



Telford & Wrekin  
C O U N C I L

Addenbrooke House Ironmasters Way Telford TF3 4NT

## CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date **Thursday, 3 September 2020**

Time **6.00 pm**

Venue **Remote Meeting**

### Enquiries Regarding this Agenda

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### Committee

Councillors M Boylan, C Cassar, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway,

### Membership:

V J Holt, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair), H Rhodes and  
K T Tomlinson, Co-optees S Fikeis, L Fowler, C Morgan and M Ward

## AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

3 - 8

4. **Terms of Reference**

9 - 16

To approve the Committee's Terms of Reference for the municipal year 2020 to 2021.

5. **Scrutiny Review of the Ofsted Report and Action Plan 2020**

17 - 40

Clive Jones (Executive Director for Children's & Family Services) and Jo Britton (Executive Director for Children's Safeguarding & Family Support) will be in attendance for this item.

Darren Knibbs (Interim Director for Childrens Safeguarding and Family Support) will also be in attendance.

6. **Chair's Update**

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## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 30 January 2020 at 6.00 pm in Meeting Room G3-G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford**

**Present:** Councillors M Boylan, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway, V J Holt, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair) and G L Offland.  
Co-optees: S Fikeis and L Fowler

**Also Present:** Councillor S A W Reynolds (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Education)

**In Attendance:** S Bass (Commissioning, Procurement and Brokerage), J Eatough (Director for Governance), H Loveridge (Director for Education and Skills), D Moseley (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader), K Robinson (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer), L Smith (School Performance and Development), and S Wellman (SEND 0-25)

**Apologies:** Councillors C Morgan, J Pinter, K T Tomlinson and M Ward

#### **1 Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **2 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **3 Travel Assistance Policy and Transport Review Consultation**

Members received an overview of the Council's proposed travel assistance policies and its transport review consultation. Officers described the consultation process and informed the Members of the consultation timetable. The Commissioning, Procurement & Brokerage Service Delivery Manager set out the rationale behind timetabling of the two consultations; explaining the split of school and post-16 SEND. Both phases of the consultation were to follow the same process with the addition of an 'easy read' version of the consultation for the second phase. The 'easy read' version was aimed specifically at My Options clients.

The Commissioning, Procurement & Brokerage Service Delivery Manager subsequently laid out the next steps for the policies once the consultation had closed. Feedback for both phases would be unified and considered together to create a single proposal to present to Cabinet in the spring.

**Members asked a number of questions as follows:-**

*Page 9 of the policy, stated that the cut-off date for applications for the new school year was 30 June. With there being a lot of movement into the area thanks to new housing developments, how would the policy work for new movers?*

This date was for the existing around 1,500 children in the area and if their applications were received on time, their eligibility could be checked and a place on the routes could be sourced in time for the start of the new school year in September. After that deadline, no guarantee to get transport in place could be made although efforts would be made to provide transport assistance.

*What about children who move in year? What was the process?*

Applications were accepted throughout the year outside of the normal admissions round but it was acknowledged that this could be better clarified in the policy.

*The new policy specifically removed the application of assistance, for parents who opted to send their children to faith schools. Had the Council considered the effect of the policy on the attendance at faith schools and the anticipated reduction in cost to transport provision?*

Parents were free to express a preference for any school but the local authority did not have to provide transport if it was not their nearest school. The Council had found that the policy to provide transport to faith schools was advantageous to a specific group of parents over and above others. However, the Council was still obliged to provide support to those on low income.

*It was noted that discrimination regulations included religion as a protected characteristic.*

There was nothing stopping parents applying to faith schools for a place for their child. A faith school was a preference, and one that they were entitled to, but the responsibility for transport remained with the parent.

*It was noted that Holy Trinity Academy was the only secondary faith school in the area but it had a tight catchment area. It also allocated 60% of school places to faith applicants. How many children would be effected by this policy?*

In common with other local faith schools, Holy Trinity Academy had a catchment area but was able to accept pupils residing out of that area. As a voluntary aided school it also had its own admissions policy. It was predicted that Holy Trinity Academy would soon see an increase in pupil numbers due to significant housing growth in the area and the bulge that had been seen over the last 5-7 years in primary schools moving through to the secondary schools. The Council would guarantee people who applied this year their places. But, going into next year it was not known how many people would apply.

*Was it possible to make an estimate based on this and previous years?*

The area had seen some of the greatest housing growth and it was expected that local applications would increase. Combined with the number of children moving through local primary schools it was expected that school numbers would increase significantly.

*What happened if a child had a spare seat one year then there was not one available in the next year?*

Unfortunately, spare seat would be lost. The parents would receive a full term's notice and would be offered support finding alternatives. The seats were necessary for those who met the criteria. Additionally, spare seats could be lost in circumstances where reductions in the number of eligible children requiring a seat result in the size of the vehicle required

*Could you tell us more about independent travel training?*

The Post-16 Offer was part of the Council's strategy to help with the transition to adulthood. There was a programme of independent travel training with the goal of helping those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities]) to be able to use public transport. This was especially targeted at supporting the transition into college and independence.

*How would the Council ensure children were adequately matched for taxi-share?*

Taxi-share was a last resort but the Council worked closely with providers, providing training, and also had very good drivers. The Council would also work with schools and parents to ensure the children got along and there were no problems during the day. If children didn't work well together then a travel assistant could be put in place.

*Where were the taxis licenced?*

Taxis were licenced by Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire. There were robust contracts and regulations in place with the companies and drivers.

