Inspecting local authority children's services

Updated 9 December 2021

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Introduction

This document sets out the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (LACS). We first published the framework in November 2018 and we have made some changes in August 2021. Here is a summary of the changes we made.

This framework and guidance are to help inspectors to be consistent in their approach to inspecting local authority children's services. We will periodically review and amend the framework and guidance as we learn from inspections.

Many inspection focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:

- to keep and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care whenever they, for whatever reason, are in care
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the quality and impact of care leavers.

We also evaluate:

- how well children are helped and protected
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of performance management.

In law, the term 'children in care' refers to those who are subject to a care order or who are accommodated by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. We use 'children in care' to describe all children and young people because it is what they group have told us they prefer.

Inspection principles

Ofsted's inspection strategy outlines how we will carry out inspection and regulation that is:

- intelligent: all of our work will be evidence-led, and we will seek to ensure our inspection and regulation activities are proportionate
- responsive: our frameworks and our inspection methods will be flexible and bodies and make our organisations and findings clear
- collaborative: we will work with those we inspect and regulate and they can lead and by providing feedback
- our approach to LACS is further underpinned by 3 principles that apply to all social care inspections. We aim to:
- focus on the things that matter most to children's lives
- be proportionate and risk-based in our approach
- prioritise our work where independent is needed.

Whole-system approach

LACS is a system of inspection. Under this system, we use the intelligence we have about how well children are being helped and protected by a local authority. Local area specialist professionals (LASPs) and children's social care (SPSC) inspections are inspections of the local area that sit outside LACS, but are part of the system of inspection that we use to inform our judgements.

The LACS system includes:

- local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social care services
- an annual engagement meeting between our regional representatives and the senior leaders in children's services in the local authority, to discuss the local authority's self-evaluation and how it is managing partnerships with each other in future
- local area specialist professional inspections (LASPs) joint targeted area and information only inspections
- focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children
- standard and short inspections of children's services, including those in care and care leavers
- joint targeted area inspections (JTAI)

We have described each part of this system in more detail later in the framework.

Applying a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection

There is a fixed cycle of visits for the LACS inspection. We use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.

There will be times when concerns arise about a local authority. The regional leaders of children's services (RLCS) will discuss with their regional inspectors, and with senior leaders in children's services, whether a focused visit would be more appropriate.

We will use LASPs and other types of short inspections to visit areas, we need to inform our judgements. This gives the local authority and its partners to identify what is going well and what needs to improve before the next inspection of children's services.

After a focused visit, we will could simply follow up with an urgent inspection of children's services. We will do this if we think there is risk to children the authority needs to address. We will always inform the local authority and its partners through the local authority's self-evaluation and the annual engagement meeting, and the inspection of children's services.

This approach aims to support improvement, while indicating the local authority's capacity to deliver. It also helps to focus the local authority's responsibilities to children in need of help and protection.

Within the LACS system, deciding which type of inspection to deploy is based on the local authority's complex and dynamic process. Figure 1 sets out this process.

Figure 1. Steps for agreeing the LACS inspection programme

Step 1
Local authority sharing its self-evaluation
Step 2
Regional leaders of children's services (RLCS) and their inspectors review the local authority self-evaluation and other information
Step 3
RLCS and their inspectors agree the inspection programme
Step 4
Inspectors carry out the inspection programme
Step 5
Inspectors report on their findings
Step 6
Local authority shares performance and improvement information
Step 7
Inspectors review the local authority's self-evaluation
Step 8
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Local

Short inspection arrangements

On a short inspection, inspectors will gather evidence across the KLOE scope. We will give Ofsted's lead inspector 48 hours' notice. The inspection team for a short inspection will usually be 4 social care inspectors, but it may be smaller or larger depending on the size and complexity of the local authority. Inspectors will be on site or online for up to 3 days and a similar inspector will be on site for 1 day.

Inspection teams may include an additional inspector who will be shadowing the work of their colleagues. Any activity they carry out will be for their own learning and development. They will not be part of the inspection methodology. They will not be in the inspection team and will not be expected to gather evidence and make judgements on inspection.

