

Children's Services

Ofsted ILACS Action Plan

March 2020

Updated December 2020

(Inspection date 11th to 22nd November 2019)

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council



Introduction

In November 2019, Ofsted carried out a comprehensive inspection of children's social care services in Solihull. This was conducted under the framework for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.

The overall judgement was that services in Solihull require improvement to be good. The individual service judgements were as follows.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement
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	Requires improvement

This action plan will be overseen primarily by the Director of Children's Services and the Directorate Leadership Team, in conjunction with Corporate Leaders. The delivery, accountability, monitoring and audit will be a routine feature of our Children's Strategic Directorate meetings, as well as our operational Leadership Meetings, throughout Children's Services. The Cabinet Member will be updated at his regular briefing sessions and the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Board will receive progress reports at a frequency to be agreed with the Chairperson.

It is to be noted that where activities are identified as completed within the action plan, they will still be subject to our routine monitoring processes to ensure ongoing implementation and continuous development.

Target dates are still subject to review given on-going impact of Covid.

Actions arising from Ofsted recommendations

Ofsted recommendation 1

Quality assurance and audit arrangements to improve practice so that leaders are aware of strengths and weaknesses

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Explore alternative audit processes best practice options (including evidencing impact of audit process – learning loop, and escalation processes) and incorporate themed and other audits into quality assurance processes	Head of Service Safeguards	November 2020	Meetings/visit held with other LA's Formulated revised model for discussion at Directorate and strategic meeting in the autumn. Consultation with staff completed. Finalised proposals agreed by SLT (Senior Leadership Team)
Launch new process, guidance and reporting frameworks	Head of Service Safeguards	December 2020 (testing) Jan 2021 service wide implementation	As noted above, SLT agreement in advance of implementation of new process. Was intended to fully launch across the service in Nov 2020. However, in light of the expected impact of the November 4 week lockdown it has been agreed to test the new process with a reduced number of staff during Nov/Dec with a view to service wide implementation in the new year
Quality Assurance – review of process and accelerate escalation activity, inclusive of team and individual performance and reflective practice supervision processes	Head of Service Safeguards	December 2020 (testing) Jan 2021 service wide implementation	Please see above and escalation process discussed within some teams e.g. Independent Reviewing Officers
Review and refresh of existing case audit process to evidence outcomes for children and families as well as adherence to quality standards	Head of Service Safeguards	December 2020 (testing) Jan 2021 service wide implementation	Decision to pause audit activity due to COVID-19 Given the above developments will reactivate following

			agreement at strategic meetings Consideration of likely impact of Nov 2020 4 week lockdown has resulted in decision to scale back intended implementation in November – with service wide implementation in Jan 2021
Learning from audits is shared across the Service	Head of Service Safeguards	Feb 2021	Will be part of revised process
Develop and revise data sets in children's services	Head of Service Safeguards	In progress	Work is under way within the service and our performance management team utilising the new reporting mechanisms within the new IT system Liquid Logic. Agreement has been reached to develop an internal management information reporting tool and the first iteration of this will be available December

Expected Outcomes

- Revised audit process in place and compliance levels good.
- Learning from audits influence action plans to improve practice.
- Escalation processes are activated in a timely way – to avoid drift and delay.
- Analysis of data influences action plans to improve practice, team and individual performance.
- Learning is disseminated across the Directorate.

Ofsted recommendation 2

The timeliness of strategy meetings and inclusion of all relevant partners, including the Police