**Recommended – that the final policy provides greater clarity regarding transport applications for in-year admissions.**

#### **4 Educational Attainment**

The Director for Education and Skills gave a presentation on educational attainment in the Borough. The Director presented the latest educational attainment statistics to the Committee, the Director set out attainment across the Key Stages and contrasted this with the national average. The Director followed this up with an update on the Councils work to improve on the set of results presented, setting out the actions that had been taken. These included a round table held with key partners and a strategic partnership between head teachers and chief executives. The role of the Local Authority Quality Assurance Officer in monitoring school performance was also set out for the Committee.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:-

*More than half of the Boroughs secondary schools were over the national average for 'Attainment 8'; was there any data on the ones that weren't so good, for example around the relationship with feeder primaries?*

Some schools performed better in certain subject areas. Some schools had had a difficult time but were now seeing improvement. It was possible to say, with some confidence, that a number of secondary schools would get good results for the current year as considerable progress had been seen. Some schools had issues but were receiving support, sometimes from outside of the Borough.

*What was the Council doing to support academies in the Borough?*

Academies were outside the remit of the Council but if there were concerns. The Chief Executives of the academy trusts would be approached initially due to the good relationships that existed. If this was not effective the regional School Commissioner could be approached and asked if the school is receiving support, and if they were satisfied with the support they were receiving. The Council had a responsibility to all children of the Borough no matter which school they attended.

*Are children with SEND identified early enough?*

There were three SEND coordinators at the Council, together with a whole infrastructure around early support for SEND. Most individuals with a plan were identified at an early age. Ofsted, Three years ago, Ofsted rated the Council's SEND provision as good.

*KS2 children were often very stressed about exams, then they moved on to high school and were re-examined to check their KS2 results. Did the Council have a role in alleviating the pressure children might feel? Has there been any discussion at national level about stopping KS2 exams or making any changes?*

The Committee had been advised that on the contrary, the government were bringing in more testing at this level as opposed to taking them away. There was pressure on pupils but schools were encouraged to offer a broader curriculum with cultural capital such as encouraging music. Schools were still ultimately judged on performance and this was difficult. Heads were under pressure to get good results but equally many heads would say the most important thing was to offer a good education and opportunities that pupils wouldn't have otherwise. Many heads did not want children to feel the pressure that they do.

*Did putting too much pressure on children have the opposite effect? There was a need to acknowledge the benefit of the cultural capital aspect of learning and give a broader education to children.*

There was a need to find a way to meet all children's needs, including their varying learning speeds, and also find ways for each child to show off their talents and ability.

*At KS2, there was a 2.3% reduction in the score for reading between 2018 and 2019, though 2018 was better than 2017. It was also noted that nationally these figures had gone down.*

The rates were still above national level, locally, but it was a national trend that reading figures had decreased.

*What actions had been taken to address this trend?*

The schools where this had happened had been identified; some of them were 'good' schools so the decline had come as a surprise. There were special development conferences and a special reading initiative in place to address the issue.

*What were staff retention levels in the Borough? How did the Service deal with teaching staff stress levels in schools?*

Officers did not have this information. However, if the Council noted a particularly high staff turnover then it would investigate. Having said that, it was common for successful staff to move quickly through the ranks and leave to pursue higher roles.

*There was concern that teachers were being put under pressure over results.*

It was noted that this was a government led pressure. Local Trade Unions had not directly expressed any concerns. There was always general pressure on teachers but there was not a sense that teachers were under undue pressure in Telford & Wrekin.

**AGREED – that the Director for Education and Skills be requested to provide a finalised report on this topic.**

**5            Work Programme 2019/20 to 2020/21**

**AGREED – Members of the Committee agreed the Work Programme.**

**6            Chair's Update**

The Chair noted that a timetable for future meetings was being worked on.

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:**            Thursday, 3 September 2020

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**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**REPORT OF ANTHEA LOWE – ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR: POLICY & GOVERNANCE**

**PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT**

**1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS**

For the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to review its Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 That the Committee review and agree the amended Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1.**

**3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	The Committee is part of the Council’s decision making framework and therefore contributes to all of the Council’s priorities.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	If the Committee recommends any changes to the Terms of Reference; they will proceed to Council Constitution Committee and then, if approved, onto full Council at the earliest opportunity.	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes/No	
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	Yes/No	The Constitution requires that the Terms of Reference be reviewed on an annual basis. The Council is required to comply with the Constitution. This report demonstrates compliance with this requirement.
		AL 26/08/2020

<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	There are no other specific impacts arising from this report.
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	Yes	Borough-wide impact

## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **4. INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The Constitution requires that Full Council should agree at its Annual Meeting the Terms of Reference for each of its Committees to enable the Council to efficiently conduct its business.
- 4.2 At the Annual Meeting on 21 May 2020, Full Council delegated authority to each Committee to review its own Terms of Reference.
- 4.3 The Terms of Reference forms part of the Constitution and was approved by Full Council in that context on 14 July 2016.
- 4.4 There are two minor changes suggested to the Terms of Reference (shown in red on Appendix 1). The first is to address a small typographical error at paragraph 3 and the second is simply to provide clarity around the process for appointment of a Chair for the Committee.

### **5. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

- 5.1 Council – 14 July 2016 and 21 May 2020

### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Constitution – [www.telford.gov.uk/constitution](http://www.telford.gov.uk/constitution)

Report prepared by Kieran Robinson, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, [kieran.robinson@telford.gov.uk](mailto:kieran.robinson@telford.gov.uk), 01952 382061

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## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **Membership**

1. The Committee will be made up of elected members from the Scrutiny Assembly, as appointed at Annual Council in line with the political balance of the Council, and co-opted scrutiny members.
2. The Committee may appoint co-opted scrutiny members but they must not exceed the number of elected members.
3. The Parent Governor and the Catholic and Anglican diocesan representatives will have statutory voting rights on education matters as set **out in** the Local Government Act 2000. Other co-optees will not have voting rights.
4. In addition to the standing co-optees, the Committee may appoint additional co-optees for one-off reviews to supplement the skills, knowledge and experience of the Committee on that particular issue. (Subject to the number of co-opted scrutiny members not exceeding the number of elected members.)
5. **The Chair is appointed at the Annual General Meeting of full Council. A Vice-Chair may be appointed by majority decision of the Committee**
6. The quorum required for a meeting is 3 elected members.
7. All Committee members should undergo the Corporate Parenting and Child Sexual Exploitation training offered by the Council (including any refresher training).
8. Members of Committee should act as champions for children and young people in the care of the authority and raise awareness of the issues facing children and young people in care with other elected members and members of the public.

