

# Inspection of East Riding local authority children's services

**Inspection dates:** 30 January to 10 February 2023

**Lead inspector:** Louise Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

<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	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Since the last inspection in 2019, when the overall effectiveness of services was judged inadequate with children in care and care leavers judged to be good, the leadership team has made significant and sustained changes in all of the practice and leadership areas identified for improvement.

Through extensive engagement with external partners and scrutineers, the improvements in the service mean that children and young people in East Riding receive a timely and effective response and intervention when they need it.

Senior leaders and councillors are clear about what their strengths are and what still needs to be improved in service delivery, and their self-evaluation is accurate. They have ambitious plans and have secured significant investment to develop their services further as part of their continuous improvement journey.

Senior leaders lead by example, and this has supported practitioners to embed the relational model of practice with the families they work with.

## **What needs to improve?**

- The consistency in the quality of children's assessments in the assessment and supporting and strengthening families teams.
- Contribution to the reviews of children's plans from key partners.
- The accessibility of the local offer for care leavers, and opportunities for children and young people to be involved in the development of services for them.
- The recording of management oversight at key decision points for children.

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

1. There has been considerable progress in services that help and protect children in East Riding since the last judgement inspection.
2. The early help offer is comprehensive, with a range of services available to support families in local communities. Early help assessments are detailed and have a strong child focus to ensure that families receive the right support at the earliest opportunity. When concerns escalate or needs increase, there is an effective step-across process into statutory children's services.
3. There is a timely and effective response to concerns at the front door. Thresholds for service are well understood by workers and managers in the safeguarding and partnership hub (SaPH). A professional telephone consultation line with robust management oversight, alongside bespoke training, is being used to improve partners' understanding of thresholds. Parental consent is well understood by partners and gained prior to referral. Social workers dispense with consent where this is appropriate to do so.
4. Social workers consult effectively with partners, including those who are co-located in the SaPH, to obtain proportionate information to support decision-making and understanding of risk. In particular, the 'Pitstop' provides an effective forum for multi-agency consideration of children's safety where there has been domestic abuse identified within the family. When possible, children's views are collected. Thoughtful analysis means that children and families receive the right level of support in a timely way.
5. When safeguarding concerns are identified, strategy meetings are well attended by core partners and supplemented by those who know the family. They are well recorded and consistently seek the views of partners on the threshold and scaling of risk. Child protection enquiries are detailed and thorough and consider presenting and emerging risks, meaning proportionate actions are taken to address the immediate safety of children.
6. The quality of children's assessments is not consistent across all teams, particularly in relation to the analysis and how this informs planning. When assessments go beyond timescales set for completion by managers, there is

management oversight, and children receive services and interventions to meet identified needs before the conclusion of the assessment process.

7. Children are seen as part of the assessment process and their views are recorded. When social workers visit young children, they capture their non-verbal communication and describe their attachments to their carers. This means that the child's world is well understood, leading to appropriately focused plans. The quality of direct work undertaken is not consistent across all service areas and children's identities are not always explored in depth within assessments. Children are visited and seen regularly according to their needs and in line with policy. The views of children are recorded well in these visits.
8. Assessments of disabled children are detailed, child-centred and holistic. Workers in the disabled children team know the children well and have access to specialist training in communicating with children, which enables them to use children's preferred methods when communicating with social workers. This ensures that children's needs and views are accurately captured and this informs their plans.
9. Child in need planning is mostly thorough and focused on the right things to help support improved outcomes for children. When risk for children increases, most children are escalated into child protection planning swiftly to enable children to be safeguarded effectively.
10. Child protection plans are clearly focused on the identified safety goals, and reviews are well attended by professionals who share information that supports the development of plans. Reviewing officers (child protection meeting chairs) are not always involved in decision-making when plans change between reviews. For a small number of children, there is a lack of oversight at key decision-making points by managers. For some of these children, there was a delay in progressing plans.
11. Core group meetings are regular and well attended by families and partner agencies who are involved in directly providing support. These are thorough and effective meetings which consider the progress of plans and identify worries and safety concerns in line with the local authority practice approach.
12. The emergency duty team provides a seamless service between daytime and night-time services for children. Well-established communication systems are in place. Social workers assess risk promptly and put in place effective safety plans for children.
13. Pre-proceedings work is effective for most children, with interventions and specialist assessments commissioned where needed prior to issuing court proceedings. Some families are diverted away from court proceedings effectively as a result of interventions at this stage. The quality of information provided to legal gateway meetings is clear and captures the concerns and what work has been done with families to address these so far. The letters