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Review all processes relevant to strategy meetings (including MACE – Multi-Agency Child Exploitation). This is to include:- a) escalation procedure to ensure senior managers are notified of exceptions, along with the Safeguarding Partnership b) escalation procedure to ensure notification and exception reporting to partner organisations	Head of Service Family Support	November 2020	Processes have been reviewed and changes implemented. Specialist from SARC now attend all Strategy discussions where sexual exploitation or abuse is suspected (Sexual Assault Referral Centre). Escalation procedure has been implemented Spring 2020. Meeting with a senior police officer to review timeliness of police response has been completed and ongoing. A review of Strategy meeting and MACE processes has been completed and is ongoing
Ensure that all strategy discussions take place in a timely way – process to be drawn up to reflect expectations, implemented and monitored, with reporting through the senior leadership meetings	Head of Service Family Support	Ongoing	Children services have continued to monitor timescales for Strategy discussion. Processes to reflect expectations have been drafted and in place. Action plan developed and planned review. Audit of strategy discussion between May – July completed. Findings shared with all relevant managers and action plan drafted. Next audit to take place in January 2021 and to review progress.
In cases where any delay has been identified (internal or external) escalation	Head of Service	Ongoing	Escalation procedure has been

policies to be followed e.g. police and any other organisation, and senior managers to be notified	Family Support		implemented spring 2020. Evidence that this is being implemented will be reviewed
Review recent cases where delay in holding strategy meetings have been identified to ensure lessons are learned and there is no repetition Learning from this review to be built into the Quality assurance framework.	Head of Service Family Support	Completed January 2021	Meeting with Detective Inspector has taken place to review cases where delay was identified. To be reviewed and taken forward to improve and develop practice
Quality assurance/audit strategy monitoring discussion to ensure relevant practitioners have been involved in strategy discussion	Head of Service Family Support	January 2021	Audit March 2020 – completed Audit May / July 2020 – completed. Next audit scheduled to take place in January 2021
Ensure Family Support and Child Protection managers on duty attend Strategy meetings within MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) – exception reporting	Head of Service Family Support	Completed	Included as part of the new process and is taking place. Practice discussions to improve participation are ongoing

Expected Outcomes

- MASH strategy discussions will be held in a timely way with all relevant professionals contributing to the decision making process. Any exceptions will be escalated in a timely way, according to procedure.
- All relevant information will be presented by our partner agencies and shared as part of the strategy discussion.
- Increase effectiveness and timeliness of intervention.
- Seamless transfer of responsibilities from MASH to the relevant Social Care team.

Ofsted recommendation 3

The practice and impact of “threshold” visits on children and families should be reviewed

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Audit of threshold visits completed and report to be presented to senior managers	Head of Service Family Support	In progress	Audit March 2020 – completed Audit June / July 2020 —outstanding and to be completed by the 31.12.20
Dip sample audit of threshold visits to review impact of visits on the timeliness of response and potential need for further intervention	Head of Service Family Support	Quarterly	Audit March 2020 – completed Audit June / July 2020 – as noted above

Expected Outcomes

- All children and families will have received a timely and proportionate response to identified needs and concerns.
- The Local Authority will continue to have a good understanding of the purpose and impact of threshold visits on the decision making process.
- The Local Authority will be satisfied that the use of threshold visits continues to be justified and proportionate and is not contributing to delayed intervention to children and families.
- Children and families will only be subject to an assessment if they need to be.

Ofsted recommendation 4

The offer and take up and analysis of return home interviews following episodes of going missing.

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Review of current specification to ensure it clearly reflects needs/service requirements and the increased knowledge and information around criminal and sexual exploitation as well as social work processes	Head of Service Children's Commissioning	Completed	We will review this again in light of learning during Covid when we have explored potential for telephone/virtual interviews. To be completed by end of September 2020. Contract extension agreed, the service specification will be updated to reflect a blended model for the interviews
The timeliness of referrals into the Local Authority as well as to the provider has been reviewed and benchmarked with robust monitoring, reporting and escalation processes in place. This will feed into our revised quality assurance processes identified in recommendation 1 of this Action Plan with learning escalated, disseminated, and addressed at all levels of the organisation e.g. strategic, operational and individual to ensure lessons are learned and practice is developed	Heads of Service Safeguards and Children's Commissioning	In progress	This is being reviewed across the service
Review and streamline internal processes for managing missing children including notifying provider.	Head of Service Safeguards	Completed	Monthly meetings with the provider and recovery plan in place
This to include exploring the potential of Liquid Logic to support more effective and efficient communication with the provider regarding missing episodes	Principal Social Worker	Ongoing	Exploring the new IT system Liquid Logic is ongoing
Work collaboratively with the provider to develop more innovative and creative ways to engage with young people to increase the uptake of missing interviews	Heads of Service Safeguards and Children's Commissioning	Completed	Unannounced visits prior to restrictions elicited positive engagement. Provider liaising with appropriate professionals to further engage with those who decline an interview. Partnership work in place with YOT (Youth Offending Team) to

