

**Ofsted inspection of Wiltshire Council Children’s Services**

**Purpose of report**

- 1. To appraise the Children’s Select Committee of the outcome and findings of His Majesty’s Inspection Wiltshire Council’s Children’s Services and points of note.

**Background**

- 2. In September 2023, Ofsted conducted an inspection of Wiltshire Council’s Childrens Services. This involved wide engagement with children and families with lived experience, frontline staff from a wide variety of service areas including commissioning, corporate and political leadership, partner agencies (such as schools, the judiciary, health services, etc) and other key stakeholders.

**Main considerations for the committee**

- 3. The inspection (report published 12th December 2023 – see appendix) judged the overall effectiveness of our services to be Outstanding, the highest rank possible. The breakdown of judgements is as follows:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children & families	Outstanding
The experience and progress of children who need help & protection	Good
The experience and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experience and progress of care leavers	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Key highlights from the findings are as follows:

- a. Children and families benefit from effective early support led by family key workers who respond quickly to meet children’s needs. Children in need of help and protection receive a swift and effective response from the Integrated Front Door (IFD) and this is a seamless service during evenings and weekends.
- b. Child protection conferences are timely, and well attended, and lead to strength-based plans that focus on increasing protective factors and reducing harm.
- c. Highly skilled and tenacious workers, including for extra-familial harm, provide intensive and targeted interventions to repair family relationships, prevent children from coming into care and reducing the risk of exploitation.
- d. Children in care, including disabled children, make good progress and live in stable homes. They are supported to stay healthy, to attend and to achieve in their education, to enjoy family time, and to pursue their hobbies and interests.

- e. Social work practice for adoption is strong. Family finding starts as soon as possible for children. Permanence planning is considered well for children and starts at an early stage.
  - f. Foster carers and adopters are well supported and trained in their roles that helps them provide consistent, nurturing care to children.
  - g. Care leavers are supported exceptionally well by caring, compassionate and determined personal advisers.
  - h. The virtual school is ambitious for children and provides effective support and challenge to schools.
  - i. Stable and effective political, corporate and children's services leadership is making a positive difference to children. Cross-council work is highly successful in delivering improved support. Children feature prominently in council strategic plans and the continued investment in children's services, including in transformation, is making a significant difference to an increasing number of children's lives.
  - j. Workers report feeling highly supported by accessible and visible managers and are positive about working for Wiltshire. They are passionate and proud about their work with children and the positive difference they make for them.
  - k. The views and experiences of children and parents are being listened to by political and children's services leaders and acted upon, informing strategic plans and leading to positive changes in practice and service development.
4. Two areas for improvement were identified and our focus continues on these:
    - a. The effectiveness and quality of practice to support and safeguard 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless.
    - b. The quality and consistency of recording of supervision and frontline management oversight and direction, including the tracking of actions and completion of tasks.
  5. Children's Services leadership are very proud of this achievement, acknowledging, as Ofsted did, delivering improvement with the national context of rising and more complex needs post-covid and alongside significant cost-of-living increases.
  6. The grading of "Good" for help and protection was strongly disputed by the leadership team and led to a formal complaint being raised with Ofsted. This was not upheld but we maintain our conviction that performance in this area is indeed Outstanding. We are clear that we will never standstill and there is always more to do in such a dynamic field of work. Outstanding of course does not indicate perfection and our detailed Roadmap, as previously shared at Childrens Select Committee, along with the update on our Service Delivery Plans are evidence of our continued focus on improvement.
  7. Achieving Outstanding was only possible with the dedication, tenacity and care our staff give to the children and families of Wiltshire every day, we are incredibly proud and grateful to them.
  8. We are not complacent and know there is always more to do to ensure we continue to deliver the best services and support. Our business plan will be

updated reflecting areas of focus and presented back to Committee at a future date.

## **Conclusion**

9. The Committee is informed of the outcome of the inspection of Wiltshire Council Children's Services.
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## **Appendices**

Link to published Ofsted Inspection report:

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50235241>