before proceedings are consistent in identifying this and what needs to change. They are written in plain language, which means that parents are clear about what is expected of them. For a small number of children where delays were seen in progressing into or out of pre-proceedings, practitioners and managers were able to articulate the reasons and what work was being undertaken, but the rationale was not always evident in children's written records.

14. Allegations against professionals who work with children are well managed by local authority designated officers, with increased capacity into the service since the last inspection. Systems are in place which track the progress of allegation management effectively. Risks are considered in relation to harmful behaviour in respect of adults that could transfer and be of potential harm to children.
15. Children who are 16 or 17 years old and presenting as homeless are responded to effectively, including children becoming looked after where this is necessary. The local authority is meeting its legal duties towards this group of children and supporting them appropriately.
16. Assessments and oversight for children who are living in private fostering arrangements are robust. The living arrangements for these children are appropriate and reviewed regularly, and carers are supported to meet the children's needs.
17. The development of a bespoke service for children at risk of exploitation and going missing, the Making a Change (MAC) team, has resulted in a significantly improved service for these vulnerable children. Oversight of these vulnerable children takes place regularly, which enables multi-agency information-sharing to safeguard children. There is consideration of referral through the national referral mechanism (NRM) when this is appropriate. Children and their support network are involved in the co-production of their plans, which ensures that there is a shared understanding of the purpose of MAC intervention. This also informs wider planning, meaning there is no duplication or confusion for families.
18. Staff in the education safeguarding team make swift and appropriate checks on children who may be vulnerable as a result of missing some of their education. Any children who are missing from education are located quickly and returned to school where possible. Leaders have systems in place to check which children are electively home educated and are appropriately safeguarded. Leaders have established effective ways of working with health partners to share information so that they can identify young people that may 'slip through the net', and education welfare officers follow up concerns and refer through the SaPH where needed.

## **The experiences and progress of children in care: good**

19. Most children in care in East Riding are thriving. They are in settled placements in which their social, emotional, health and educational needs are being met. They are supported by social workers who know their children well.
20. The majority of children come into care at the right time. These decisions are underpinned by comprehensive and timely assessment work. A range of care arrangements is considered for the child, which includes early assessments within the child's wider family network. For most children, they do not experience delay in living with their permanent carers and, where appropriate, children are supported to remain with family members.
21. When children return home, they have a clear plan of support. The progress of the plans is well monitored by agencies and extended family members. For these children, this supports successful rehabilitation to immediate family and reduces the likelihood of children returning to local authority care.
22. Children placed with parents on care orders are, in the main, making progress. Social workers involve the wider family network in overseeing and supporting the plan. The plans to discharge care orders are regularly reviewed by senior managers. This ensures that the child and family are not experiencing statutory interventions for longer than is necessary.
23. When children need to move into care, including residential education provision, for most children there is thorough transition planning undertaken by social workers. These plans involve the child and the significant people involved in their lives. Transitions for disabled children are well planned, with children's views influencing these transitions. As a result, children's transitions to adult services are well coordinated and there are no gaps in services being provided to meet continuing needs.
24. Most children in care benefit from regular looked after reviews which they attend and where they contribute their views. Independent reviewing officers provide challenge when there is a lack of progress with children's plans. However, this is not always timely enough to improve outcomes for a small number of children. Although professionals from other agencies provide reports to looked after children's reviews, they do not routinely attend these meetings and so are not directly involved in conversations about children's progress.
25. Most children are regularly visited by their social worker in line with their identified needs. Social workers gain and consider the views of children through imaginative direct work, which provides insight into their experiences. Social workers use this information well within their assessment and planning for children.
26. Regular annual health reviews inform most children's plans. This ensures that any identified health needs are met. The embedding of psychologists in the

children in care teams provides valuable guidance to social workers and carers that helps them to meet children's behavioural and emotional needs more effectively.

