



**Community and Wellbeing
Scrutiny Committee**
21 September 2023

**Report from the Corporate Director
of Children and Young People**

**Lead Cabinet Member:
Cllr Gwen Grahl**

Outcome of 2023 Ofsted ILACS and current children's social care improvement activity (including current workforce challenges)

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	Ofsted Inspection of Brent Local Authority Children's Services (published April 2023) – https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50213625
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides CWB Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and outlines how practice is being improved based on learning from this inspection. It also outlines current workforce challenges and what is being done to address these.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 CWB Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the 'Good' judgements across all categories.

2.2 CWB Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the actions being taken to address the inspection recommendations and next steps to improve practice.

2.3 CWB Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the activity being taken within the CYP department to address the current workforce challenges as they relate to qualified social workers.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

The February 2023 Ofsted ILACS report of our children and young people services demonstrates a continued journey of improvement and reassurance to our community that a good level of early help, child safeguarding and looked after children support is provided for children and their families. I would like to congratulate all staff who were involved in the inspection and commend them for their work with Brent's children and families. I am confident that the learning from this inspection is leading to improvement actions that will further strengthen Brent's children and young people's services over the coming months and years.

Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

The Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4 is that our babies, children and young people get the best start in life. The Ofsted ILACS report demonstrates the work of Brent CYP to ensure children and families receive the support they need, when they need it. The report highlighted that,

"Brent's family wellbeing centres provide an extensive range of early help for children and families, including intensive targeted family support. Families have access to universal services and specialist help relating to poverty, domestic abuse and emotional health. Early help assessments draw on a wealth of family and professional information. They are detailed and analytical and lead to multi-agency family support plans that help to improve areas of concern".

The Ofsted inspection provided reassurance that children and families were receiving a good service in relation to safeguarding, including older teenagers who are close to adulthood. This evidences the ongoing work of Brent CYP to ensure children and families receive the right support at the earliest possible time.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 ILACS focuses on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:

- to help and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers.

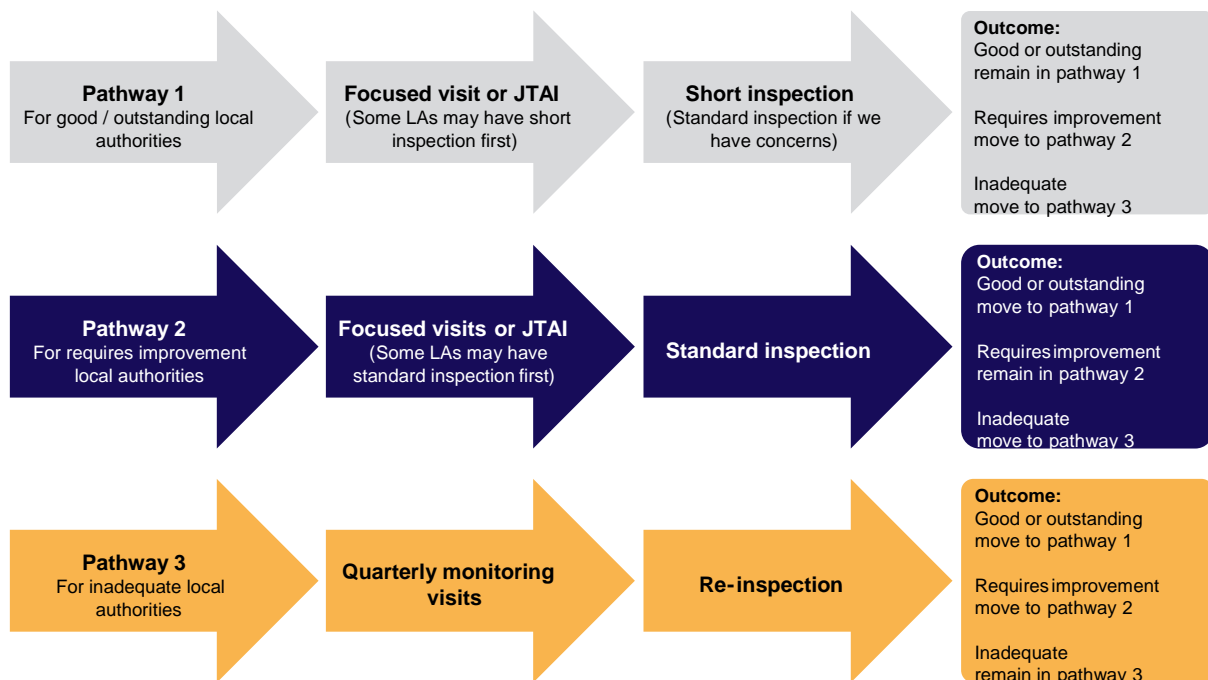
Whilst the framework is primarily focused on social work and the quality of professional practice, the effectiveness of leaders and managers and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people are also evaluated.

