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Dear Ms Turner

Focused visit to Kingston upon Hull children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Kingston upon Hull children's services on 18 and 19 September 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Rebecca Dubbins and Jan Edwards.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need and children in need of protection, with a particular focus on:

- The quality and consistency of planning processes for children, including those suffering long-term significant harm.
- The scrutiny and oversight of social work practice by managers, including senior leaders, and child protection chairs for all children in need of protection.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors considered a broad range of evidence, including individual children's records, and undertook discussions with social workers. Inspectors also spoke to parents. Inspectors reviewed relevant local authority performance and quality assurance information.

Headline findings

Since the last inspection, when the overall effectiveness of the service was judged to be requires improvement to be good, there has been effective and focused action by senior leaders, elected members and partners to improve services for vulnerable children.

A strong and stable senior leadership team has developed effective systems that are in place to provide a clear line of sight to frontline practice. As a result, leaders know their service well. Leaders have had a determined focus on improving the services provided to children in need and those in need of protection. They have given particular attention to the impact of domestic abuse and neglect. This has ensured that the workforce understands the impact of this on children in the long term. As a

result, children are better safeguarded and receive timely help and support to meet their needs.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- Contingency planning in children in need and child protection plans, to ensure that parents are clear about what would happen should risks increase, or if children's circumstances do not change.

Main findings

Children's assessments detail an understanding of the risk, potential harm and complicating factors well. They provide a balanced view of the concerns, which is informed by analysis of the family history and information from partner agencies. They consider strengths and how these may alleviate the concerns. As a result, children's experiences are well understood.

While risk of harm is identified, assessments do not always capture children's individual needs well enough, which includes children's identity and cultural needs. While workers can articulate and understand children's needs well, this does not always translate into the written assessment.

Children's plans set out clear goals and stipulate the support required and a timescale to achieve these. These plans include valuable support from partner agencies and the wider family network and are reviewed regularly by managers to ensure the agreed work is progressing. Where domestic abuse is a concern, the locality teams are supported by specialist practitioners in the Hull Domestic Abuse Partnership and by a variety of services to support victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. Family network meetings are used frequently and to good effect. Practitioners work hard to keep this network engaged and use the nominated leads within the network effectively. Children and their families are helped to understand the concerns and to make changes which help ensure that children are better safeguarded.

Review meetings and core groups are well attended by relevant professionals and help to progress the plan. However, for a small number of children, core group meetings are not always regular or written in their record to help understand how the plan is helping to mitigate the presenting risks.

Risks to children are well understood and identified by workers who are hopeful, curious and appropriately cautious in their approach. This ensures that positive steps made by families are encouraged and acknowledged, but seen alongside repeated concerns so that plans minimise risks to children effectively.

Child protection conferences are well attended by relevant and involved professionals. Child protection chairs have effective oversight through the

formulation of the initial child protection plan and midpoint reviews to consider how the plan is progressing. Children's records demonstrate that child protection chairs escalate concerns when necessary. This ensures that children do not experience any delay in the support they are offered, and that the intervention is purposeful.

Children and their families do not receive written plans that clearly set out contingency plans. This can make it difficult for families to understand the consequences and the actions the local authority will take if children's circumstances do not change. However, social workers and their managers are clear on what is needed should children's lived experiences not improve. When needed, when risks increase or when the changes needed cannot be seen, social workers escalate their concerns appropriately to their managers and decisive action is taken.

When risks to children increase or their circumstances do not improve, the local authority makes timely and effective use of pre-proceedings to provide support and to safeguard children. The oversight of children in pre-proceedings processes is very thorough and informed by regular updates. This helps to ensure there is no drift or delay for children and that the use of care proceedings is made only when necessary. The local authority continues to see many families step down from the pre-proceedings process after receiving effective support to make long-lasting changes.

Visits to children and their families are clearly recorded. These records demonstrate that children are seen regularly and in accordance with their needs. These visits are purposeful. A range of direct work is undertaken with children to ensure they understand why the local authority is involved with their family. Families are engaged in this direct work, which helps them to make the changes needed.

Children benefit from social workers and other practitioners who know them well and with whom they have developed positive relationships. Parents spoke positively about social workers, whom they considered to be reliable and trustworthy.

Practitioners informed inspectors that they benefit from regular and meaningful supervision with their managers. Sometimes, written records of supervision sessions do not demonstrate the reflection discussed or provide a clear set of actions to help workers to be clear about the steps they need to take and to address any barriers to successful intervention. Children's written records demonstrate management oversight at various management tiers. They reflect how managers have a grip on children's plans, which as a result, are progressing as they should.

The local authority has a comprehensive quality assurance framework. This is used effectively to ensure improvements needed are addressed and maintained. Assurance and oversight are provided as a result of managers at various levels taking ownership of these improvements, which are then taken back into practice. Practitioners are actively engaged in this process. The local authority has been creative and successful in seeking the views of children and their families in order

that quality assurance findings can be triangulated. This helps leaders to know that they are making a difference for children and families.

Leaders have focused on the recruitment and retention of their frontline staff. This has largely been successful due to 'grow your own' routes into social work, which include a large number via the apprenticeship path. The local authority has an impressive social work academy which is clearly developing good practice, inspires new ways of working, and shapes the training needed for frontline staff. This focus and investment has helped to stabilise the workforce and improve practice. This provides increased consistency for children and their families.

Practitioners spoke positively about the culture in the local authority. They spoke of feeling valued, with the right conditions for them to practice. They said they have managers at all levels whom they consider to be approachable and highly supportive.

Social workers recognised the value of having a more stable workforce and manageable workloads, which is supporting them to undertake more meaningful direct work with children and families.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Dubbins
His Majesty's Inspector