			<p>identify those receiving a service.</p> <p>All interviewers trained in engagement strategies – March 2020. Increased engagement and comprehensive reports subsequently written. Reports provided to senior leadership team.</p>
<p>Develop different ways to engage and seek feedback from young people who have experienced the service to identify learning and where practice can be improved</p>	<p>Missing and Exploitation Team Manager, supported by the Commissioning Officer</p>	<p>In progress</p>	<p>Evidence indicates young people are increasingly more likely to engage via telephone.</p> <p>Direct feedback from young people has been shared by provider and reported via SLT</p>
<p>Monthly contract monitoring to ensure compliance with the service specification and improved performance, once established this may become quarterly</p>	<p>Head of Service Children's Commissioning</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Monthly review meetings undertaken with provider beginning April 20. Provider complying with service specification.</p> <p>Uptake of interviews increasing each month; 67%, 83%, 92% respectively.</p> <p>Provider is reviewing and quality assuring reports. Quarterly meetings re-established.</p> <p>Performance continues to be good.</p> <p>In Qrt 2 79% of referrals resulted in an interview, 83% for those with 1 missing episode, 70% with those with 2 or more missing episodes</p>
<p>Monthly review of cumulative data reports to inform detailed analysis of missing episodes to further develop targeted support, especially for those young people who have repeated missing episodes, shared with the commissioner</p>	<p>Missing and Exploitation Team Manager with the Provider</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Identify external placement providers where missing episodes are more prevalent, Quality assurance visit to ensure provider has appropriate procedures in place and is following</p>	<p>Head of Service Children's Commissioning</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>Procedure in place. Quarterly data provides oversight of external placements with multiple missing</p>

the Solihull process and actions are in place to prevent repeat missing episodes			episodes. Provider to detail those external placements hindering access to YP. QA visits currently on hold, being taken forward virtually with identified providers
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Expected Outcomes

- More timely referrals to provider to enable increased likelihood of interviews taking place within 72 hours.
- Children and young people who go missing will be engaged with and have a return home interview where they can share concerns and issues and be supported with strategies to prevent further missing episodes, as well as identify safeguarding issues including exploitation.
- Social workers receive a report of issues and recommendations identified at the interview to support their ongoing care planning with the individual young person.
- An improved and shared understanding based on data analysis that informs practice development and enables effective targeted support to be provided for the young person.
- An increased proportion of children and young people who go missing will have a return home interview.

Ofsted recommendation 5

The clarity of children in need and child protection plans so that parents and carers can more readily understand what is expected of them and why.

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Ensure that all Child in Need and Child Protection plans are written in a way that is easily understood by parents	Heads of Service Safeguards and Family Support	Completed	Ongoing and as part of Audit Activity identified in recommendation 1
This will be audited through seeking service user feedback on a routine basis and is part of our revised Audit and Quality Assurance processes as identified in recommendation 1 of this Action Plan	Heads of Service Safeguards and Family Support	In progress	Ongoing
Implement revised Signs of Safety guidance into Liquid Logic which will support our practice and engagement with children, parents/carers	Head of Service Safeguards and Principal Social Worker	Completed	New Signs of Safety forms in Liquid Logic being used across the service
Practice workshops with relevant professionals to develop and strengthen practice will be held regularly	Head of Service Safeguards and Principal Social Worker	December 2020	Signs of Safety Leads within Independent Reviewing Officer service convene practice meetings with the group
Audits of Child in Need and Child Protection Plans will be built into our revised audit and monitoring processes	Head of Service Safeguards	December 2020	Please have regard to recommendation 1

Expected Outcomes

- All plans will be written to ensure that they are easily understood by parents and carers, and they are fully aware of what is required of them.
- Engagement with parents and carers is enhanced, to improve outcomes for children.