3.2.2 ILACS is an inspection ‘system’, introduced in January 2018 aimed at making inspection risk-based and proportionate through more frequent contact tailored to each local authority. It comprises:

- an annual engagement meeting (Brent’s most recent was July 2022) between the local authority and an Ofsted regional representative to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and to inform future engagement
- standard inspections (usually for local authorities judged requires improvement to be good)
- short inspections (for local authorities judged good or outstanding)
- focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children, taking place over 2 days, usually in between standard / short inspections
- monitoring visits for authorities rated ‘inadequate’
- Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI).

Local authorities are also encouraged to participate in activity outside inspection, such as sharing a self-evaluation for discussion at the annual engagement meeting.

3.2.3 The following diagram summarises the three inspection pathways in the ILACS framework. Brent was inspected on Pathway 1, having been graded as ‘Good’ in the previous ILACS inspection in 2018.



- 3.2.4 Brent was informed on Monday 13 February 2023 that a short inspection would be undertaken, commencing with immediate effect, with inspectors on site at the Civic Centre from 20 to 24 February 2023.
- 3.2.5 Ofsted spent time engaging with the local authority in the week preceding the on-site visit, gathering information and intelligence to inform their key lines of enquiry.
- 3.2.6 As this was a short inspection, Ofsted started with the mindset that the local authority is 'good'. In a short inspection, inspectors sought to answer 3 questions:
- Has the quality and impact of practice been maintained?
 - Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have improved?
 - Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have deteriorated?
- 3.2.7 The inspection team tested the validity of Brent's most recent self-evaluation (June 2022) with the main focus on social workers' direct practice with families and the impact on outcomes for children. The inspection involved reading case files and supporting documentation, including evaluating individual children's records that had already been audited by the local authority.
- 3.2.8 The inspection identified many strengths within the local authority and overall found that children in Brent benefit from good quality help, support and care from children's services. They found that children are helped by practitioners who are passionate and committed to improving children's lives and futures. Inspectors saw that there is strong political support for improving services and making positive differences to the lives of children and to their futures. They commented that the Borough Plan is informed by children and members of the community and focuses on what matters most to them. They also found that there are robust governance arrangements providing members and senior leaders with a clear line of sight of children's services and relevant scrutiny by council members of the impact of services for children.
- 3.2.9 The inspection report was published on 11th April 2023. The overall effectiveness of the local authority was judged to have remained 'good' overall:

Judgement	Grade 2018	Grade 2023
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care (and care leavers in 2018)	Outstanding	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers (new judgement area)	--	Good

Overall effectiveness	Good	Good
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See Appendix 1 for the full ILACS report.

3.2.10 The ILACS inspection makes four recommendations for improvement. There is a requirement to submit an action plan setting out how these recommendations will be addressed to Ofsted within 70 days of the inspection report being published and this was submitted within this timescale. A summary of the immediate actions being taken against each of the recommendations is set out below:

Ofsted recommendations	How this is being addressed in the action plan
The compliance with private fostering regulations and the senior management oversight, performance management information and quality assurance of these arrangements.	A report was presented outlining system improvements to ensure compliance with private fostering regulations, including a reviewed pathway for dealing with new referrals. An audit has been undertaken on existing cases and the learning shared with practitioners. An awareness raising plan with partners is in place so that there is a better understanding of private fostering. A specific campaign is being planned with schools in the autumn term to help identify potential private fostering arrangements and facilitate reporting.
The attendance of children in care at their reviews and the quality of information provided to children following their reviews.	The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance met with our commissioned provider to share findings and agree improvement actions. An audit was carried out in March 2023 to further understand practice issues. A learning session took place with all Independent Reviewing Officers to share learning from the inspection and the audit. There are monitoring processes in place to track improvement.
Care leavers' understanding of and access to their health histories.	There is a plan of work underway to ensure that health information that is routinely shared with care leavers when they turn 18 is regularly reviewed as part of their Pathway Plan.
The consistency of management supervision and recording.	A series of actions are being implemented to address this including embedding the consistent use of the agreed supervision template, monitoring supervision timeliness through performance management tools and senior management oversight. Senior leaders observed supervision practice as part of Practice Observation Week (July 2023) and