### **Functions**

9. The Committee will be the main mechanism by which Scrutiny members will scrutinise and monitor the planning and performance of the Council's services to children and young people and the Council's Corporate Parenting role, including but not limited to the following key areas
  - Early years and child care
  - All aspects of education including schools and academies, school improvement, school/college transport, training and apprenticeships, behaviour and attendance, further education
  - Children's Centres
  - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
  - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
  - Positive activities for young people
  - Safeguarding and child protection (including exploitation)
  - Corporate Parenting

## Appendix 1

- Looked After Children and Care Leavers
- Fostering and adoption
- Teenage pregnancy
- Supported accommodation and lodgings
- Supported employment for young people
- Youth Services
- Youth Offending Service
- Youth unemployment, NEETs
- Family Support

10. The Committee will set its own work programme. The following points may be taken into consideration when considering the work programme each year:

- areas where significant change is proposed and the potential impacts
- performance in areas where significant change has been implemented;
- areas of financial overspend;
- areas receiving a high level of budgetary commitment;
- areas where there is a high level of user dissatisfaction;
- reports and action plans produced/agreed with external inspectors;
- areas that are key issues for the public or have become a public interest issue covered in the media.

11. The Committee will consider matters referred by the Scrutiny Management Board, and will exercise discretion as to whether a suggestion falls within the remit of the Committee to scrutinise.

### **Meeting Administration and Proceedings**

12. The Committee procedure rules as set out in the Council's Constitution apply to this Committee.

13. The meetings will follow the principles of scrutiny ie no party whip will be applied and a constructive, evidence based approach will be used.

14. If the Chair and Vice Chair (if appointed) are unable to attend a meeting the Members present will elect a Chair for the meeting.

15. All Scrutiny Committee meetings will be held in public, unless exempt information is being considered or discussed. Scrutiny Committees may appoint sub-groups to carry out investigative work as part of a review and these sub-groups may hold informal meetings but will report back their findings to the Scrutiny Committee.

16. The meetings will be administered by Scrutiny Services and Democratic Services. Frequency of meetings will be agreed by the Committee as necessary to carry out the work programme.

17. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Executive Directors, Directors and Service Delivery Managers will attend the Committee at the request of the Chair. Representatives from other organisations may be invited to attend.

### **Sensitive and Confidential Information**

18. From time to time members may become privy to information of a confidential nature. If this happens, members must maintain this confidence. Members are unable to request personal/confidential information from Officers about an individual or family.
19. Information obtained as a result of membership of the Committee is sensitive and should be treated as being confidential by members.

### **Reporting Arrangements**

20. The Chair will provide regular updates to meetings of the Scrutiny Management Board to inform the other Scrutiny Chairs of performance and budget issues relating to the remit of their Committees.
21. The Chair of the Committee, or his/her representative, will provide and present reports and recommendations of the Committee to the Council's Cabinet, Full Council or other relevant organisations when necessary.

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**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN ARE CARED FOR, AND THEY ARE CARED ABOUT**

**JOINT REPORT OF CLLR. SHAUN DAVIES LEADER OF THE COUNCIL & CLLR. SHIRLEY REYNOLDS LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT**

**1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 To present the findings from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) which took place between 13<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Notes the content of the this report.
- 2.2. Notes the final action plan shown at Appendix 2.
- 2.3. Notes and supports a request by Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to monitor implementation of the Action Plan

**3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	- Protect Care and Support our Most Vulnerable Children and Adults - Securing the Best Possible Start in Life for Children and Young People
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The action plan will mainly impact on children and young people and their families, particularly those in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	As set out in the Improvement Plan – 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2020.	

<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	No	There are no financial implications identified from the recommendations in this report at this time. Once the draft action plan is available an assessment of the financial implications will be made and any identified will be detailed in the next reporting stage of the Cabinet cycle. TAS 20/02/2020
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	Yes/No	The Council has a number of statutory duties to ensure it protects and supports the children and young people residing within the Borough. The ILACS system of inspection is a method of benchmarking the quality of care provided to children and young people; the assessment of Outstanding provides assurance that the Council follows best practice within its Children's Services teams. There is a requirement, following an ILACS inspection, to evidence that steps are being taken to address any recommendations and the proposed action plan will enable the authority to do this. AL 20/02/2020
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	No	N/A
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	No	The action plan will have a borough-wide impact

## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **4. INFORMATION**

#### ***4.1 Background***

4.1.1 The Council is committed to creating a better Borough for its residents and businesses in areas such as improving employment, skills and people's health, ensuring our local health services respond to the needs of our Borough's facilities and boosting tourism. Our ambition is to be the place of enterprise, innovation and partnership.

4.1.2 The **Council's Protect Care & invest Programme** priorities include

- **Investing to protect our most vulnerable children**

We want to see children and adults live safely at home in their communities, this means developing community capacity to achieve this goal. Where we can't do this we want the very best for our vulnerable children and adults.