Ofsted recommendation 6

The timeliness of reviews of children in need of services at level 2 in the disabled children's team

Action	Who	By when	Progress
The processes and capacity of the Children's Disabilities Team will be reviewed	Head of Service Safeguards	Dec 2020	Ongoing. A threshold document has been agreed by SLT. This will be implemented following some final adjustments to wording
The backlog of and timeliness of reviews has been cleared and review timescales met	Head of Service Safeguards	Completed	Significant progress has been made with the backlog of assessment requests. This has been prioritised. All Level 2 cases reviewed, allocated and initial assessments completed
Implement plan to review existing Level 2 Children in Need of services to ensure needs continue to be met	Head of Service Safeguards	Completed	Plan implemented to ensure regular review of level 2 cases at six monthly intervals. Please see above
Training and development through team and individual supervision embed the Family Support Model to support the delivery of services to children with disabilities	Head of Service Safeguards and Principal Social Worker	February 2020	Embedding the changes in the structure and service delivery model within Childrens Disabilities Team
Implement finalised threshold document	Head of Service Safeguards and Principal Social Worker	November 2020 December 2020	Draft documents completed. Discussed at a recent senior leadership meeting and agreed. Launch date to be agreed

Expected Outcomes

- All children supported at Level 2 (ie without the need for Family Support or Social Work intervention) have their needs reviewed on at least an annual basis to ensure support continues to be appropriate.

Expected Outcomes

- Backlog of reviews is cleared.

Ofsted recommendation 7

Levels of awareness and access for connected carers to training opportunities that will enhance their skills in caring for children and in strengthening placements.

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Ensure clear communication with all connected carers of the existing offer	Head of Service Looked After Children	All carers have been updated and this communication will be on-going	Completed in April and Foster Carer handbook updated and sent out June 2020
Promote the existing opportunities for e learning model, and monitoring access and engagement	Head of Service Looked After Children	Initial promotion complete. To be repeated (see below)	E Learning training models continue to be supported
Quality assurance and monitoring reports to senior managers to monitor access to and take up of training – quarterly	Head of Service Looked After Children	In progress	Performance score card for placement being developed and data for training is now available
Develop a business case for further support and training in respect of other permanency options e.g. Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)	Head of Service Looked After Children	In progress	Permanency Hub has now been developed to progress SGO's as permanency options for children where appropriate
Triangulate direct feedback from carers through audit and quality assurance of the training offer to identify areas for development and barriers to access	Head of Service Looked After Children	In progress	This needs to be developed further. Covid has impacted on the offer of face to face training

Expected Outcomes

- All carers have access to suitable and informative training dependent upon their requirements and other commitments.
- Connected Carers and Mainstream Carers already have equal access, and take up rates will be increased.
- All our carers would be highly trained and feel appropriately supported in caring for children.
- Carers would feel supported to consider other permanency options (i.e. SGO) for children if appropriate.

Ofsted recommendation 8

Timely progress in the making of special guardianship orders where these are set out as the plan for permanence