Week 1: notice period - off site

Local day of the week	Activity
Friday	Lead inspector phones call to DCS to announce the inspection Lead inspector sends a request for information to the local authority
Monday	Local authority receives information and starts to prepare
Tuesday	Local authority meets internal leads and information about cases
Wednesday	Local authority sends information to inspection team
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site preparation activities Telephone conference team meeting (including on Ofsted analytical offer)

Week 2: on site

Local day of the week	Activity
Monday	Lead inspector on site in the afternoon to meet DCS and set up the inspection with local authority leaders
Tuesday	Full team on site with partnership
Wednesday	Feedback to inspection findings Team off-site to prepare for feedback

A short inspection covers the KLOE scope, which is the same as a standard inspection. Judgements are made against the same quality standards. However, it is not a 3 week inspection delivered in 1 week. Inspectors will not be able to gather evidence to the same depth. It is not a 'dipped authority'. This assumption is not correct.

- the previous inspection judgement
- the quality of the last inspection authorised earlier findings
- the quality of self-evaluation over the preceding years, which will have been tested by the local authority's quality assurance framework
- information held on the children's social care case management strong performance

In a short inspection, inspectors will seek to answer 3 questions:

1. Are the quality and impact of practice been maintained?
2. Are there any areas where the impact of practice has been affected by the pandemic?
3. Are there any areas where the quality and impact of practice have improved?

This approach enables the lead inspector to prioritise gathering primary evidence. It also allows the lead inspector to focus on the evidence that will be best the validity of the evidence that the local authority has compiled of caseloads. This will help inspectors to quickly close down lines of enquiry.

Inspectors will gather evidence from a wide range of sources to test whether the local authority is another effective way to answer the 3 questions set out above. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to make a quick evaluation. We will carefully reduce the need for further primary evidence in that part of the inspection.

Further guidance on short and standard inspections

Inspecting against the scope and making judgements based on the evaluation criteria

Inspectors impact across the areas included in the scope of the inspection and make judgements against the quality standards in the evaluation criteria. Each feeding into overall judgements. Inspectors will gather evidence of quality of good experiences and progress for children. Inspectors do not have to evaluate every aspect of the local authority's services. They will focus on what they judge the most important and most significant to the local authority's ongoing scheme.

The role of evidence gathering in standard and short inspections

In previous inspection programmes, inspectors have followed 'the journey of the child' through the local authority's services. This approach gives children in care and, finally, leaving care. For standard and short inspections, inspectors will follow 'the journey'.

The factors that influence what they do and how they do it are:

- the geography of the local authority - for example, we may not always attend in the best of ways
- previous known strengths and weaknesses (including the findings from a previous inspection, and the local authority's self-evaluation). This will may wish to inspect the areas of practice that have been the focus area of enquiry, so that the inspection can focus on whether performance has improved in those areas
- the number of children - for example, we may not visit all children in care
- the cultural issues - where inspectors need to go at the start of the work to set practice issues (for example, the local security arrangements - gain access to IT systems)
- the inspection methodology - for example, in the children in care

The PIM will include the required DfE's analysis of the most recent self-evaluation and annual management information. The PIM will include:

Annex A lists the information that we request from the local authority at the start of the inspection.

The lead inspector will have time allocated, before fieldwork begins, to review the PIM and to make initial contact with the local authority. This will be weeks of children, young people, parents and carers and feedback through the social care annual point-in-time survey run by Ofsted. The lead inspector will use this information to:

- ensure that the fieldwork is properly focused and uses the best offers of information from children
- decide which cohorts of children and young people are most important to identify initial lines of enquiry for the inspection
- develop a hypothesis about the quality of the local authority's services

Only initial lines of enquiry will be generated at this point. There will be few judgements made at this point. The lead inspector will be expected to develop the lines of enquiry and the hypothesis at the beginning of the inspection. The lead inspector will explain to the local authority how these lines of enquiry will be tested. The lead inspector will also explain how it is to be tested.

We do not expect the local authority to produce documents and data in addition to those that are routinely produced for management purposes. The lead inspector. During the inspection fieldwork, we may request more documentation will be kept to an absolute minimum and agreed by the lead inspector.

All inspectors have time allocated to prepare for the inspection. All team members will be expected to read the information that is provided in the initial material and profile of the local authority's services and children. The lead inspector is likely to identify other documents for inspectors to read during the inspection.