4.1.3 The Council's approach to austerity has been to invest in new ways of working including Nuplace, a solar farm and working with our communities, including parish and town councils. This has allowed us to preserve many early interventions services. For example libraries and children's centres and to generate income to invest in Council services including Children's Services.

4.1.4 The **Council budget 2017/18 to 2020/21 for Children's Services has increased by £13.77m (53%). This is at a time when the Council's Revenue Support Grant reduced by £8.485m (46%).** Over the same period an additional £2.1m has been allocated from one off funding to support a number of improvements in practice. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to children's services.

#### ***4.2 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)***

4.2.1 The ILACS inspection framework was published in November 2017, replacing the previous Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which had been in place since November 2013.

4.2.2 ILACS takes a 'system' approach to evaluating the quality of social work in local authorities rather than the previous one-off inspection approach. The system includes:

- local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice.
- an annual engagement meeting between Ofsted regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation

and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future.

- Ofsted's local authority intelligence system (LAIS) (which brings data and information into a single record).
- Focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children.
- Standard and short inspections where Ofsted make judgements using their four-point scale.
- Joint targeted area inspections (JTAI).

4.2.3 Our **previous full Ofsted inspection** (under the Single Inspection Framework) was in June-July 2016. **The judgement overall was 'Requires Improvement to be Good'**, with performance on adoption and services to care leavers judged to be 'Good'.

4.2.4 We had a two day focused visit from Ofsted in September 2018 which focused on our arrangements for permanence and permanency planning for looked after children.

### **4.3 Telford & Wrekin ILACS**

4.3.1 The Telford & Wrekin ILACS took place between 13<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and the report was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

4.3.2 **The outcome of the inspection was that the Council's Children's Services were assessed as being 'outstanding'**. Out of the three judgement areas, two areas (the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers and the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families) were judged to be 'outstanding' and the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection was judged to be 'good'.

4.3.3 There is only one area cited in the report under 'what needs to improve most' (previously known as recommendations): *The quality of recording in children's plans and at key management decision points.*

4.3.4 We are required to submit an action plan responding to the findings in the report within 70 working days of receiving it.

4.3.5 At the time of writing we were **one of only 18 local authorities achieving an 'Outstanding'** for overall effectiveness (including one from previous SIF inspection arrangements), and **the only authority in the West Midlands and North West of England** (see map attached at Appendix 3). Only one other authority (Bexley) achieved improvement straight from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Outstanding'.

4.3.6 The Inspection report is very positive throughout, and some key messages from the summary and leadership sections include:

- *Children's services in Telford and Wrekin Council are **outstanding***
- ***Senior leaders have implemented a clear and ambitious vision** for vulnerable children and families in Telford and Wrekin, which has resulted in outstanding services that are benefiting children. Despite this success, they continue to work to continually improve services. They aspire to a service for every child that they would welcome for their own.*
- *Senior leaders have a clear and transformative vision for services to sustainably improve the lives of vulnerable children and their families in Telford and Wrekin. **Members and senior officers' work together successfully to deliver this ambitious agenda to improve services**, which has been implemented and embedded by committed and skilled social workers and managers.*
- *Strong **corporate commitment** to prioritising children's social care has enabled the service to develop and improve.*
- ***Staff at all levels are valued and very well supported.** This has developed a positive culture where social workers can practice safely and effectively and where they are making a positive impact on lives of children and their families...*
- *The **response to children facing risks outside of the family is very strong and an area of excellent practice.** Additional capacity has been created within the child sexual exploitation team to develop it into a **children abused through exploitation team (CATE)**... **children receive highly effective help and support that mitigate risk well. Consequently, children's safety and well-being improve.***
- *Children benefit from **high-quality social work** and an impressive range of specialist services that improve their well-being and help to protect them from harm. Social workers and other staff who support children are very committed, and they are exceptionally well trained. **Children are valued and receive child-focused services** tailored to their individual needs.*
- ***Corporate parenting is exceptionally strong. Children are cared for, and they are cared about.** Children and their families benefit from creative high-quality services which support children to live with their families wherever possible.*
- ***Life story work** is a strength and **area of exceptional practice***
- *Care leavers benefit from strong and enduring relationships with personal advisers, who are responsive to their needs well into adulthood.*

- ***Strong and effective multi-agency partnerships mean that children in need of help and protection are identified quickly and get the support they need.***

4.3.7 This is a very positive judgement which reflects several years of hard work with a clear focus on improving services. We will **need to build on this going forward and continue working to improve outcomes for our vulnerable children and young people and their families**, including our work on criminal exploitation, reducing exclusion by creating a sense of belonging and the implementation of the Hertfordshire 'Family Safeguarding' model.

4.3.8 The Council was successful in making an application to join the Department for Education's Strengthening Families Programme in 2019. Funding from this programme will be used to implement, with partners the family safeguarding model which is designed to keep families together where it is safe to do so. This is achieved through a more collaborative way of working where parents are motivated to identify changes needed within their own families. This helps to achieve better outcomes for children.

## **5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

5.1 Ofsted have found in their report that "Children's services in Telford and Wrekin are outstanding overall. Children benefit from high quality social work and an impressive range of specialist services that improve their wellbeing and help to protect them from harm.

## **6 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

6.1 Minutes of the Meeting of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin held on Thursday, 24 November 2016 at 6.00pm at The Haybridge Restaurant, Telford College of Arts & Technology, Haybridge Road, Wellington, Telford

**Report prepared by Clive Jones, Executive Director, Children's & Family Services, Telephone: 01952 385100**

# Telford and Wrekin Council

## Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 20 January 2020 to 31 January 2020

Lead inspector: **Alison Smale**  
Her Majesty's Inspector

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
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	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Children's services in Telford and Wrekin are outstanding. Children benefit from high-quality social work and an impressive range of specialist services that improve their well-being and help to protect them from harm. Social workers and other staff who support children are very committed, and they are exceptionally well trained. Children are valued and receive child-focused services tailored to their individual needs. Children are listened to and their experiences are well understood and inform planning to improve their lives.

