



# Agenda Item Introduction

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date	<b>7 MARCH 2024</b>
Topic	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFSTED REPORT</b>

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## Background

1. The Ofsted report that was published on 18 December 2023 determined that the Isle of Wight Council's services for children in need have been rated "Good" following a four-day inspection.
2. The judgement of 'the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' was graded as 'requires improvement to be good'.

## Focus for Scrutiny

3. Have the areas that were highlighted for improvement from the previous inspection been improved?
4. What are the key recommendations for improvement resulting from the recent Ofsted inspection?
5. What plans are in place to address those recommendations and how will they be monitored?
6. What are the main areas scrutiny should focus on in its upcoming meetings to ensure that improvements are made?

## Document(s) Attached

7. Appendix 1 – IWC Ofsted Report Oct23.
8. Appendix 2 – Draft Ofsted Action Plan

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# Scrutiny Committee Report

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date	<b>7 MARCH 2024</b>
Title	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICE'S OFSTED REPORT AND ACTION PLAN</b>
Report of	<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>

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## Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of the Isle of Wight children's services held between 30<sup>th</sup> October and 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023, and to share the draft action plan arising from the inspection.
2. The outcome of the inspection was as follows:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good.
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

3. In addition to many areas of strength, Ofsted identified some specific areas for improvement. These are:
  - 3.1 The routine inclusion by the local authority of partner agencies in child protection strategy discussions and assessments.
  - 3.2 The opportunities for the voices of children and care leavers to be heard at a corporate level.

### 3.3 The quality of oversight and monitoring of:

- 3.3.1 the pre-proceedings process in the Public Law Outline (PLO)
- 3.3.2 permanence for children
- 3.3.3 private fostering

### 3.4 Caseloads in the children's assessment and safeguarding teams

4. The local authority is required to produce an action plan in response to the findings of the inspection, detailing where service improvements will be made, and how progress will be monitored. This action plan must be submitted to Ofsted by 27<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The draft action plan has been considered by the children's services departmental management team and is now being presented for discussion prior to being finalised for submission to Ofsted.

## Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- 5. notes the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of children's services;
- 6. reviews and provides feedback on the draft action plan;
- 7. supports the mechanism for monitoring progress against the measures included within the plan so that accountability for progress in delivering excellent services for children is maintained at the highest level.

## Background

### 8. Strengths identified by Ofsted included:

- 8.1 Effective Early Help Service Provision and Support. Evidence was found of the investment in and commitment to early help services, ensuring families have access to appropriate support at an early stage. Evidence was also seen which demonstrated the availability of various services during times of crisis for families, including evidence that we undertake comprehensive child protection enquiries, and provide effective support for children at risk outside the home.
- 8.2 Comprehensive Assessments and Direct Engagement. This area focuses on there being evidence of comprehensive assessments for most children, demonstrating a clear understanding of their needs. Additionally, direct work evidenced that methods are used to understand children's wishes and views better, enhancing the effectiveness of work done with them.
- 8.3 Strengthening Parenting Capacity and Education Support. Efforts are made to strengthen parenting capacity through successful programmes, which are reducing risks and supporting children to remain safely at home. Additionally, there is effective support for children who are missing from, or not in full time education.

- 8.4 Consistent Care, Recognition, and Development. This area highlights the consistent provision of good support and care from social workers and foster carers. It also includes the recognition of children's achievements through regular events and ceremonies. The inspection noted improvements in personal education plans and the allocation of personal advisors at age 16 which provides greater opportunity for meaningful relationships to be built at this critical stage in the life of a cared for young person. It was further recognised that there is a focus on workforce development, with efforts to increase and develop the workforce to ensure better support can be consistently provided for children and families.
- 8.5 Resilient and Adaptable Senior Leaders. Senior leaders have demonstrated resilience and adaptability in their responses. They have shown the ability to navigate challenges effectively and adjust strategies as needed to address the evolving needs of children and families under their care.
- 8.6 Informed and Supportive Corporate and Political Leaders. Corporate and political leaders are well-informed and supportive of initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of children and families. They are actively involved in decision-making processes and demonstrate a commitment to providing the necessary resources and support, to drive positive outcomes.
9. The actions being taken to address the areas for improvement identified in 1.3 above include the following:
- 9.1 The routine inclusion by the local authority of partner agencies in child protection strategy discussions and assessments. Work is being undertaken with our partner agencies including safeguarding leads. This work is being delivered through the Local Safeguarding Partnership and protocols are in place to ensure invitation to and attendance of representatives at these meetings in which important decisions are made. A themed practice audit and dip sampling will enable us to evidence an increase in partners' attendance at these meetings and going forward, this will be form part of our performance monitoring with operational managers from the various agencies that make up the safeguarding partnership.
- 9.2 The opportunities for the voices of children and care leavers to be heard at a corporate level. Work has begun to refresh our corporate parenting board action plan. This has now been updated to include more opportunities for participation. The findings, actions, and impact on improvements from the two separate children in care and care leavers Bright Spot surveys are reported into the corporate parenting board. Corporate parents are offered the opportunity to meet with children in care and care leavers. These opportunities include the STAR Awards, Come Dine with Us, social activities, and Have Your Say Weeks. Corporate parents are also invited to the Youth Council and the Hearing Young People's Experiences group.
- 9.3 The quality of oversight and monitoring of the pre-proceedings process in the Public Law Outline (PLO). A new process has been implemented for members of the senior management team to track the quality of practice and provide oversight and monitoring of the timeliness of the pre-proceedings process.