Inspectors may request more information (e.g. a specific dataset) from the local authority. The lead inspector may decide that more inspectors must be allocated to the inspection if the local authority's information is not available and cannot be made available. The lead inspector is likely to identify other documents for inspectors to read during the inspection.

Inspectors will use the information they receive to plan the inspection. The lead inspector will ensure that the DCS is notified about the start of the inspection and any subsequent changes to the inspection. The lead inspector will ensure that the DCS is notified about the start of the inspection and any subsequent changes to the inspection. On this basis, we do not consider that the information we request from the local authority at the start of the inspection will be an opportunity to provide a 'dipped authority' in the sense of the DCS's time to bring together the relevant staff. This conversation will usually be in the week before the inspection. It will be a short call. It will not be a practice to do so.

If the DCS is not available, the lead inspector will speak with an senior manager who is responsible for children's services. If the DCS or senior manager is not available, the lead inspector will speak to the DCS's senior manager will not delay the start of the inspection.

The lead inspector will ask the DCS to make a senior leader support person for the inspection. It is important that the person has ready access to the DCS and senior leaders. The support person will be a senior leader who knows the local authority's services.

In the week before inspections are on site, the lead inspector will also arrange to meet with the DCS or the most senior leader responsible for children's services to:

- answer questions about the scope of the inspection
- discuss the lines of enquiry and hypothesis that the inspection, which will focus primary evidence gathering and inspection. Feedback will be kept to a minimum, will only cover lists matters arising from case discussions and will not be a formal feedback on inspection findings
- discuss how inspectors will meet children, young people and their families, young people and families as an integral part of the inspection. When inspectors will need to meet children, young people and their families and other children, young people and families. The lead inspector will also ask if they need to obtain their agreement to observe any meetings and speak to children, young people and families
- agree practical arrangements, for example, on Ofsted's laptops and IT and information technology systems, and any staff support required to access information and data
- agree arrangements, for the inspection team to have access to secure spaces for regular keep in touch meetings and the feedback meeting
- provide information about the local authority's current and recent inspection and other relevant information, including the previous inspection report
- provide information for effective/relevant staff, such as copies of the summary of the inspection and the inspection report and the statement of the agreed action plan
- agreed practical arrangements, for the feedback meeting, including the local authority's social contact, key strengths and challenges
- agree how the local authority will be kept informed of the inspection, including the inspection team's initial lines of enquiry, which will include significant and current investigations (including police investigations) and any other matters that the local authority's senior leaders wish to raise

During the week before inspection, the lead inspector will also, on Ofsted's laptop, will ask to speak with an analyst of the local authority. This is to discuss the local authority's data and information. The analyst will be able to provide information and explain how the local authority's management information is produced.

The lead inspector may also ask for a phone conversation with the lead member for children's services and the local authority chief executive.

Onsite inspection

The lead inspector and 2 inspectors will arrive on site on Monday afternoon. Inspectors will be expected to be on site for 3 days. The lead inspector will arrive a day later than the other 2 inspectors.

When the lead inspector arrives on site, they will meet with the DCS and/or the most senior leaders responsible for children's services. The lead inspector will review the matters and arrangements discussed in the previous week. The lead inspector will also discuss the lines of enquiry and hypothesis and will confirm that the practical arrangements are in place and are working.

When opening the on-site aspect of inspection, the lead inspector should ensure that:

- support is provided to facilitate communication with children, young people, parents, carers and families and other relevant people and staff
- the plan allows realistic travel time for inspectors between activities
- the plan allows for inspectors to spend sufficient time with children, young people and families
- staff are given the opportunity to provide their evidence separately to inspectors, if they wish to do so
- if the lead for any meeting arrive at a result of inadequate practice experiences, the lead inspector sets for this to arrive on the next sessions
- the lead inspector sets out the lines of enquiry and hypothesis that inspectors have to test, reflect on, record and report on individually and as a team

The schedule for the inspection will develop throughout the inspection in response to issues emerging from evaluating children and young people's experiences. The lead inspector will be responsible for ensuring that the lines of enquiry are being explored and evidence gathered.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoption carers

Ofsted is developing a standard inspection. The social care regulatory inspector will be on site for up to 2 days during the fieldwork. During this time, their focus will be on the local authority's recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoption carers.

When evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoption carers, inspectors will use the social care regulatory inspector's evidence and judgements.