Corporate parenting is exceptionally strong. Children are cared for, and they are cared about. Children and their families benefit from creative high-quality

services which support children to live with their families wherever possible. A significant number of children have been successfully diverted from alternative care and enabled to live safely with their birth families. When this is not in their interest, children benefit from high-quality carers and timely securing of permanence. Care leavers benefit from strong and enduring relationships with personal advisers, who are responsive to their needs well into adulthood.

Senior leaders have implemented a clear and ambitious vision for vulnerable children and families in Telford and Wrekin, which has resulted in outstanding services that are benefiting children. Despite this success, they continue to work to continually improve services. They aspire to a service for every child that they would welcome for their own. Workforce development, recruitment and retention are particularly strong. Staff at all levels are valued and very well supported. This has developed a positive culture where social workers can practise safely and effectively and where they are making a positive impact on the lives of children and their families.

## **What needs to improve**

- ☐ The quality of recording in children's plans and at key management decision points.

## **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good**

1. Children and families are offered highly effective early help and support when their needs are first identified. Thresholds are appropriately applied and understood. Strong multi-agency information-sharing supports effective decision-making, which is making a positive difference to children's lives. Families benefit from access to an impressive range of supportive and accessible services and helpful staff. Parents spoken to were extremely positive about the non-judgemental and helpful support they receive, which is making a difference to them and their children's lives.
2. Managers in the early help Strengthening Families hubs know the children and families in the community well. They allocate interventions and resources based on an effective need and risks-based approach. This is providing timely and targeted support to families where and when it is needed. Much of the work undertaken in the hubs is delivered by the local authority. Senior leaders recognise that there is more to be done to encourage partners to take a lead role in more early help plans.
3. Strong and effective multi-agency partnerships mean that children in need of help and protection are identified quickly and get the support they need. The multi-agency safeguarding hub, Family Connect, benefits from experienced social workers who are skilled at speaking with families and other professionals to ascertain information and identify risk

and need. Social workers are professionally curious and passionate about safeguarding children and young people. They appropriately probe and explore issues with parents and other professionals. Historical factors are thoroughly explored to inform decisionmaking. Consent is well understood, sought or dispensed appropriately.

Consequently, children's needs are identified and decisions about next steps are made in a timely way by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Where needed, children and families are diverted to the appropriate service commensurate with their level of risk and need. Threshold decisions are appropriate, and staff are well informed and refer to the revised threshold guidance, including out of hours. Management oversight is strong and effective. In a very small number of cases, the recording of management decisions when timescales for enquiries need to be extended is not clear enough. While there is no detrimental impact for children, the rationale for the decisions is not made explicit.

4. Case summaries on children's records are a particular strength and provide an immediate and up-to-date overview of children's circumstances. They give an effective summary of the child's story, which helps those not familiar with the child's circumstances, for example those who work in the out-of-hours service, to understand key information quickly.
5. Child protection work is highly effective. Strategy discussions are timely and involve the right professionals. Where there are concerns about immediate harm, children are seen promptly to better protect them and inform initial risk assessments. Joint investigations are undertaken where appropriate. Child protection enquiries result in children receiving effective help and protection.
6. Child and family assessments are child-centred, and direct work ensures that social workers understand children's lives and circumstances. Timely assessments are well written and appropriately involve family members, differentiating between the needs of brothers and sisters. Children's current needs are effectively identified. Assessments could be further strengthened by better use of research to anticipate likely future harm.
7. Social workers know children very well. The experiences of children and the progress they make as a result of effective social work practice are good. The tenacious work undertaken by social workers, which they articulate very well, is not always reflected in children's written plans. Children's plans vary in the quality of how they are written. Actions can be quite general, are not timebound and are not always explicit for parents about what needs to change. Plans are reviewed at regular child in need and core group meetings.

8. Conference chairs ensure that child protection conferences are timely, involve the right people and make the right decisions for children. Review conferences consider actions within the plan and clarify what has been achieved and is still to be achieved. Children's circumstances improve through the help and protection they receive.
9. Pre-birth assessments are undertaken to a very high standard, and this is an area of excellent practice. Parents are offered appropriate help and support at the earliest stage. When there are concerns about potential significant harm, a specialist team undertakes a pre-birth assessment at the earliest opportunity. Assessments are of a very high quality to inform future planning for the child at birth. When born, and when it is in the child's best interest, parents are supported to safely parent, and they benefit from a further parenting assessment to inform the longer-term plan. When children need to become looked after, managers are decisive, and, in these instances, family members are considered in a timely way. Planning for children to achieve permanence with their brothers and sisters is also well considered. This means that children are enabled to live with their family where it is safe to do so or that timely and effective action is taken to protect them.
10. The needs of disabled children are well understood. Social workers and caseworkers work well together to ensure that assessments are updated and inform support for disabled children and their families. Effective support helps children to lead fulfilling lives.
11. The designated officer ensures that allegations against anyone working with children are managed effectively. Consequently, children are appropriately protected.
12. Management oversight through regular supervision is evident in children's records. Actions are routinely recorded and followed up, which helps progress planning for children, mostly within their timescales.
13. The voice of the child is a real strength and an area of good practice across the whole service, including the voices of children in care and care leavers. Children are seen regularly, with visits tailored to their needs and presenting risks. Social workers take time to get to know their children through regular visiting, activities and direct work. This helps children to understand, at their own pace, their life experiences and plans for their futures. Social workers articulate children's daily life experiences well. Children's views and perspectives are reflected in their assessments and reviews of plans and in key meetings.
14. Children exposed to domestic abuse are recognised and are effectively afforded safety and protection. Children and their families who need specialist support benefit from a comprehensive range of services, such as a mental health support drop-in group, substance misuse support, a

course for children who are potentially becoming involved in crime, and online counselling.

