

Self-Assessment and Evaluation and the Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1. Background to the Report

- 1.1 Children's Services complete a self-assessment each year as a part of the Sector-Led Improvement (SLI) programme put in place by the South West Region ADCS (Association of Directors of Children's Services). This is subject to peer challenge.
- 1.2 Ofsted introduced a new framework for the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) in January 2018 that requires children's social care services to produce a self-evaluation of social work practice in advance of the *Annual Conversation* (referred to in the ILACS framework as the annual engagement meeting) with Ofsted.
- 1.3 The annual engagement meeting covers:
 - the content of the self-evaluation – what do leaders know about practice and outcomes, and the evidence that supports this
 - the impact of the self-evaluation – what leaders are doing to address weaknesses in practice and maintain or improve good practice, including evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of their actions
 - actions taken in response to previous inspections
 - the local authority's current financial, political and professional practice context
 - the broader issues that affect delivery of children's social care services, for example schools and early years provision
 - the possible scope of a focused visit
 - the approximate timing of the next self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting.

2. Regional SLI peer challenge

- 2.1 The Regional Peer Challenge event took place on 7 December 2018. Devon was grouped with Bristol and with Wiltshire with each Local Authority challenging the self-assessment of another whilst the third observed and provided feedback. The Devon self-assessment was challenged by colleagues from Bristol whilst we in turn challenged the Wiltshire self-assessment.
- 2.2 The challenge to our self-assessment included identifying three areas of strength and three areas for development. Peers from Bristol identified the following:

Strengths

1. Strong strategic vision and sign up leading to huge strategic investment and trusted by corporate centre.
2. Credible, transparent self-assessment. Leadership know themselves.
3. Real pace this year and awareness on sustainability of improvement and aware of areas for further development.

Areas for development

1. Buy in to sustainable and sufficient provision will take work and time.
2. Disconnect between the verbal self-assessment and presentation and the written.
3. Noted the challenge of rurality and scale – questioned whether we are focussed on holding rather than reducing need.

3. Annual Engagement Meeting (Annual Conversation)

- 3.1 Our meeting took place on 31 January 2019 and at the time of preparing this report the final version of the letter from the Regional Director that reflects back to the local authority the points that Ofsted have noted, together with any next steps, has not been received. Ofsted do not publish this letter.
- 3.2 The meeting was a positive one during which the Regional Director remarked that the children's services leadership team 'know their service well'. Subsequent communication confirms that Ofsted "left with a clear sense of the key milestones in the local authority's improvement journey, the challenges that remain, and plans for future improvement."
- 3.3 During the meeting, local authorities are invited to discussed with Ofsted representatives the potential areas of focus if there were to be a Focused Visit in the following year. We have indicated that we believe a focus on children in need services or services for disabled children would be of most support and benefit to our continuing improvement activity.

4. Self-Assessment (Appendix 1)

- 4.1 The South West Region ADCS Self-Assessment includes a summary of key personnel and key documents together with a brief outline of the local demography and progress against areas for improvement identified in the previous years' assessment. The main focus of the document is a self-assessment of Education, Early Help, and SEND provision, with accompanying data. An assessment of social work services was not included in the most recent self-assessment because the introduction of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework placed a new requirement on social work services to produce a self-evaluation of social work practice as a standalone document.

5. Self-evaluation of social work practice (Appendix 2)

- 5.1 With the introduction of the ILACS framework, Ofsted will each year ask local authorities to share a self-evaluation of social work practice with them and meet with their regional representatives to discuss it. This part of the framework is

voluntary but plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work.

- 5.2 The published guidance for the ILACS states “We ask local authorities to share an annual self-evaluation of social work practice with us. This will help us to see whether leaders and managers have a grip on practice and are taking suitable action.”
- 5.3 The guidance indicates that the self-evaluation should draw on existing documentation and activity. It should reflect the local authority’s business as usual so as to avoid additional burden.
- 5.4 Inspectors look at a local authority’s most recent self-evaluation when preparing for the next inspection or focused visit.
- 5.5 The self-evaluation should answer three questions:
 - What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
- 5.6 If a self-evaluation identifies weaknesses in practice and the local authority has credible plans to take clear, appropriate and effective action in response, Ofsted treat this as effective leadership rather than an automatic trigger for an inspection or focused visit.

Darryl Freeman

Head of Children’s Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Children’s Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Appendix 1: South West Region ADCS Self-Assessment

Appendix 2: Devon County Council Self-evaluation of Social Work Practice (updated January 2019)