- up to 5 foster carer households (including a recent carer assessment)
- up to 4 adopter households (including a recent adoption assessment)

The lead inspector will ask the local authority to provide lists of foster carers and adopters in the scope of the inspection (see Annex A). The lead inspector will also ask for lists to select the households mentioned above and ask the local authority to provide information about the households' children, if they are in care.

In addition, the social care regulatory inspector will:

- foster carers and adopters
- staff and managers who supervise foster and adoption carers
- the foster and adoption panel chairs

Conversations with carers and staff will usually be telephone. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to help arrange these calls.

Carers are regularly involved in the recruitment and training of the workforce. The recruitment, assessment and training of prospective foster and adoptive carers is a key area of work. It is vital that the local authority ensures that it recruits strong prospective carers, who are well trained.

Local authorities may be part of a regional adoption agency (RAA), where some of the recruitment, assessment and training of adoptive carers is done by another children's organisation and not by the local authority. Inspectors will need to ensure the responsibility of each local authority to demonstrate how the local authority ensures that the RAA is meeting the recruitment and training needs of local children.

If a local authority manages its own recruitment, assessment, training and support for adopters, inspectors will need to evaluate the impact of these arrangements. If these are managed by the RAA, inspectors will need to evaluate the impact of the local authority's arrangements with the RAA and the impact of these arrangements on children.

To understand how the local authority works with the RAA to meet the needs of its children, inspectors will need to see the local authority's SLA with the RAA and the independent review of the RAA's work. Inspectors will also need to review local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency. for more information

Evaluating the educational progress of children in care and care leavers

Each subject inspector will be responsible for evaluating VPS. They consider VPS and be allocated 2 days - the Thro Primary and Secondary of Newborn.

Inspectors will use the information in the local authority's self-evaluation, the local authority's annual report and the local authority's annual report and school for the lead inspector. They may contact the virtual school headteacher for a conversation by phone.

On the Tuesday, they will be on site and will interview the virtual school headteacher and other staff. They will also review the local authority's evaluation some case studies of specific children's and care leavers' progress. They may contact specific schools by phone for further information.

The schools VPS will analyse the educational progress of children.

- the educational progress of children in care and care leavers
- ensure home educational offered
- children missing education

Thro's judgements and evidence in short inspections

Inspectors will make the following graded judgements:

- overall effectiveness
- the experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
- the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
- the impact of leaders on social care and children and families

Inspectors will make their graded judgements on a 4 point scale:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement to be good
- inadequate

Inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children, young people and families and the services they receive using the evaluation criteria as a framework. Inspectors will use professional judgement and evidence to make a sound and significance of the impact. Inspectors will gather evidence and make the inspection team conclude that the evidence cannot do more than reasonably be expected of a good. It is not a 'tick box' approach to Thro.

The overall effectiveness judgement is not a mathematical average of the 3 other judgement areas. Inspectors will use both evidence and their professional judgement to make the overall effectiveness grade.

If inspectors find widespread or serious failure resulting in harm, continued inadequate practice or practice that is not in the best interests of children, it will be the arrangements to be inadequate. Inspectors will also look for gaps when an overall effectiveness judgement of inadequate.

It is possible for the overall effectiveness to be good or require improvement to be good even if any of the other judgements grade is inadequate. Inspectors will need to be sure that the local authority's services show sufficient understanding of the inadequate area and sufficient actions to ensure that the local authority's services will be good or requires improvement to services. Inspectors will acknowledge this in the report. The inspection report will explain why the overall effectiveness is not inadequate. The report weight to identified strengths.

If, at the end of fieldwork, the local authority's children's services are judged inadequate, inspectors will follow the section in this guidance on monitoring inadequate local authorities.

Focused visits

Focused visits evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a group of children. Focused visits do not cover all the KLOE scope. Unlike SIF, MYFSI or the previous 'ofsted' SCR inspections, Ofsted is not bound by the 3 week SCR inspections as Ofsted is written 105 of the ESA.

Focused visit arrangements

Focused visits will happen between standard and short inspections. We will give the local authority 48 hours' notice. The lead inspector will be on site on the 1 day contacted within 1 week. Focused visits will exclude some or all of the same inspection activity as a standard or short inspection.