15. The response to children facing risks outside of the family is very strong and an area of excellent practice. Additional capacity has been created within the child sexual exploitation team to develop it into a children abused through exploitation team (CATE). Consultations offered by CATE workers add value and support social workers and other professionals working with children and families to better recognise and respond to child exploitation using recognised tools and approaches. Effective strategic and operational partnerships mean that intelligence about the local child exploitation profile is well developed. Timely risk identification and analysis ensure that effective plans are in place to reduce and manage risk. Effective multi-agency information-sharing and decision-making take place through risk panel meetings. Children's voices and experiences are well understood and taken into account by the panel. Children receive highly effective help and support that mitigate risk well. Consequently, children's safety and well-being improve.
16. The local authority has begun to take a different approach to meeting the needs of and addressing risks to children who are experiencing neglect. Social workers articulate well the current assessment of harm. There is concerted work to provide parents with the skills to maintain long-term safe care. In a very small number of instances, the cumulative impact, resulting in chronic neglect, has not been responded to soon enough. Senior leaders acknowledged that they had more to do to ensure effective use of pre-proceedings, particularly for the small number of children experiencing chronic neglect. Senior managers made changes during the inspection to strengthen this.
17. Where 16- to 17-year-olds are at risk of homelessness, they are not always routinely offered section 20 accommodation, although their needs are well met. Senior leaders immediately made changes to the assessment process to ensure that care is offered as an option.
18. Private fostering arrangements are highly effective. Assessments identify children's needs well. Visits to children are commensurate with their level of need, and the voice of the child is strong and well represented in their records. Children are seen alone and away from their placement.
19. The response to monitoring children who are electively home educated is effective. In the last 12 months, the local authority has strengthened its response to monitoring pupils who are electively home educated. There is a clear approach to working with schools and families to ensure that parents are able to make informed decisions about whether or not to home educate and that the quality of education that each pupil receives is suitable. The local authority's 'Belonging Strategy' is designed to

ensure inclusion for all. The principles underpinning this have informed revised policies and procedures for children who are not in full-time education. Local authority staff have a clear picture of who these children are and the schools they come from. They are persistent in following up concerns and work effectively with other local authority teams and external agencies. As a result, there are now fewer pupils who are on part-time timetables.

## **The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers are: outstanding**

20. Children in care and care leavers receive outstanding interventions and care. Family Solutions, which includes family group conferences, provides intensive and non-time-limited interventions to enable families to sustain changes. A highly effective and creative service successfully assists children, especially older children, to remain with their birth family, or supports a return to their family wherever it is safe to do so. It is impressive that the local authority has successfully and safely diverted 42 young people aged 10 to 15 who were on the edge of care from care in the last 12 months, and has helped children to return home where it is safe to do so. Families are supported to ensure that changes are sustainable, avoiding the need for further care episodes and reducing the need for further statutory involvement. Exit strategies are carefully planned to ensure that families can sustain change themselves.
21. Social work evidence to court is very detailed, providing a clear overview of assessments completed and the rationale for plans and recommendations. Family members are assessed as carers, with assessments completed to a high standard in a timely manner. Cafcass was very complimentary about the quality of court work. This is leading to swift legal permanence for children, which improves their life chances.
22. Care planning for children in care is thorough and highly effective. Children's care plans are very well written and provide clear and sensitive insights into children's experiences and how their needs will be met. Care planning meetings held regularly between children's reviews are a particularly strong area of practice and ensure that information is shared and that staff have a strong grip on children's progress and their plans. This makes a real difference to children's lives.
23. Children's looked after reviews are regular and permanence options are routinely considered at the second review. This results in timely permanence for children. Increased investment in the independent reviewing officer (IRO) service has resulted in reduced caseloads and has improved IROs' oversight of care planning, which ensures that children's plans progress. There is a particularly strong system to ensure timely permanence. IROs provide clarity about whether they endorse the

local authority plan, but review records are not always clear about timescales for implementing contingency plans to avoid drift and delay. IROs escalate any concerns to managers, but the effectiveness of this is insufficiently evidenced in recording and tracking systems.

24. Direct work with children in care is a real strength and area of excellence. Social workers know their children well and clearly articulate the child's needs and plans. Children are seen regularly and encouraged to participate in care planning meetings and reviews wherever possible. Children's views are recorded well, and the lived experiences of even very young children are captured in the records. Children are helped to understand their rights, and have access to advocacy where required. Children's and care leavers' achievements are celebrated. Senior leaders are ambitious for their future. VOICE is an active child in care council, which ensures that the views of young people are heard. Senior leaders have been responsive to the input of care leavers and children in care. For example, they have developed the care leaver lounge, which provides a safe place to meet, mentoring support and 'Leavers Lounge' events. Events include well-being sessions, music club, financial advice and pamper sessions.
25. Since the last inspection, the responses when children go missing from care or home have improved significantly. Children are safeguarded effectively. Return home interviews occur and inform future safety planning. Practitioners take time to explore with children why they run away and take proportionate and appropriate follow-up action to prevent further incidents. As a consequence, the number of repeat missing episodes has reduced.
26. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive very sensitive and effective responses to their needs. They are well supported, and their needs are understood. For example, most children are deliberately placed out of the area, with good care planning and visiting to ensure that their cultural and community inclusion needs are met. Meaningful and regular visits by social workers mean that the children remain connected to the local authority.
27. A very strong focus on promoting and sustaining the health needs of children in care results in their health needs being very well met and tracked through care planning meetings, plans and reviews. There is a particularly strong focus on the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people. Child and adolescent mental health workers are accessible, providing guidance to carers and workers on how best to meet children's emotional needs and improve their well-being. When additional support is required, children in care have access to highly responsive services, both in-house and through individually commissioned services. Strength and difficulties questionnaires are completed for some children, but are not utilised beyond a score in plans

and reviews. This is a missed opportunity to understand children's emotional needs even better.

