Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted

23 October 2025

Jenny Glennard
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service
Liverpool City Council
Cunard Building
Water Street
Liverpool
L3 1AH

Dear Jenny

Monitoring visit to Liverpool City Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Liverpool City Council children's services on 23 and 24 September 2025. This was the sixth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in May 2023. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Kathryn Grindrod and Leanne Cooper.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- Response to contacts and referrals.
- Child protection enquiries.
- Child and family assessments.
- Designated officer for the local authority (LADO).

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. A range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior managers. Inspectors spoke to a range of staff, including social workers and managers.

Headline findings

Since the inspection in May 2023, there have been significant improvements in the quality and impact of work with children in the front door and assessment teams. Work to streamline processes, reduce workloads, and develop partner engagement has led to a reduction in delays and an improvement in the application of thresholds for working with children. There remain areas for further improvement, such as consistency in the quality of assessments and the response to domestic abuse.

Leaders are fully sighted on these areas and the plans to address these issues are well underway.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Partner agencies usually make prompt referrals to the front door when concerns or issues about children arise. There are occasional delays in police referring children to the front door following incidents, which delays multi-agency consideration of concerns for a small number of children. Contacts from partners are detailed enough to enable appropriate decisions to be made by practitioners at the front door.

The Children's Advice and Support team (CASS) process most contacts promptly. There are no delays in management oversight or decision-making about what needs to happen. Initial decisions made by managers at the front door are appropriate to the child's needs and any risks they may be facing. Managers provide clear direction to assist the receiving social worker in progressing their screening of concerns. Despite this initial swift response, there are sometimes short delays in receiving social workers being allocated contacts in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) due to the cumbersome processes in place to move work through to allocation from the CASS team. This can cause short delays in some children's needs being considered. Senior leaders are aware of this issue and have advanced plans in place to address it.

The value of sharing information is well understood by workers in the front door. Parents are helped to understand what is being done and why during screening activity. There is effective use of interpreters during screening when English is not the first language of the parents. When information must be shared without parental agreement, due to concerns about significant harm to children, this is appropriate and clearly documented.

Social workers consider children's history in their initial screening of information, and they use this to consider cumulative risk and harm to children. Social workers make attempts to contact relevant adults, including all parents, during screening activity. Children themselves are not often spoken to by social workers in the front door. While the reasons for this are usually appropriate, those reasons are not routinely recorded in records. This may leave children feeling unsure about why their views were not directly sought.

Decisions about whether to seek partner information during screening are proportionate. Information is returned from partners promptly to inform decision-making, and this information is usually helpful.

Thresholds are appropriately applied in decision-making about the next steps for children when screening is completed by workers in the front door. This means that children and their families are offered support or protection when they need it. While thresholds are appropriately applied, the consideration that is given to children's

experiences during screening is not always well recorded. This risks the impact of adult issues on children not being fully evaluated and responded to.

The response to domestic abuse at the front door recognises children as victims and leads to appropriate decision-making about them. The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference link and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors being situated in the front door provide extra scrutiny, oversight and expertise to the initial response to domestic abuse.

Strategy meetings are convened quickly when needed for new referrals. The right people attend those meetings and share helpful information to assist with decision-making. Risks to children are appropriately considered by partners in strategy discussions. Children's experiences are not always explored in detail at strategy discussions. While this does not negatively impact on decision-making, it again risks the impact of adult behaviour on children not being fully understood.

Decisions made at strategy discussions are proportionate and the right ones to protect children. Agreed actions from strategy discussions include the need for any additional assessments, such as medical examinations of children. Professionals agree appropriately timebound actions to prevent delays in children being safeguarded as necessary.

Section 47 child protection enquiries are completed without delay and consider a breadth of partnership information. Children are seen promptly and alone when appropriate as part of the investigation. Risk is understood by professionals who are completing investigations and agreed decisions about next steps are clearly recorded. Agreed short-term or interim actions to keep children safe during investigations are sometimes not detailed enough to ensure that everybody understands their specific role. However, child protection investigations conclude with the right decisions for children to protect them from harm.

The overall quality of assessments is much improved since the inspection and monitoring visit that took place in 2023. Assessments are usually completed in timescales that meet children's needs. Social workers seek information from professionals and family members, and this contributes to the evaluation of the child's life and their needs. A chronology of social care involvement with children is listed in assessments. This is used to a greater or lesser extent to inform the final analysis and recommendations depending on the quality of the assessment.