Week 1: notice period - off site

Local day of the week	Activity
Friday	Lead inspector phone call to DCS to announce the inspection
Monday	Local authority receives information and starts to prepare
Tuesday	Local authority meets internal leads and information about cases and partnership information
Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site preparation activities Telephone conference team meeting (including on Ofsted analytical offer)

Week 2: on site

Local day of the week	Activity
Monday	Office evaluation activities
Tuesday	Feedback to inspection findings
Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

The focused visit will take place on Wednesday and Thursday. All other inductions will be adjusted to 1 day for inductions.

Focused visit topics

A focused visit will look at 1 or more aspects of the service, themes or experiences of a group of children. Inspectors will gather evidence and feedback on their LSIF.

We will make the final decision about the focused visit topic to be covered. The decision will be based on the results of the Ofsted's:

- Ofsted's analysis of service has been identified in a local authority or an overview of good or outstanding practice
- the specific area of service has been identified as one that needed improvement in the previous inspection report. The local authority's self-evaluation and the local authority's annual report and school for the specific focus will support that local authority's improvement journey
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Each focused visit will cover part of the scope of standard and short inspections.

The scope for individual focused visits can be narrowed with each topic. Ofsted will publish a list of topics. Ofsted will publish a list of topics. Ofsted will do the impact of leaders on children and children and families.

A list of topics and what they may include is set out below.

Topic: Pre-front door

This may cover:

- stop cycles drawn between children in need and child protection
- children in need of help and protection
- risks associated with gangs
- risks associated with radicalisation
- trafficking and modern slavery

Children in care

This may cover:

- quality of matching, placement and decision making for children in care
- the experiences and progress of children looked after in care
- the experiences and progress of children living in unregulated and/or independent provision

Planning and achieving permanence

This may cover:

- return to birth family
- permanence (family and friends)
- adoption
- long-term foster or residential care
- supported lodgings

Care leavers

This may cover:

- care leavers aged 18 and 17
- care leavers aged 19 to 21
- quality and suitability of accommodation
- quality of pathway planning and training
- transition to adulthood
- staying close and in touch

Findings at focused visits

In each of these focused visits, inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of:

- performance management

- management oversight
- supervision
- quality assurance
- continuous professional development of the workforce

Inspectors will not make graded judgements at the outcome of a focused visit. Nor will they indicate what the grade may have been if the visit had been a short or standard inspection. The outcome will be findings about strengths and areas for improvement, reported in a published letter.

If inspectors find serious weaknesses, they will identify areas for priority action. An area for priority action is either:

- an area of serious weakness that is placing children at risk of inadequate protection and significant harm
- an unnecessary delay in identifying permanent solutions for children in care that results in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted

Priority actions may result from particular or localised failings to protect or care for children as well as from systemic failures or deficits. Some examples of areas for priority action are:

- unrecognised or unallocated children's cases and/or significant delays in addressing child protection concerns or safeguarding the welfare of a child in care
- systemic failure or significant weakness in practice that either expose children to significant risk of harm or fail to safeguard and promote the child's welfare
- a significant shortfall in capacity (frontline staffing numbers, qualifications and expertise) or deficit in management oversight and supervision that impacts adversely on delivery of help, protection or care to children
- significant delays in the allocation or assessment of a large number of children in need cases that expose those children to potential and unquantified risk of harm

Inspectors will use findings from focused visits when planning their next short or standard inspection. The evidence from a focused visit will not be used as primary evidence but may enable inspectors to target their evidence-gathering more effectively.

Monitoring inadequate local authorities

Notifying the local authority of monitoring activity

If local authority children's services are judged inadequate, we will carry out monitoring activity that includes an action planning visit, monitoring visits and a re-inspection. The lead inspector will inform the DCS of this at the feedback meeting for the inspection where the inadequate judgement is given.

If a local authority is not prepared to agree the programme of monitoring visits, the Secretary of State for Education is likely to intervene and direct us to carry out these visits. Section 118(2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 enables the Secretary of State for Education to direct the Chief Inspector to carry out an inspection of a local authority's children's services.

These activities may also take place if inspectors identify areas for priority action at a JTAI that suggest that children are at risk of significant harm.

Monitoring visits will focus on where improvement is needed the most. Inspectors will monitor and report on the local authority's progress since the inspection. Inspectors will also check that performance in other areas has not declined since the inspection. If new concerns emerge, inspectors are likely to look at these on the monitoring visits.