27. Children in care have access to and enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities, which helps them to develop interests and provides them with new opportunities and experiences.
28. Staff at the virtual school are ambitious for children in care. They have clear and effective systems in place to check on children's educational attainment and progress. Children in care make good progress, achieve well in school and are supported to make informed decisions about their next steps. The proportion of children in care and care leavers being in education, employment and training is high. There is a robust process for writing children's personal education plans (PEP), which are completed in a timely way. The quality of PEPs for most children is good, with clear targets for children to achieve. There is a stringent quality assurance process in place for those in Years 1 to 11. However, this is not mirrored in the early years or post-16 and the local authority has plans in place to address this.
29. Most children in care are living in placements that are stable, meet their needs, and in which they are making good progress. Wherever possible, social workers ensure that children in care can live with their brothers and sisters. Social workers support children to retain links with their birth family and others who are important to them. Family time for children is regular and responds to the child's changing wishes.
30. East Riding is part of a regional adoption agency, One Adoption North & Humber, with its neighbouring local authorities. This has increased its access to a high number of potential adopters. The assessments of prospective adopters are comprehensive, and adopters benefit from the support from experienced adoption social workers. Most later-in-life letters and life-story books are well written, helping children to understand their experiences and why they came into care.
31. There are insufficient placements available to meet the needs of all children needing to be in care, particularly those with complex needs. This sometimes results in children living outside the area. It also results in some children living in unregistered provision. For the majority of these children, there is evidence of senior management oversight. For a small number of children, it was clear from discussions with practitioners and senior managers that robust oversight and action were taking place to progress registration processes with providers. However, these discussions and actions were not always fully captured in the records.
32. Although there are participation groups established for children in care, they are not all well attended. This limits the opportunities for children to influence service developments, or to meet other children in similar circumstances to

them. The local authority is aware of this and has invested in participation services to address this.

## **The experiences and progress of care leavers: requires improvement to be good**

33. The experience and progress of care leavers requires improvement to be good because, while there are strengths and many young people are well supported to make progress, this is not a consistent experience for all young people.
34. Care leavers have limited involvement in the co-design of services and information that is important to them. Not all care leavers know how they could have their voices heard to support the development of their service. The local offer is available from the pathway team office and online. It is lengthy and not in an easy-to-read format, and there is no translation into other languages, so it is not accessible to care leavers who do not understand English well without support. The offer lacks detail and specificity about key entitlements. Young people told inspectors that they are unsure of their entitlements and the support they will receive.
35. Personal advisers (PAs) contact young people after their 18th birthday. This does not allow time for relationships to develop prior to children leaving care. Despite this, PAs know their young people well. They are tenacious in establishing working relationships, which enables them to provide emotional and practical support. Young people told inspectors that they really appreciate the out-of-hours support provided by PAs.
36. The transfer of young people between workers from the 16 to 18 service to the 18 to 21 service is not robust. It does not lead to clear, accurate and full information being given between workers. This leads to young people having to start again with their subsequent worker.
37. PAs have a good understanding of risks affecting young people and manage risk effectively through multi-agency working. There is appropriate use of the NRM to try and prevent children who are being exploited from being criminalised.
38. Care leavers have all the documents they need as they move to independence, such as passports and driving licences.
39. Pathway plans are not of consistently good quality. Stronger plans reflect the work needed to support young people into independence and to support them achieving their goals. Plans identify needs and actions, but some could be strengthened with clearer timescales. Most young people have their pathway plans reviewed and updated, which ensures that risk issues and help required are relevant. Where plans are not updated, there is delay in ensuring that changing needs are addressed.

