on improving performance management is enabling leaders to understand the areas that have started to improve and where further improvement is needed to ensure that developments are embedded and continue with pace and momentum”*.
17. The monitoring visit identified that supervision was now taking place regularly for staff but challenged supervision in itself was not effectively addressing drift in all cases and challenged us to ensure that the monthly supervision isn’t a silo monthly approach and ensure that actions between supervisions are picked up to identify and address drift and delay. As a service response, a three monthly case summary is now being completed by the case-holding workers, which includes a review of the last three supervision sessions. This will enable the team managers to undertake a December/January supervision and ensure that plans are identified and progressed.
18. Ofsted noted that establishing greater permanency in our workforce remains a priority.
19. In response to the verbal feedback the service put in place actions as identified above. A presentation to the full staff conference on the 22nd of November also took place providing the positive feedback to the workforce and identifying our actions that were taken in the context of the Ofsted feedback.
20. This approach enables us to ensure our workforce understand not only what they need to do to improve but why and how the changes in practice are to achieve improving quality of service for children and families.
21. The outcome findings letter will be shared and discussed with our partners through the Children’s Safeguarding Board to identify any further partnership actions required as a result of this focused monitoring visit

22. This Monitoring Visit outcome letter will be available to the public via the Ofsted website on 4th December 24. It will also be available via the Council website.
23. The next monitoring visit will be our sixth monitoring visit and is likely to take place in January / February 2025

Community impact

24. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to ‘enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and benefit from communities that help people to feel safe and supported’ and more specifically, the council aims to:
 - a. We want to support children and young people to thrive, be safe, and for families to be supported.
 - b. We believe that children and young people are best supported in their family networks and within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. Our children are the future. Sometimes children and families need our help.
 - c. We are committed to improving children’s services and providing support to families who need it. Acting on Ofsted monitoring visits are part of our drive to improve our services to children and families.
 - d. We will support all children to have the best start in life.

Environmental Impact

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

Equality duty

26. There are no equality issues arising from this report.

Resource implications

27. There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.

Legal implications

28. The Ofsted inspection in July 2022 was undertaken under the Framework, Evaluation Criteria and Inspector Guidance for the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS). This contains provisions regarding actions to be taken after an inadequate inspection report. These include monitoring by Ofsted, an action plan, a number of monitoring visits and a re-inspection.

Risk management

29. There are no new or additional risks arising from this visit. Risks associated with the wider improvement plan are monitored by the Improvement Board.

Consultees

30. None

Appendices

Appendix A: Ofsted Feedback Letter.

Background papers

None identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

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Approved by	Tina Russell	Date 29/11/2024
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Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.