

Children’s, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23rd September 2025

Children’s Services – Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS)

Portfolio: Councillor Statham – Deputy Leader, Children, Families & Lifelong Learning

Related portfolios: All

Wards: All

1. Aim

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Committee of the publicised report of the Inspection of Walsall Local Authority Children’s Services, and the judgements and recommendations therein.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the report provided to Cabinet on 16th July 2025 and identify any further information required.

3. Report detail – know

- 3.1 Walsall was inspected by Ofsted between 12th and 16th May 2025. The inspection report published on 8th July 2025, makes the following judgements:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

- 3.2 “Outstanding” is the highest grade available. Walsall is currently the only outstanding local authority for overall effectiveness in the Black Country and West Midlands Metropolitan area. The full report is attached as **Appendix A**.

- 3.3 In the final report, published on Tuesday, 8 July 2025, Ofsted inspectors have rated the council’s children’s services as ‘outstanding’ overall.

- 3.4 This builds upon the previous rating of ‘good’ in 2021 and establishes Walsall as the only local authority in the Black Country and West Midlands Metropolitan area to achieve an ‘outstanding’ rating for overall effectiveness.

- 3.5 Children's services were judged as 'outstanding' in three areas:
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
 - The experiences and progress of children in care.
 - Overall effectiveness.
- 3.6 Children's Services were judged as 'good' in two areas:
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.
 - The experiences and progress of care leavers. This is a new category of judgement since Walsall's last inspection.
- 3.7 Every judgement from 2021 has improved in the 2025 inspection, although the care leaver judgement was introduced after the 2021 inspection.
- 3.8 There were two areas of improvement identified by Ofsted. The first area of improvement was identified around the "effectiveness of practice with every child who is experiencing harm from neglect". Inspectors felt that areas of neglect were not always identified in assessments or responded to in a timely manner. This was an issue that children's services were already aware of and were able to share with inspectors our plans to address this.
- 3.9 A second area of improvement was identified around "The effectiveness of the emotional, health and well-being support to all care leavers". This is not elaborated on in the report, but discussions with the inspectors indicate that they felt our 18-25 mental health provision for care leavers could be clearer in the young person's plans.
- 3.10 Inspectors recognised that children are at the heart of the Walsall Local Authority. Inspectors praised the council for its commitment to ensuring that the voices of children in Walsall are listened to, understood, and have a significant influence over the delivery of services.
- 3.11 Inspectors reported that ambitious senior leaders, including political and corporate leaders, have worked relentlessly to understand the needs of the communities they serve and children's services, which have been significantly strengthened since the last ILACS inspection in 2021.
- 3.12 The report details how children in the local authority's care receive outstanding support, with social workers producing high-quality assessments and establishing positive and trusting relationships with children to gain a clear understanding of their needs and realities.
- 3.13 The Senior leadership team are described as having "a wealth of experience and formidable ambition for the service and all children who live in the authority" Inspectors noted that the work of leaders in Walsall will have a local, regional, and national impact in shaping services for vulnerable children.
- 3.14 Staff are proud to work for Walsall Council and reported to inspectors that they feel supported to deliver good outcomes for children.

Response to OFSTED recommendations:

3.15 ***The effectiveness of practice with every child who is experiencing harm from neglect is the first OFSTED recommendation.***

3.16 Inspectors found that a small number of children experience neglect for too long because assessments do not identify all the areas of concern or children do not receive timely and effective support.

3.17 Neglect is a strategic priority for the Safeguarding Partnership as neglect remains a persistent and complex safeguarding challenge for Walsall. It is the most prevalent category of abuse in Child Protection Plans and features in over 60% of Child Safeguarding Practice reviews nationally. Walsall has proactively responded to this challenge and a Neglect subgroup is in place that is chaired by the Director of Early Help and Partnerships. The subgroup has a detailed action plan (please see **Appendix C**) and has:

- **Revised the Walsall Safeguarding partnership Neglect Strategy** (2025-2030) that sets out a whole system partnership response, aiming at early identification, effective intervention and long-term reduction in neglect. This has been influenced by national findings including the NSPCC 2024 report 'Too Little, Too Late'. The implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) is integral to the strategy and provides an evidence-based tool and practice that can be used across the multi-agency system. Influenced by national findings the revised strategy removes the term 'persistent' from the definition of neglect, signalling the importance of earlier response to signs of unmet need.
- **A Neglect Training Pathway** has been developed that seeks to ensure that all professionals across the partnership have a sound understanding of what neglect is, are able to identify the signs and response. There is a detailed plan regarding the implementation of the GCP2. This includes quarterly drop-in sessions and coaching support to be introduced as identified through consultation with professionals who have completed the GCP2 training.
- **Systems Integration and Tools** ensuring that the GCP2 is embedded into Mosaic for local authority staff and aligns with the Families First for Children process pathways. External partners are able to access and download the GCP2 Tool via the Walsall Safeguarding partnership website.
- **Quality assurance** and audit activities on Neglect and the system's response have been central to the Quality Assurance framework. An outcomes framework is under development to monitor family help activity supported by the GCP2, assess whether GCP2 impacts the quality of care, and track reductions in children subject to plans due to neglect. School attendance, early years development, and health indicators are also included in the outcomes framework to provide a broader perspective when measuring outcomes for children and families.
- **Locality profiles** to be developed that help understanding the context and trends around neglect.