Systems for the review of all pre-proceedings activity are being refreshed to ensure there is line management accountability and service manager oversight for all children who are subject of this process. This monthly review is now recorded on a child's file demonstrating oversight of progress. PLO performance is reported through to the children's management team regularly.

- 9.4 The quality of oversight and monitoring of permanence for children. Every child in care now has their legal permanence status tracked and progressed by the service manager. From March 2024, a monthly care planning meeting will be held to review the progress of permanence planning for each of our cared for children. Through this mechanism, opportunity is provided to consider if there is any drift or delay in the progression towards permanence for each child. This means steps can be taken to address any areas of practice which might be contributing to delays in outcomes being achieved for children in a timely manner. The outcome of these discussions will be recorded on our electronic files.
- 9.5 The quality of oversight and monitoring of private fostering. Guidance has been reissued to all front-line staff, on the assessment and management of private fostering arrangements. A flow chart has been developed to support staff and managers in following processes. These are available to all staff and can be located within the Children's Toolkit. Workshops have been provided to managers to support a consistency in approach to responding to referrals, indicating a child may be living in a private fostering arrangement. Case file audits were undertaken to ensure those children who had been identified as potentially living in privately fostering arrangements, had been appropriately assessed and that any plans arising were of good quality. Any newly identified private fostering arrangements are now reported through to senior managers in the performance meetings in order to ensure senior management oversight of any arrangements. An e-learning training package is being developed for all staff and will be delivered this spring.
- 9.6 Caseloads in the children's assessment and safeguarding teams. There is weekly oversight of caseloads by service managers. Caseloads have reduced overall due to new staff joining the services allowing work to be more evenly distributed amongst social workers. This continues to be an area of focus for managers and work is planned to ensure caseloads are maintained at the lowest level possible. Service demand is routinely monitored so that reasons are well understood so that strategic responses are put in place to respond to demand wherever possible. Recruitment and retention activity continues to ensure vacancy rates are reduced. The introduction of the enhanced market supplement in 2023 for social workers within frontline teams has proven successful and has led to reduced turnover rates. Recruitment activity in December 2023 has also led to an increase in agency social workers joining the council. The new permanent senior management team have worked at pace with the service managers, to quickly establish the new arrangements for managing the service and those by which we will self-govern and monitor ourselves against performance indicators and other measures to assure ourselves that a relentless focus on high standards of practice continues.

10. A self-assessment of all elements of children’s social care provision is currently being undertaken and this will inform a wider action plan. Together with the action plan resulting directly from the inspection, these documents will form the basis of the presentation to Ofsted as part of the annual conversation in July 2024.
11. Defining our ethos. Following staff groups and manager meetings, our new approach to the work we do has started to emerge, which has led to the defining of the Isle of Wight ethos. This approach is bringing a clear sense of direction for the service in the way we will be shaping our service. “Creating Change Together” is the heading under which our new approach to the work of children’s services will be delivered. This defines the way in which we will work with partner agencies including our education colleagues, and most importantly with our families and young people. Whereas previously, the education, special educational needs, access and resources and children’s social care teams all operated separately, reporting into different Assistant Directors in Hampshire, the new senior management team is bringing the directorate together as one cohesive service for the benefit of local children and families. Staff believe there is good potential to improve as an independent children’s service.
12. A new Children and Young People’s Plan is being drafted with consultation planned with children and young people informing the shaping and delivery of the plan. This is being developed and implemented through the Children’s Trust, a multi-agency partnership focussed on safeguarding children and promoting better outcomes.
13. The project overseeing the implementation of the new electronic case management system called Mosaic re-commenced on the Isle of Wight in February 2024, with implementation of the new system anticipated later this year.
14. The leadership team is working to ensure measures are in place for equality and inclusion issues to be considered and effectively responded to as a golden thread throughout all our work.

## **Appendices Attached**

15. Appendix 1: Ofsted report published on 15 December 2024
16. Appendix 2: Draft Ofsted Action Plan, March 2024

## **Background Papers**

17. [Ofsted focused visit to Isle of Wight Children’s Services, July 2021.](#)
18. [Ofsted inspection of children’s social care services, November 2018.](#)

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