

The Axis
10 Holiday Street
Birmingham
B1 1TF

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



9 March 2020

Lorna Fitzjohn HMI
Regional Director, West Midlands

Mr Nigel Minns
Strategic Director - People Group
Warwickshire County Council
PO BOX 2
Shire Hall
Warwick
CV34 4RR

Sent by email to: DPA

Dear Nigel

DCS Annual Conversation 2019 - 20

Thank you for meeting with myself and my senior leadership team on 7 February 2020 to discuss the developments in Warwickshire. Also, thank you for the information that was sent in advance of the meeting.

To keep this letter brief, I will only summarise our discussion about the three key challenges for Warwickshire County Council and our conversation regarding social care.

Three key challenges for Warwickshire County Council

You outlined your three key challenges: placements and the associated pressures of costs and availability, high needs provision and funding, and exploitation.

Social Care

I am aware that there is a lot of work going on in Warwickshire Children's Services that is not fully evidenced in the information that you provided for this meeting.

You outlined the work that has been carried out to improve your services such as the reduction in missing episodes for children. There is an effective multi-agency team and an increase in the number of practitioners. I was pleased to hear that the multi-agency team has had the biggest impact on your work as staff are able to work intensively with young people. Information sharing between agencies works well. There is targeted direct work completed with boys and a number of male workers recruited specifically to complete this work.

You said that there was an issue with thresholds in 2017-18, as Warwickshire children were twice as likely to be subject to a child protection plan (CPP) compared with statistical neighbours. To address this, you have carried out thematic audits on the CPP process. I noted a couple of the outcomes from the thematic audits such as staff being risk averse and conferences were taking too long. You continue to work on these issues and invest in staff and resources when necessary.

We talked about your re-referral rates as I am concerned that they have increased. You explained that the re-referral rate is at 22%, the children coming through MASH is historically high and your early help is not as embedded as it should be. You added that the Early Help Offer has been redesigned and you believe this will be more effective in future.

The timeliness of initial child protection conferences (ICPC) appears to be on the way back up but was particularly poor in December. I understand that it has been difficult to recruit independent reviewing officers (IROs). You have now recruited three new IROs and they have made an impact on the team. Their average caseloads are 90 children. You acknowledged that there has been lack of challenge from the IROs in the past and this is being addressed with them.

Placements stability is not where it should be, and this was an issue highlighted in the last inspection. You accepted this but believe this links with the placement issues you mentioned and difficulties of securing placements for children who have complex needs. You said that you are doing a lot of work on placements and are tendering for a specialist recruitment agency and campaign to increase the number of internal foster carers.

We discussed the RNIB site and your thinking about the different options of how to use the bungalows. You are currently working with Hexagon to provide crisis beds and increased wrap around support. This may be part of the work for the RNIB site.

I noted that visits to CIN are around 69%. You said they are now above 80% and You have a focus on children with disabilities and support through the Strengthening Families service. To monitor the CIN, a weekly live time report is sent to the relevant managers.

Finally, you reported that the RAA performance across all ACE local authorities has improved. Hosting the RAA has been an administrative challenge. Services, such as those to birth parents have improved. I noted that you are looking at other services which might benefit from a more joined up approach across local authorities.

Actions

Warwickshire to:

1. send figures on the number of children coming off child protection plans
2. keep Ofsted updated about CC
3. provide an update about the Pears site – the number of placements, to Karen Wareing, Social Care Senior HMI
4. update Alex Magloire, Early Years, Senior HMI on safeguarding in early years
5. update about impact of entitlement funding take up to Alex Magloire
6. speak with James McNeillie, Assistant Regional Director about education strategy and impact issues.

Ofsted:

1. Karen Wareing to explore the arrangements about provision registered by the Care Quality Commission and whether some of these should be jointly registered with Ofsted.

Thank you once again for the information you provided about early years, further education and skills and schools. Please contact Alex Magloire, Russell Jordan or James McNeillie respectively to provide updates or to follow up on any of the issues.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and please do get in touch if you would like to discuss anything in the future.

Yours sincerely

DPA

Lorna Fitzjohn HMI

Regional Director, West Midlands