- **A Neglect screening tool-** Understanding My World-Neglect Tool has been developed in consultation with partners to help professionals' identify neglect at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.18 We need to consolidate data collection and quality assurance to better understand the prevalence of neglect among children and young people in Walsall, inform effective practice, assessment, and planning, and identify areas for further support. The Principal Social Worker, who is part of the neglect subgroup is leading a comprehensive review of this work.
- 3.19 Engaging the voluntary and community sector is a key objective of the Children and Young People's strategic alliance. Policies should be aligned so that addressing neglect is integrated into wider strategies to reduce child poverty. This requires a coordinated, cross-directorate effort and partnership approach, ensuring support for families and tackling inequalities are embedded in council-wide strategies.
- 3.20 ***The effectiveness of the emotional health and well being support to all care leavers is the second OFSTED recommendation.***
- 3.21 The report states that most Care Leavers physical and emotional health care needs are met and that young people have access to a plethora of health services and are encouraged to have good physical and emotional health care. Whilst not explicit within the report, feedback was provided by OFSTED in the Keeping in Touch meetings that this was not evident in all of the pathway plans reviewed by OFSTED where multi agency and that the offer of mental health and emotional well being support was less developed with young people leaving care.
- 3.22 The issue of a well defined and choate offer of emotional well being and mental health support is known. Our own young people have told us during engagement sessions for Corporate Parenting Board how they have often felt they did not feel ready to access support as a child and then when ready to seek support as they grew into adulthood the support was not easily available. Walsall Care Leavers Strategy 2025-2028 is rooted in the principle of corporate parenting and shaped by the voices of care experienced young people through the 'It Takes a Village project. The strategy recognises the emotional well being of care leavers as a critical area of focus and commits to ensuring that every young person leaving care is supported to thrive, live independently and achieve their full potential. Priority 2 of the strategy specifically targets the development of a robust mental health and wellbeing offer, acknowledging both the local and national gaps in provision.
- 3.23 To deliver on the commitments the strategic action plan includes a range of interventions:
- 'Ask Jan' licenses in partnership with public health
 - Therapeutic life story work training for personal adviser
 - CBT training for Transition and Leaving Care staff (four of who have already completed)
 - Public Health to continue to fund Mustard Seed counselling
 - Digital passports for Care leavers.
 - Emotional well being pathway to be developed in conjunction with Black Country Health Trust.

- 3.24 To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, the strategy incorporates a structured programme of audit activity. A quality assurance audit is scheduled for September 2025 to assess the quality of Pathway Plans for 16/17 year old, while a separate audit will evaluate the impact of support hours provided by semi supported providers. A meeting with senior leaders in children’s CAMHS and Public health took place in August 2025 to jointly consider the OFSTED recommendation and to understand the partners approach to supporting an emotional welling offer that is both effective and responsive to the evolving needs of Walsall Care Leavers. A collaborative piece of work is currently underway to determine how the IThrive model can be further developed to include Care Leavers as a vulnerable cohort.

4. Financial information

- 4.1 There are no financial implications though there could be benefits to recruitment and retention given the OFSTED outcome of outstanding.

5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1 Children’s Social Care is committed to reducing inequalities by ensuring that all children, young people, and families—regardless of their background or circumstances—receive high-quality, compassionate, and effective support. Our approach is rooted in inclusive practice and equity, recognising that some families face greater challenges and require tailored interventions to achieve positive outcomes.
- 5.2 Reducing inequalities is not the responsibility of Children’s Services alone. It requires a coordinated, multi-agency partnership involving health, education, police, and the voluntary and community sector. Together, we work to identify and address the root causes of disadvantage, including poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion.
- 5.3 We are committed to delivering services that are culturally competent, trauma-informed, and responsive to the diverse needs of our communities. Our staff are supported to challenge bias and promote fairness in all aspects of their work.
- 5.4 Children and families should be confident that Walsall’s Children’s Social Care represents their rights and delivers services with consistency, transparency, and accountability. We will continue to align our efforts with the Council’s strategic priorities to build a fairer borough where every child has the opportunity to thrive.
- 5.5 Children’s Social Care support children, young people and families, those children’s young people and families deserve the highest standards of practice from compassionate and skilled practitioners who can support them to address any challenges they face. This cannot be done alone by the Local Authority and must be done in partnership with other agencies, including the police, health and education.
- 5.6 Children, young people and their families, wherever they live, should be confident that local authority children’s social care represents their rights and the services that they commission are delivered with consistency.

6. Decide

- 6.1 Scrutiny is asked to formally acknowledge the findings of the Ofsted inspection report and support the strategic actions outlined in response to the recommendations.
- 6.2 Scrutiny is also requested to support the continued implementation of the Council Plan priorities within Children's Services and ensure that legal and risk management frameworks are robustly applied to sustain service excellence.

7. Respond

- 7.1 As above.

8. Review

- 8.1 The recommendations will be subject to consideration and review by Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and through CMT. There will also be consideration and oversight through Safeguarding partnerships and through our continued engagement with Ofsted.

Background papers

- **Appendix A:** Inspection of Walsall local authority children's services (report by Ofsted)
- **Appendix B:** Post-OFSTED Action Plan
- **Appendix C:** Neglect Strategy Action Plan
- **Appendix D:** Care Leavers Strategy Action Plan

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