When completing assessments, social workers recognise the risks children face and the support they may need. Children are spoken to alone by social workers when it is appropriate, and what children say or demonstrate through their behaviour comes through clearly in assessments. Some assessments thoroughly evaluate how a child may be feeling and what their day-to-day lives are like. These stronger assessments triangulate information thoroughly and explore hypotheses about what may be happening for the child and why. Research is sometimes effectively used to inform

practitioners assessment of a child's lived experience. Better quality assessments demonstrate that social workers understand children's wishes and how they feel.

Social workers reference children's individual characteristics in assessments, such as their culture, ethnicity, and any additional needs they may have. However, this is not always given further consideration when evaluating children's daily lives and how best to support them. This means support may not be best tailored to meet the child's specific needs and experiences.

Despite these improvements, the quality of single assessments is still not consistently strong. Some assessments are brief. While they identify risks to children, they are sometimes too superficial to fully inform detailed and effective planning to meet their needs. This means that assessments must sometimes be revisited soon after completion because the complexity of family life has not been fully understood. Children and families receiving the right level and nature of support can be delayed as a result.

Social workers recognise the impact of domestic abuse on children when they complete assessments. The complexities of domestic abuse and the impact it can have on victims are not always fully understood. Some social workers and managers place responsibility for children's safety on to the victims of abuse. The complexities of fear, coercion and control are not always fully explored in assessments and any agreed safety plans for children. This limits the effectiveness and safety of agreed plans.

Social workers do not delay in securing support from other services, and they convene multi-agency meetings at the start of their assessments if this is appropriate. This means there are usually no delays in securing the right support for families. Most management authorisation at the conclusion of assessments is detailed and demonstrates a clear rationale for the recommendations being made.

The LADO service builds ongoing professional relationships with several agencies across the city. This means that professionals are confident to seek advice when they need it. When there are concerns identified at the front door about parents who also work with children, consideration is not always given to referring the issue to the LADO. This means that any potential risks to children at the workplace of those parents are not always promptly explored.

The system for recording advice calls to the LADO service is complicated. This means that it is difficult to analyse patterns and trends of behaviour that would escalate levels of concern about individuals or providers. This limits the ability of the LADO service to identify when lower-level concerns accumulate and to raise questions about the suitability of somebody to work with children.

When an allegation about an adult who works with children meets the threshold for a strategy meeting, these meetings are well attended by relevant partners. The LADO ensures that all necessary issues about risks to children, employment and police

investigations are thoroughly addressed. The LADO holds agencies to account in the completion of tasks and does not end their involvement until they are satisfied that necessary processes to safeguard children have been completed.

Ongoing improvement plans, overseen by senior leaders, have strengthened the impact of social work practice since the inspection in 2023. The quality and timeliness of work at the front door and in assessment teams have improved. There are now few delays in the response to contacts about children, and risk is recognised and effectively responded to in this part of the service. Partnership working in the MASH is a strength, resulting in the appropriate application of thresholds, and carefully considered decision-making that meets children's needs.

The quality of single assessments overall has improved. Social workers and partners better understand children's lives, and risks to children are promptly recognised. This means that more children now receive effective support and protection.

There are areas of practice that require further improvement. There is still variability in the quality of assessments, and the impact of domestic abuse on parental ability to protect children is not sufficiently understood by some social workers and managers. Managers do not always help social workers to reflect on the impact of their work on children during supervision sessions. This means that opportunities to further develop the impact of social work practice for children are not always clearly recognised.

Senior leaders were aware of these areas for development prior to the monitoring visit and they are included in detailed development plans, which are being delivered at pace. As at previous monitoring visits, the local authority's understanding of practice in the front door and assessment teams was reflected in what inspectors found during the visit. The experienced and stable senior leadership team, with the ongoing support of a committed and knowledgeable lead member, continues to have a detailed understanding of what is effective in improving children's experiences and what needs further improvement. This is supported by increasingly accurate quality assurance activity, which has developed significantly since the last inspection.

Social workers told inspectors how much has changed for the better over the last two years. Workers talked about processes being more effective and supportive and of there being much less drift and delay in the front door. In the assessment teams, social workers reported that reduced caseloads mean that they are much more able to spend time doing quality work with families, which is evidenced in the overall improved quality of assessments.

Social workers in the front door, and assessment teams, value highly the relationships within their teams, and with managers and other professionals. They describe strong and supportive relationships, and how professionals trust one another enough to welcome professional challenge and to ask for help when it is needed. Social workers now feel involved in discussions about proposed changes and believe that their views are considered.

Social workers are positive about working in Liverpool and of the support they receive from their managers and senior leadership team. They reported feeling safe and settled in their roles and that they are proud to work in Liverpool.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Grindrod
His Majesty's Inspector