28. There have been significant developments to the virtual school in the last 18 months. This has resulted in clear improvements. The restructured team, which is led effectively by the virtual school headteacher, provides both support and challenge for school leaders. Schools speak positively about the quality of training received. This has resulted in improved consistency in the timeliness and quality of personal education plans. However, some targets are not yet specific enough to help pupils make strong progress. Outcomes are broadly similar to those seen for children in care nationally. Children have access to a range of fun activities outside school, such as horse riding, membership of youth groups and participation in sport.
29. Stability and permanence for children are a real strength. Careful consideration is given to matching children to the appropriate carers. Children are supported to remain in long-term placements that meet their needs well. Children will only move when it is in line with care planning and in their best interests. Wherever possible, brothers and sisters remain together, and safe and regular contact with family members is facilitated.
30. Permanence is considered through reviews, and regular and detailed dialogue takes place with carers and children through visits and regular care planning meetings. Children in long-term foster placements are formally matched so they have security in their long-term placement with carers. Children who are placed out of area receive regular and purposeful contact and visits from their social worker. Social workers communicate and engage well with care staff in residential care to ensure that placements meet children's needs to a high standard.
31. Connected carers are well supported, and there is very good engagement between the children's social worker and the foster carers' social worker. Children are supported to stay with family carers, and permanence options via special guardianship orders (SGOs) are considered. For a very small number of children, there is a delay in progressing the final SGO plans. These children are not affected by this, as they are placed with the family carer, but it does result in delay in securing confirmation of permanence.
32. Life-story work is a strength and area of exceptional practice. It is not seen as a 'one off' piece of work, but is continually revisited throughout a child's life and at key developmental stages. Dedicated and appropriately trained therapeutic practitioners work directly with some children. They provide training to benchmark 'what good looks like'. They also run weekly clinics to support social workers to increase their confidence in helping children to understand and capture their memories

and journey. Memory boxes are routinely collated by foster carers, which ensures photos are collected to capture important events and people for children in care. Life-story work is collated to help babies and young children to understand how and why decisions were taken. Effective direct work with older children helps them to understand why they are in care and to plan for their futures.

33. A positive change to in-house marketing is ensuring active recruitment is taking place for both foster and adoptive carers. Assessments of foster carers are timely, detailed and analytical. The preparation and training of prospective foster carers is thorough and enables them to have an insightful understanding of the complexities surrounding the fostering task. The fostering panel is appropriately challenging and highly effective, providing a strong quality assurance function. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with clear qualifying determinations.
34. Children are considered for adoption at the earliest opportunity and receive timely permanence through adoption. Adoption assessments are timely, concise and analytical. They give an accurate reflection of adopters' strengths and vulnerabilities, enabling effective matching to take place. Fostering for adoption approval for early permanence placements is included in pre-approval training and, if considered, is fully explored in assessments. The adoption panel works effectively and promotes safe, secure and stable placements.
35. Care leavers benefit from stable and enduring relationships with their personal advisers. Personal advisers know their young people very well and are fully engaged in planning for young people's move to independence. Young people are seen regularly and in accordance with need. They told inspectors that their personal advisers were highly responsive and supportive. High but realistic aspirations for care leavers result in growing confidence among young people. Care leavers continue to be actively supported beyond 21 years of age where needed.
36. Pathway plans are completed with young people and their views are incorporated and influence planning. The disabilities transition worker has developed a new format which is more accessible, but the impact of this cannot be evaluated as it has not yet been rolled out. Most care leavers have copies of key documents, including the local offer, so that they are supported to understand their rights and entitlements. Not all young people have copies of their health information to help them understand their health history.
37. Young people receive support to access employment, education and training that maximise their work opportunities. Care leavers benefit from additional group activities that develop their skills and provide social

opportunities, such as a residential driving course. A range of accommodation is available, and the local authority actively seeks feedback from young people about the quality of this. Care leavers, including disabled young people, benefit from staying put and the continuity of care this offers them into adulthood.

## **The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families is: outstanding**

38. Senior leaders have a clear and transformative vision for services to sustainably improve the lives of vulnerable children and their families in Telford and Wrekin. Members and senior officers work together successfully to deliver this ambitious agenda to improve services, which has been implemented and embedded by committed and skilled social workers and managers. More mature and creative approaches are being generated at all levels to work effectively with families and improve children's life chances and outcomes.
39. Leaders are having a very positive impact across the service. Strategic planning is exceptional. A strong focus on building resilience through programmes based on community assets ensures that resources are effectively targeted to where they are needed most. As a result, the local authority is future-proofing sustainable services to support children and families to give them better life chances.
40. Strong corporate commitment to prioritising children's social care has enabled the service to develop and improve. Senior leaders understand the strengths and priorities, holding officers to account. Leaders, managers and social workers take corporate parenting very seriously and are highly ambitious for children in care and care leavers. Children in care and care leavers are cared for and they are cared about. Children in care and care leavers receive an outstanding service, supported by strong fostering and adoption services and a virtual school that advocates strongly for children.
41. The senior management team and frontline managers are highly visible and effective, and this has created strong foundations to develop and sustain good social work practice. This is making a significant difference to the lives of children and their families in Telford and Wrekin. Social workers and other support staff are valued and invested in as the most precious resource for vulnerable children and families. This is paying dividends, meaning that social workers are very well supported to work with families to achieve positive change. Staff value the co-productive management approach to problemsolving and professional autonomy within a practice structure supported by a clear practice model.