The table below sets out an illustrative timetable for activities after an inadequate judgement. Each step is set out in more detail after the table.

Activity	When the activity happens
Action planning visit between Ofsted and the local authority	30 working days after we publish the inspection report
Local authority shares action plan	70 working days after we publish the inspection report
First monitoring visit	6 months after we publish the inspection report
Second and subsequent monitoring visits	Timetable to be agreed between Ofsted and the local authority

Action planning visit following an inadequate judgement

At the inspection feedback meeting, the lead inspector will ask the DCS to arrange an action planning visit. The visit should take place about 30 working days after the local authority has received its inspection report.

The purpose of the visit is to:

- clarify the roles, responsibilities and activities of Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE)
- help the local authority and its partners understand the inspection findings so that they can develop an action plan
- set out the implications for statutory partners, including those included in the local strategic safeguarding arrangements
- discuss the draft action plan (if available)
- confirm the date of the first monitoring visit and establish the pattern of future monitoring activity
- agree the focus of the first monitoring visit and (if possible) any subsequent monitoring visits

Once the local authority has received its inspection report, the regional director will write to the DCS confirming the action planning visit. They will copy this letter to the DfE inspections and interventions team.

A member of the inspection team, usually the lead inspector, and a SHMI based in the local authority's region will attend the visit. The role of the inspector and SHMI is to help the local authority understand the findings from the inspection.

The DCS will decide who else attends the action planning visit. The DCS may wish to discuss this with the lead inspector to ensure that attendees are appropriate to the findings in the report. The attendees will usually include senior managers of the local authority children's services and other key partners. The visit is concerned with the operational work of children's services professionals, so elected councillors will not normally attend.

The SHMI and lead inspector will discuss the agenda for the action planning visit with the DCS before the event. The lead inspector will circulate the final agenda 5 working days before the visit.

If the local authority has a draft of its action plan, the DCS should share this with the lead inspector before the action planning visit. Early drafts of action plans are accepted as a 'work in progress' and will not be formally reviewed by the inspector.

The lead inspector will record the outcome of the discussions. The SHMI will send this to the DCS, regional director and the national director, social care.

Reviewing the local authority action plan

The lead inspector will review the action plan as soon as possible after receiving it. We are not responsible for 'signing off' or endorsing the action plan – this is the responsibility of the DCS. Our role is to advise the DCS about whether the action plan reflects the findings in the inspection report. Our regional director will write to the DCS confirming whether the action plan reflects the inspection findings.

If the regional director thinks that the action plan does not respond to the findings set out in the inspection report, the lead inspector and/or SHMI will discuss this with the DCS. If we and the local authority disagree on this matter, the regional director will write to the DCS setting out the area(s) of difference and the reasons.

The lead inspector will share the letter they send to the DCS with the DfE inspections and interventions unit. If we and the local authority differ in our view of the action plan, we will ask the Secretary of State for Education to consider what action (if any) they want the DfE to take.

With the agreement of the DCS, the inspector and/or SHMI may attend the local authority's improvement board or other related meetings, for example with DfE officials. Our inspectors will attend as observers.

Arrangements for monitoring visits

At the action planning visit, the SHMI, lead inspector and DCS will agree arrangements for monitoring visits. The following guidelines will usually apply. The first monitoring visit will be within 3 months of the submission deadline for the local authority's action plan (which is about 6 months after publication of the inspection report). We will carry out 3 or 4 monitoring visits a year. We will carry out between 4 and 6 monitoring visits before a re-inspection. The monitoring visits may not be equally spaced throughout the year. The lead inspector will confirm the dates of the visits in advance. After we have completed these monitoring visits, we will either: * adopt the ILACS process for self-evaluation and annual engagement before carrying out a re-inspection * consider whether further monitoring would continue to add value in light of further plans for improvement

Usually, 2 inspectors will carry out each visit. Each visit will usually last for 2 days. Whenever possible, the same inspector will lead all the monitoring visits in the same local authority.

We have set out timescales in the tables below.