40. Health needs for most care leavers are met. Most young people are registered with a GP and dentist, and there is regular review of their health needs. PAs understand emotional well-being issues and are proactive in finding support where the young person is placed away from the area. Access to mental health services is not always timely for children; the local authority is aware of this and is working with health partners to address this at a strategic level.
41. Care leavers who are parents are well supported. When they are not able to continue in their parenting role, sensitive work is undertaken to support them through this.
42. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers' past experiences and cultural needs are considered in assessments. Access to interpreters supports PAs and social workers to communicate effectively with children and young people. This enables workers to understand children's needs and ensure that appropriate services are put in place.
43. Many young people are in education, employment and training; however, some care leavers reported that they could be better supported to access opportunities for education and employment. For those who are not in education, training or employment, there is a lack of active involvement by the virtual school in ensuring that young people's educational needs are being met.
44. Young people are supported to access housing. Some care leavers reported difficulty in securing suitable accommodation due to insufficiency in both local authority housing and in the private sector.

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

45. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have significantly improved services to children. There is a strong and caring leadership team in children's services that leads by example. There is a considered and thoughtful approach to improvement work and what this will mean for the children and families in East Riding. The service has embraced external scrutiny from peers, partners and the Department for Education commissioner to support learning, continuous development and improvement.
46. The chief executive, portfolio lead and elected members are strong advocates for the children and young people and understand and carry out their role as a corporate parent. The leadership of the council and partners hold each other to account and there is a culture of respectful challenge.
47. There are effective relationships with partners and neighbouring local authorities, which have been instrumental in driving the improvements forward, particularly those in the SaPH and the development of the Pitstop model. Leaders have actively engaged with local authority peer support and a review of services, which assisted them in their improvement journey.



48. The council has recognised that there are currently insufficient placements available to meet the needs of all children, particularly those with complex needs. Work has commenced to re-provision existing accommodation, and plans are progressing to further develop capacity to enable the council to meet identified needs.
49. In recognition of the need to increase the involvement of children and young people in service development, there has been significant investment in the participation, innovation and improvement service. There are plans in place to strengthen the participation of children in care with the corporate parenting board and the offer to care leavers. At the point of inspection, it is too early to see any impact of this.
50. Managers use performance management information directly with the workers they supervise. This has shifted the culture of performance management from being about data and numbers to being about individual children. Performance issues are now identified and addressed at an early stage and leaders have an understanding of the practice behind the data.
51. For most children, there is regular management oversight and case direction through supervision of social workers and panel processes. However, this is not the case for all children and, for some, their records do not reflect the level of oversight and professional thinking behind the decision-making. This means that children will not have a full understanding of how decisions were made for them should they access their records in the future.
52. Workloads vary across the service and, for social workers in some teams, they are too high. Inspectors found that, for some children, frequent changes of worker have impacted on relationships developing, and families have to repeat their stories. The local authority recognises this and has plans in place to address this through its recruitment and retention strategies, acknowledging that this will take time to achieve.
53. The 'grow your own' approach to social work training, particularly a significant investment in the social work apprenticeship degree route, is contributing to the service's succession planning and a carefully considered approach to retention and recruitment. The development of the workforce academy, the practice standards and quality assurance framework has created a solid foundation for consistent practice to be developed from.
54. There is a wide range of quality assurance activity across all service areas, which gives leaders a real understanding of the quality of practice and the impact this has on families. There is evidence that the learning from this activity then informs the practice development offer. There is a strong culture within the local authority of workers being supported in developing their careers. There is a comprehensive training offer available to support practice improvement.

55. The workforce reports that senior leaders are visible and approachable. Practitioners appreciate the contact with leaders. They feel valued, listened to and part of the whole service. Practitioners and managers are positive about working in East Riding. They describe an improved culture within the organisation over the last two years, with a strong focus on learning and development and a more cohesive approach being achieved through its 'Stronger Together' approach. This has had a direct impact on staff actively choosing to return to work in the authority from elsewhere.

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