42. A real strength is that social workers and other support staff benefit from a very strong learning culture. Examples include reflective group supervision, learning from external associates with expertise, investment in a range of quality training and development and building expert capacity within teams. Senior leaders know that their recently strengthened approach to audit needs to be further embedded to ensure consistency. Audits are beginning to include managers and social workers at all levels, which offers an additional learning opportunity to reflect on and improve practice. The social work practice model is well embedded, enabling a strength and relationship-based culture of practice that is benefiting children and families.
43. The sufficiency strategy provides clear analysis, which enables the service to plan effectively for future demands and is aligned with other strategies to support children and families. A range of interventions have been developed to strengthen services and respond to changing demand. Services support young people effectively and enable parents to improve their parenting and the lives of children. These include Strengthening Families, Family Solutions, the CATE team, family group conferences, and a range of commissioned services, including community assets such as a company set up by two care leavers to train and mentor children in care and care leavers and the Telford after-care team (a community-interest company run by ex-service users).
44. Children and young people are listened to both individually in relation to their unique lives and also to influence and improve services. A range of consultation has taken place with children to inform service development and understand their experience of the service. It is a strength that safeguarding work is informed by more than 40 children's safeguarding boards, run in schools with children across the borough, together with an annual children and families conference to ensure that children's voices are represented. Both the children in care and care leavers council meet regularly and their views have a clear influence on improving services.
45. Leaders and managers know their service well, based on improved performance management information. Areas for development identified in this inspection were already well understood by leaders and built into improvement plans. During this inspection, leaders offered a forensic level of reflection on findings. This stimulated new ideas, which they immediately put into practice as actions to further improve the service.
46. Senior managers have reflected on the need to improve recording of management decisions and acknowledged that improvements are needed in recording management discussions by frontline managers. For a very small number of children experiencing long-term chronic neglect, management checks and balances at key decision-making points need to be strengthened to ensure that oversight and decision-making for these children are robust and clearly recorded.

47. Children benefit from a stable social work workforce, which is highly committed and experienced. Despite this, the local authority continues to strengthen its ability to retain and attract social workers with the implementation of a new career progression and pay structure for social workers. Most staff have manageable workloads, which enables them to do meaningful social work with children. Social workers benefit from one-to-one supervision, which is further enhanced by regular group supervision, focused on a particular case and based on the local authority's systemic practice model. Social workers and other support staff are exceptionally well trained. They access a wide range of development opportunities, which improves their expertise and confidence. Skill capacity is further enhanced by training social workers to train others in specific areas and build capacity and expertise within teams.



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APPENDIX 2

Ofsted Action Plan<sup>1</sup>

Ref	Outcome	Action	Success Measure	Workstream	Date Due	Status: what is the progress on the action?	Performance: is the action making a difference?
	Management decisions are clearly recorded so the rationale for decisions is clear and social workers understand expectations and timescales for action.	Improve recording of key management decision points, e.g. where children are experiencing chronic neglect	Case learning activity evidences clearly recorded management oversight leading to more timely action where children are experiencing neglect.	CPAG PAG Pre-proceedings Group	31.12.20	% complete	Fewer children on CP plans for neglect for 12 months+
		Record management decision when timescales for enquiries or other actions need to be extended	Rationale for decisions is clearly visible on case recordings Clear timescales lead to more timely intervention and less drift for children and young people	CPAG PAG proceedings Group	31.12.20	RAG rating	Improved scoring for management oversight and decision making on practice learning audit activity
		Consider how POD reflective discussions can be better linked to supervision and how we can report on this	Supervision notes reflect the impact of POD discussions on case management	Forms group	31.12.20		increased proportion of pre-proceedings

<sup>1</sup> Extract from Children’s & Family Services Improvement Plan 20/21

Ref	Outcome	Action	Success Measure	Workstream	Date Due	Status: what is the progress on the action?	Performance: is the action making a difference?
		Add clear management oversight to system where children have been subject to CP plan for 6 months	Child protection plans progress in a timely manner and children and young people are able to live more safely at home.	CPAG	31.12.20		which are concluded within 16 weeks Increased proportion of pre-proceedings which are effective in diverting from Court.
		Improve note taking at panels and appropriate meetings to ensure rationale is clear and actions given timescales - LPMs, Legal Meetings, etc	Rationale for decisions is clear and actions are progressed in a timely manner. This leads to reduction in drift and delay for children and young people	Pre-proceedings and PLO Group	30.09.20		Increased proportion of PLO cases concluded within 26 weeks.
		Ensure management oversight and rationale is recorded where Letter Before Proceedings is no longer going forward	Plans for children and young people are more clear, and families are not subjected to legal intervention where this is no longer needed.	Pre-proceedings and PLO Group	31.12.20		
		Improve decision making regarding status of children who are living outside of their families and not	Children living outside their families have a clear legal status according to their level of need	CPAG QA meetings	31.12.20		

Ref	Outcome	Action	Success Measure	Workstream	Date Due	Status: what is the progress on the action?	Performance: is the action making a difference?
		looked after, and ensure rationale is recorded during their developing journeys. Set up system for regularly reviewing their circumstances					
		Develop ADM decision form to rescind placement orders to enable clear recording and reporting	Children are not kept subject to placement orders unnecessarily and alternative arrangements for permanence are made without delay.	CiC/ Permanence Action Group	31.07.20		Regular audits of children who are living outside of their immediate families evidence that these considerations are being made.