Timescale: before the visit

Timescale	Usual day of the week	Activities
10 days before the visit	Monday	Lead inspector requests child-level data
9 days before the visit	Tuesday	Local authority provides data, indicating which cases they have audited
8 days before the visit	Wednesday	Lead inspector notifies local authority of specific audited cases that the local authority should share
The week before the visit	Wednesday	Local authority shares audited cases
The week before the visit	Thursday and Friday	Full team off-site evaluation of evidence Telephone conference team meeting

Timescale: the on-site visit

Usual day of the week	Activities
Monday	Off-site evaluation of evidence
Tuesday	Full team on site gathering evidence
Wednesday	Full team on site gathering evidence and providing feedback

Some focused visits may take place on Wednesday and Thursday. All other milestones will be adjusted by one day to reflect this.

Before a monitoring visit

Two weeks before the visit, the lead inspector will ask the local authority to provide up-to-date child-level data. When providing the data, the local authority should indicate any cases that it has audited since the last monitoring visit.

The inspector may ask the local authority to audit cases. Usually, the inspector will request information about up to 6 cases that have already been audited by the local authority. The local authority should share the completed audits at least 3 working days before the monitoring visit.

We will only request information that is necessary to inform that monitoring visit. Requests will be based on the information in Annex A.

Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that the local authority can use to share this information.

On-site activity in monitoring visits

The lead inspector and DCS will agree a timetable for the on-site activity. On-site activity will usually consist of evaluating the experience of up to 6 children and young people. Inspectors will evaluate the cases audited by the local authority to see how effective the local authority's auditing systems are.

To triangulate their findings, inspectors will look at a sample of other cases. Any sampling activity will be proportionate to the practice that inspectors are evaluating. Inspectors will usually only sample cases from the previous 3 months.

If the inspector identifies a cause for concern about the help, protection or care given to a child or children, they must bring it to the DCS's attention.

Inspectors will record the evidence collected and their conclusions during each monitoring visit. Inspectors must record the case numbers of tracked and sampled cases so that these can be cross-referenced in future visits.

At the end of each visit, the lead inspector will feed back a summary of the inspection findings to the local authority. It is for the local authority to decide who will attend this meeting. If the Secretary of State for Education has appointed a children's services commissioner, the local authority may invite the commissioner to attend the feedback as an observer. The Ofsted regional director and/or quality assurance manager may be present for the feedback. If the authority and inspectors disagree about the findings, this must be recorded.

The lead inspector and the local authority will discuss the areas to consider at the next monitoring visit. If the date of the next monitoring visit is known, the lead inspector will confirm the milestones for the local authority to provide information and whether it will need to audit any cases.

Roles and expectations of inspectors

The things inspectors should do when working as part of an inspection team. In all inspections, all inspectors work collaboratively on all aspects of the scope to ensure that evidence is analysed as a group activity. In short and standard inspections, all inspectors usually gather evidence and evaluate the same cohort of children's experiences and progress at the same time. This is central to the effectiveness of a small team.

The lead inspector will:

- coordinate the inspection between the team and with the local authority area leaders
- challenge, support and give advice to the team and quality assure the team's work
- develop lines of enquiry alongside the team
- prioritise inspection activity according to lines of enquiry
- consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors

The team inspector will:

- work across judgement areas to provide challenge and scrutiny to the work of other inspectors throughout the inspection and in the final judgement meeting
- present succinct analysis of the main findings based on reliable evidence
- quality assure their own and other inspectors' work during inspections

Inspection team meetings

Team meetings are important to ensure that the team covers the scope of the inspection. Inspectors should come together at the beginning, middle and end of each fieldwork day to:

- share and triangulate their evidence and analysis
- agree and record shared findings in their joint evidence record
- develop and close down lines of enquiry as a team
- build up an evidence-based view of the quality and impact of practice and leadership within the local authority area
- keep the lead inspector fully aware of any key developments
- enable the lead inspector to coordinate the inspection effectively

The team will meet for an extended period on the penultimate day on site to discuss findings, agree provisional judgements and identify areas for improvement.

Inspection methodology

The things that inspectors will do to gather and evaluate evidence and report their findings.

Inspection activity and gathering evidence

Almost all inspection evidence will be gathered by looking at individual children and young people's experiences. This will be largely through meeting with practitioners to understand the nature and impact of their work with children and families, including scrutinising electronic records.

We take into account individual children's starting points and circumstances during inspections. We recognise that even slight progress in a particular aspect of their lives may represent a significant improvement for some children. We also recognise that for some children, because of their experiences of trauma, abuse or neglect, progress is not always straightforward. Progress in one area may result in deterioration in another as they work through the impact of their past experiences.

