
Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan

Lead Member Briefing: 14 October 2024

Lead director: Damian Elcock

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Helen Sheppard
- Author contact details: helen.sheppard@leicester.gov.uk, 0116 454 1170
- Report version number: v1

1. Summary

Under Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, a short inspection was carried out in Leicester during September 2024. This inspection resulted in the overall rating of 'requires improvement to be good' across all key areas.

Though there were areas of strength recognised, with acknowledgement provided of where previous recommendations had been addressed and significant improvements made, five areas requiring action were identified.

In response to these areas for improvement, an action plan has been developed to drive forward change and strengthen practice. This action plan is being overseen through the Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) governance framework, to ensure there is a cohesive approach to change that aligns to a number of drivers of transformation. Progress has been made to deliver many of the improvements, with new procedures and approaches embedded in practice, though in some areas the impact of the improvement activity is yet to be measured.

To further drive the ongoing improvement activity, Islington Council is providing support as a Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) – focusing particularly on activity related to domestic abuse and sexual violence, care leavers and management oversight. Further improvement will be supported through engagement in the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance peer challenge process.

An annual engagement meeting was scheduled with Ofsted in mid-September but this was postponed until 11 December following the announcement of SEND local area inspection.

2. Recommended actions/decision

It is recommended that members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission note the action plan and the progress that has already been made to deliver the necessary change.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

The full action plan has been shared with Ofsted.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

Inspection process

In September 2024, a team of Ofsted inspectors spent a week on site in Leicester, evaluating practice on the basis of case reviews, discussions with frontline staff and evidence submitted in advance (including policies, procedures and performance data).

Inspection recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the inspection report:

1. The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.
2. The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.
3. The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.
4. Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children's homes.
5. Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.

Responding to the inspection

Acknowledging the areas for improvement identified through the inspection, a detailed action plan was put together to outline the specific activity required to drive the necessary change. This identifies the action owner and outlines timelines for the delivery of activity. The plan also provides a BRAG rating for both the progress on the activity itself and the impact the activity has had. Following submission of the initial plan to Ofsted, it has been reviewed and updates captured.

Governance for overseeing improvement

The delivery of this action plan is being overseen through the Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) governance framework, alongside other key areas of transformation. This ensures that the activity aligns with work being carried out in response to a number of other drivers of change, such as the Families First Partnership Programme and Placement Sufficiency Programme.

Driving improvement with a Sector Led Improvement Partner

Sector-led improvement partners are local authorities that are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' for children's services by Ofsted and that have been selected through a Department for Education (DfE) procurement exercise to deliver this support. Sector-led improvement support can be accessed by any local authority rated as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'.

Islington Council, judged to have 'outstanding' children's services in both 2017 and 2020, has been delivering sector-led improvement programmes with children's services since 2018 and has now begun to offer support to Leicester City Council. They have shaped a proposal covering activity focused on the following areas:

- Domestic abuse & safety work
- Care leavers & preparation for adulthood
- Leadership development for SMs & TMs
- Management oversight & managing case work
- Coaching and affinity groups
- Leadership vision planning

Initial scoping conversations have taken place and will be developed further with a visit day on 29 September, when representatives from Islington will attend Leicester in person to further solidify plans to support improvement activity. Through connections made with

Islington, staff in Leicester's workforce have already been able to access specific training and development opportunities.

Ofsted annual engagement meeting

An annual engagement meeting was scheduled with Ofsted in mid-September, but this was postponed until 11 December following the announcement of SEND local area inspection. The self-evaluation of children's services had been updated in advance of the meeting planned in September, critically assessing the strengths and areas for development within the service. When the postponed annual engagement meeting takes place in December, this will function as an opportunity for regional Ofsted representatives to review the self-evaluation, reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with the local authority in the future. The intelligence gathered from the meeting will inform any plans for future inspection activity and focused visits.

RIIA peer challenge

To further support Leicester's improvement journey, the authority will engage in the biennial regional children's social care peer challenge. Through a structured challenge activity, Leicester will be able to engage in a focused exploration of regional strengths and areas for improvement, with the aim of generating actionable insights, enhancing strategic cohesion, and driving continuous improvement across the organisation. Leicester is in a peer challenge triad with Nottinghamshire and Derby, supported by Lou Williams (a lead consultant). Preparatory work will be taking place ahead of the peer challenge day on 13 March 2026.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. The action plan identified will be delivered using the existing budget for Education and Children's Services.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 03 October 2025

5.2 Legal implications

The contents of this report are noted as is the action plan. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Signed: Susan Holmes, Head of Law

Dated: 08 October 2025

5.3 Equalities implications

The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are age, disability, gender re-

assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The report provides an update on the action plan developed following Ofsted's short inspection which took place during September 2024 and focuses on the five identified areas requiring action. The report cites the work currently underway including the support being provided by Islington Council and the preparation underway for the peer challenge taking place in March 2026. The work cited in the action plan should lead to positive outcomes for children, young people and their families/carers who will be from across a range of protected characteristics. The commitment by senior management to the diversity pledges and diversity action plan should ensure equality and diversity considerations are central to our processes, procedures and delivery of services. It is recommended that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are undertaken as appropriate to ensure we are paying due regard to the PSED as part of our decision-making processes.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 2 October 2025

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2246

Dated: 01 October 2025

6. Background information and other papers:

n/a

7. Summary of appendices:

- a. Appendix a Summary improvement plan
- b. Appendix b Ofsted Action Plan – ILACS Autumn 2024
- c. Appendix c Self-evaluation (SEF)

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No