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Review Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) financial policy	Head of Service Looked After Children	In progress	Financial policy has been updated awaiting confirmation and sign off
Develop a business case for dedicated resource to facilitate/timely SGO arrangements	Head of Service Looked After Children	Completed	Permanency Hub based within the Fostering Service has now been set up. SGO assessments are being progressed
Liaison with judiciary about pathways to support SGO process to remove any avoidable delays	Heads of Service Family Support and Looked After Children	In progress	Due to Covid impacting upon the legal process this has not been able to be progressed at the pace needed. However, this is being developed further with the judiciary and with our internal legal team, with the expectation that courts dates will be released by HMCTS in the new year
Permanency planning to be considered throughout children services intervention including private law orders. Review and embed within our current process and procedures, through training and development, team and individual supervision	Heads of Service Safeguards, Family Support and Looked After Children	In progress	This work is being developed alongside the Permanency Hub. Once the updated SGO financial policy has been agreed, training will be offered to workers
Timeliness and service user feed-back, will be monitored and audited through our revised quality assurance framework. This is identified within the initial recommendation of this Action Plan	Heads of Service Safeguards, Family Support and Looked After Children	In progress	To be developed as part of recommendation 1

Expected Outcomes

- All children who are currently looked after but who could be cared for appropriately without the need for statutory intervention, would have permanency with their current connected person or mainstream foster carers under a private law order.
- Those carers would have access to training and support should they need this post order being made. The carers would have access to continued financial support at the appropriate level.

Ofsted recommendation 9

Consideration of the need for homeless 16 and 17 year olds to be cared for, and to be made aware of that option, by the local authority.

Action	Who	By when	Progress
There is a clear pathway for young people to access independent support and advice when requiring/needing accommodation	Heads of Service Family Support and Children's Commissioning	Ongoing	Process drafted and being implemented
An information pack will be developed to advise young people of their rights and benefits of being accommodated in the care of the Local Authority	Head of Service Family Support	November 2020	Ongoing
Quality Assurance and review to ensure compliance and impact inclusive of young people's feedback. This to form part of the audit and monitoring processes which is identified within recommendation 1 of this Action Plan	Heads of Service Family Support and Safeguards	Ongoing	All S17 placement for 16/17 year olds have been reviewed and changes implemented
Review framework for support for 16-17 years old with Solihull Housing Group	Head of Service Family Support	Completed	Joint protocol has been updated and shared with legal for final sign off before roll out in January 2021 alongside briefing session for all practitioners. Shared data base between children services and St.Basil's is in place and to be reviewed monthly. Strategic Board to meet quarterly
Evidence on file that all of the above has been completed	Head of Service Family Support	Ongoing	Ongoing

Expected Outcomes

- Young person will make an informed decision and understand the impact of their decision.
- Young person who does not chose or require to be accommodated in the care of the Local Authority will continue to receive the right support at the right time.
- Clear evidence on the children's case file that all of the above has been considered and discussed with the young person and his/her family.
- Service user feedback to develop service provision and outcomes.

Ofsted recommendation 10

The focus on and response to private fostering arrangements

Action	Who	By when	Progress
Awareness raising activity plan to be developed across all partners	Head of Service Looked After Children	Completed	Continued Awareness raising has taken place across social media platforms and within the partner agencies
A training and awareness raising programme across social care	Head of Service Looked After Children	In progress	Training has not taken place due to Covid. However awareness raising has taken place via email and social media platforms
Quality assurance and reporting arrangements to the Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership (LSCP) to be implemented	Heads of Service Looked After Children and Safeguards	In progress	Report was due to be presented to the LSCP in May, however due to Covid this meeting was postponed. A report will be presented in due course
Private fostering arrangements are identified at the front door and appropriate arrangements put in place. Review and embed within our current process and procedures, through training and development, team and individual supervision	Head of Service Family Support	In progress	Further Awareness raising has taken place and consultation is available. Further embedding within procedures in progress
Audit and monitor increased development and use of private fostering arrangements, which will include feedback from partners and other service users. This will form a part of our revised audit and quality assurance framework which is outlined within the initial recommendation of this Action Plan	Heads of Service Safeguards, Family Support and Looked After Children	In progress	Being developed as part of the QA process as identified within recommendation 1

Expected Outcomes

- Solihull will have an increase in Private Fostering Arrangements that are known, assessed and supported appropriately.
- All professionals in Solihull will be aware of Private Fostering and know how to report this to Children's Services