	have agreed further improvement actions following the learning from this.
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- 3.2.11 The practice improvement plan has been updated to capture all the areas for development identified in the inspection report. This includes feedback during the ‘keeping in touch’ meetings with inspectors (as well as the four recommendations) so that all practice issues are addressed in the next phase of our improvement journey.
- 3.2.12 In preparation for an annual engagement meeting with Ofsted in November 2023, a self-evaluation of Brent CYP is currently underway, providing a comprehensive overview of the position against the Ofsted ILACS framework. This includes capturing progress and strengths alongside areas of ongoing improvement.
- 3.2.13 **Current workforce challenges**
- 3.2.14 There is an ongoing national shortage of social workers and a high number of social workers leaving the profession, coupled with increased demand for services since the pandemic. The Department for Education began collecting a series of national data on social workers in 2017. This data demonstrates that in 2022, there was a 21% increase in social work vacancies (totalling 7,900) compared to 2021. There was also a 13% increase in agency workers (totalling 6,800) in 2022 compared to the previous year¹. At a local level Brent had a 19% increase in vacancies and a 19% increase in the agency workforce during the same period.
- 3.2.15 Across London as a whole, 24% of social work roles were filled by agency staff when the last comparable figures were available as of 30th September 2022. The Brent position was 41.8%. This systemic issue has become unsustainable and inhibits investment in workforce development for the existing permanent workforce and future generations of the profession. The Association of London’s Directors of Children’s Service (ALDCS) launched the London Pledge in June 2022; a memorandum of cooperation committing 32 London local authorities to work collaboratively to avoid rising agency worker costs by agreeing regional pay rates based on evidence and strengthened by multi-disciplined governance structures under Director of Children’s Services control. The London Pledge provides a strengthened platform to enhance quality and capacity while controlling the costs of the social work workforce. Brent CYP is fully engaged in London-wide work to systematically address workforce issues. One of the benefits of the London Pledge has seen a reduction in the turnover of agency workers, with longer levels of retention, supporting longer-term relationships with children and families.
- 3.2.16 Due to national and London-wide issues, significant structural difficulties remain in recruiting and retaining experienced permanent social workers and

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-work-workforce-2022>

first line social work management staff. Despite this, recent recruitment campaigns have attracted a favourable response, particularly for first line managers. However, challenges remain within the Short and Long Term Teams in the Localities Service and Care Planning Teams in the LAC and Permanency Service as a result of permanent social workers leaving Brent to take up employment either in the agency market or to some other London local authorities where there can be a more competitive pay and reward structure.

- 3.2.17 There are a number of approaches being used recruit and retain social workers in Brent CYP. Whilst filling vacant posts with agency workers increases staff budgetary pressures, the decline in the number of agency workers coming forward and the very limited success in recruiting permanent staff through the current recruitment and retention arrangements, is becoming a challenge across all teams with some posts currently vacant. There is an ongoing focus on converting agency workers to permanent staff with 17 social workers converting from agency to permanent workers since the start of 2022.
- 3.2.18 The issue of sufficiency of suitably qualified children's social work staff is recognised as a national issue that the DfE is seeking to address through new routes into social work and better development pathways for future managers. The profession is noted as an occupation that appears on the list of skills shortages. Brent CYP actively recruits and supports new graduates through the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme. Not only does this help newly qualified social workers develop their skills, knowledge and professional confidence, there is an emphasis on retaining workers to build their career in Brent. The career progression framework in place supports social workers move to more senior roles seamlessly and supports retention. Between May 2022 and May 2023, 23 social workers progressed their career through the progression panel.
- 3.2.19 There have also been successful recruitment campaigns for international social workers who would like to live and work in the UK. International recruitment campaigns have led to social workers relocating to the UK and working in Brent. International recruitment of qualified Social Workers from India and Africa 2019 and 2021, with 16 out of 17 of these workers remaining in role in Brent CYP. A further round of international recruitment is underway from India with 4 appointments already made and 6 applications in progress.
- 3.2.20 In April 2023, a Transformation Team led project, focusing on improving the Brent offer for the recruitment and retention of CYP social workers was completed. This work included reviewing, benchmarking and evaluating incentive packages against other London boroughs, as well as developing options to minimise the disparities in current arrangements in Brent. The issue of workload was also considered with Brent's average caseload for social workers comparable with other London boroughs. High caseloads can be a factor in those authorities where there is high social worker turnover. The findings of this review were considered alongside detailed feedback from

CYP staff and HR. The review was very comprehensive and involved the analysis data and feedback from what staff told us.

3.2.21 As a result of this work an incentive package was agreed by General Purposes Committee in June 2023 and targets the 'hard to recruit' social work teams. This new package involves an additional Council investment of almost £400k, demonstrating the Council's commitment to doing everything possible to support our permanent workforce.

3.2.22 A comprehensive workforce development plan is in place and overseen by the Corporate Director in order to ensure Brent CYP is an attractive place to work.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Not applicable.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no financial considerations linked to the content of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 Section 118 and 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 gives the Secretary of State Statutory Powers to direct the Chief Inspector to conduct an inspection of the performance of a local authority's functions, including those functions as it pertains to its Children's Services.

6.2 Further guidance and framework is set out in detail in the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC) Guidance, the recent version of which came into force of 1 January 2023.

6.3 Local Authorities are under a specific duty to ensure a high standard in the delivery of services to children in its area. This is graded as set out within the body of this report and the lowest grading that can be issued by Ofsted being "inadequate", such a grading could invoke further intervention from the Secretary of State hence the importance of maintaining a high standard of service delivery.

6.4 This report is providing an update on the steps being taken to improve standards within Children Services in light of the outcome of the last inspection.

6.5 The recommendations within the report are within the remit and powers of the local authority as mandated by statute.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 This report covers services for children and families in need of help and protection including looked after children and care leavers.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental issues relevant to this report.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no Human Resources or property issues relevant to this report.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 A report on the outcome of the Ofsted ILACS has been shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee and multi-agency safeguarding partners.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People