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| <u>Committee and Date</u> |
| People Overview Committee |
| 29 th June 2022 |

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| <u>Item</u> |
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| <u>Public</u> |

Ofsted Inspection of Childrens' Social Care Services

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1. Summary

- 1.1 An Ofsted inspection on Shropshire's Children's Social Care Services took place between 31st January – 11th February 2022. The inspection was carried out under the ILACS framework by a team of HMI inspectors. The previous full inspection on children's social care took place between 11 September 2017 to 5 October 2017 and was judged to be **GOOD**.
- 1.2 On 25th March 2022, Ofsted published its report providing an overall judgement that Children's Services in Shropshire are **GOOD**. A copy of this report is included as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 This report presents the findings from the Ofsted inspection to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, together with details of the action plan for the areas requiring development. The related action plan identifies how the report recommendations will be implemented across Children's Services to further support children, young people and their families in Shropshire. The Ofsted action plan is currently in draft and will be circulated once finalised.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The committee note and review the Ofsted Inspection report
- 2.2 The committee review the action plan and agree a process to monitor and update on progress.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- Reduced drift and delay in the system – shown by the DRP process, reduction in red rags.
- Children's needs are appropriately identified. Assessments are consistently clear and completed in timescales.

- Children are not left in risky situations.
- A high percentage of Children are seen, and the majority seen alone, resulting in children's lived experience being understood.

3.1 Ofsted Inspection

3.1.2 The outcome of the inspection reflects the hard work and commitment staff have in striving to ensure children and their families receive appropriate support for the best possible outcomes. Ofsted commented that 'Children in Shropshire are benefiting from the high aspirations of senior leaders for their services to continue to improve children's lives.

3.1.2 The outcome of this inspection has been widely celebrated amongst council staff at all levels. Senior managers and members recognised and have expressed their gratitude to staff who have worked extremely hard to further improve outcomes for children and their families, in what has been an unprecedented and extremely pressured 2 years during the Covid-19 pandemic. Recognition from senior leaders in the council was appreciated by staff, having a positive impact on morale.

3.1.3 The below table categorises the areas of inspection and the grade awarded

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

3.1.4 There were some areas identified as requiring improvement, these include:

- The effective application of the pre-proceedings stage of the PLO, and the local arrangements for the family group conference service.
- The sufficiency of local placement options.
- The partnership response to the emotional health needs of children in care

3.1.5 Inspectors developed a Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) in respect of our Public Law Outline (PLO) identifying areas requiring improvements. These include decisions being made too late, letters before proceedings being of poor quality and PLO plans not consistently being reviewed or progressed. Letters before proceedings were considered overly complicated and unclear to parents what they need to do to

ensure that their children remain in their care. The review of our PLO work during the inspection found that most children presented at Legal Planning Meetings (LPM) were more likely to progress into care proceedings rather than preventing them from entering proceedings.

- 3.1.6 A comprehensive action plan has been produced in response to these findings and the re-modelling of our procedures was launched on 6th June 2022. This new model is based on the Essex Children's services PLO model which is recognised as national good practice. The model developed by Essex, along with 4 other local authorities, has assisted in our review and development our PLO letters, LPM agenda and other documents which are now included in our new toolkit. Shropshire will continue to adopt and review the principles of this model. This will enable us to share regional good practice and measure our performance against our neighbouring regional local authorities.
- 3.1.7 There will be thematic audits and the inclusion of PLO cases in the monthly child journey audit allocations. Findings, revisions, and any learning will be circulated amongst staff and senior manager once completed.
- 3.1.8 All areas for development and improvement will continue to be addressed via the newly formed Continuous Improvement Development Board (CID). Work is already underway where a proactive approach will be applied to all recommendations and action planning.
- 3.1.9 Reflecting on the inspection and from feedback received we have been able to identify some key strengths that we will continue to build upon:
- **Social workers that know their children & families well, are knowledgeable, passionate and child focused.**
 - **Leaders who are visible, knowledgeable, passionate and child focused. Have oversight of the children & young people. Leaders understand their team's strengths and challenges well.**
 - Education is well supported by our Virtual School. Action is taken to improve the education outcomes for those children whose overall progress is good but where their attainment is not where we aspire for it to be.
 - Children are seen by their social workers, listened to and their wishes and feelings taken into account.
 - **Social workers and wider staff tell us that Shropshire is a good place to work, they are supported, receive supervision and their well-being is important. A strong retention rate.**
 - A culture of learning, development and wanting to get things right. No blame culture, when things are not right we learn from them, together. We use Restorative Practice to interact with others and behave in a restorative way.
 - **Compass and Assessment provide a strong response to referrals in a timely way.**
 - Strong planning for permanence practice, including brothers and sisters remaining together.
 - When we find weaknesses or gaps in social work practice, we follow them up and address them. A strong Quality Assurance framework that strives to 'close the loop' and demonstrate improvement for the child & young person. An improved dispute resolution process.

- **Development of a strong response to Child Exploitation as the issue has developed into an area of concern in recent years.**
- No under 16 young people in unregulated placements, no under 18's in bed & breakfast.
- Transfer of young people (UASC) on the National Transfer scheme over the last 2 years has increased significantly.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The issue of capacity and demand was discussed with Senior Leaders at the informal feedback session. The Director of People is working with Executive Leaders to assist in addressing this issue, recently agreeing an extension to the retention payment scheme for social workers.
- 4.2 Investment in increasing capacity in Special Guardianship Hub, Early Help at the front door, additional capacity in TREES and our exploitation team.
- 4.3 Staff utilisation review is currently underway to better understand the tasks of social workers that could be carried out by others more efficiently.

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| List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information) |
| Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) |
| Cllr Kirstie Hurst-Knight |
| Local Member |
| Appendices |
| Appendix 1 – Ofsted Inspection Report |
| Appendix 2 – Next Steps Action Plan |