Evaluating individual children's records that have already been audited by the local authority is an effective way for inspectors to understand the local authority and target their evidence-gathering. If the local authority's evaluation of practice is in line with our evaluation, this will usually reduce the need for further primary evidence in that part of the inspection.

When evaluating individual children's experiences, inspectors will not grade individual pieces of work.

If statutory functions have been delegated, the inspectors will evaluate the experiences of children and young people in the same way as they do in areas where functions have not been delegated. For further information on delegated functions, see the section on alternative delivery models.

When inspectors select the children and young people whose experiences they will evaluate, they will take into account the factors set out below:

- age, gender, disability and ethnicity
- children at risk of harm from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. Inspectors will also want to identify those children and young people who the local authority is concerned may be vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation and those children and young people who have been missing from care, home and education. These children must be part of the cohort of children whose experiences inspectors evaluate
- educational achievement and ability
- type of placement, including out-of-area placements, kinship care or 'connected person' arrangements and children placed at home and subject to a care order (Regulation 24(3) Care Planning, Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010)
- at least 1 child from a large sibling group
- children and young people supported by a third-party provider operating with social services functions delegated to it by the local authority (if the local authority has delegated functions to a provider of social work services; for further information on delegated functions, see the section on alternative delivery models).

The lead inspector will take into account any lines of enquiry identified before arriving on site or particular children and young people who are identified through the sample information, such as children who appear to have experienced significant delay.

It is important that inspectors examine good practice as part of the inspection. We encourage local authorities to provide examples of cases that demonstrate good practice that it has identified through local case audit activity.

In evaluating children and young people's experiences, inspectors will test the following thresholds:

- early help – including early help assessments
- referral and assessment
- children in need
- child protection (for investigation and for a plan)
- continuing help and support for families
- the decision to accommodate
- the decision to remove
- permanence planning
- matching and placement decisions, including work to support return home
- leaving care

Inspectors will base their judgements on contemporary practice. This will usually be practice in the 6 months before the inspection. They may need to evaluate practice from before this to understand a child's journey.

Judgements will generally be based on practice that has an impact on the child's or young person's current situation, although inspectors will read some historical information to understand the child's journey, their progress and how this relates to the plans for their future.

If case files are wholly or partly electronic, the local authority should arrange for each inspector to have individual access to all relevant electronic systems. Inspectors must return any paper case files when they are needed by the staff working with the child and/or family.

Inspectors will review a sample of supervision records and carers' records (when appropriate), including those related to the sample of children and young people.

Protecting personal data

During inspections and visits, inspectors will gather personal information that is necessary to help them evaluate local services. Our privacy notices set out what data we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and people's rights under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Hearing the views of children and young people and their families

There are various opportunities to hear the views of children, young people and their families. Inspectors will use these whenever possible. These include:

- direct testimony – for example, speaking to those whose cases we are looking at closely
- views of representative groups – for example, from the Children in Care Council
- views expressed by others advocating for children in care and care leavers, including foster carers and residential staff
- views directly recorded in case files and meeting minutes
- views expressed by practitioners
- views expressed by others advocating for children, young people and their families
- analysis of the annual questionnaires, including those from children in care, carers, social workers and stakeholders
- reviewing complaints made by children

Inspectors will talk to children and young people whenever possible during the inspection, although these discussions will not always be face to face. When talking to or about children or young people, inspectors are interested in hearing how the children and young people's rights are being considered, how their entitlements are realised and about their experiences of the local pledges or charters in practice.

Inspectors will provide the local authority with guidance to help prepare children, young people, carers and families to be involved in the inspection. Inspectors must make sure that children and young people and their families understand what their involvement in the inspection means before speaking with them about their experiences. We have published 2 documents with this framework to help local authorities and inspectors explain to children and their families what their involvement in inspections and visits means.

Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues concerned with meeting children and birth family members with the child's social worker or lead practitioner.

Inspectors will work with agencies to ensure that any child or young person with communication difficulties has access to the necessary support to facilitate her/his full involvement in the inspection.

We will also want to see and hear the impact of local consultation with all children and young people. This includes children in care, care leavers, carers and birth families. We will want to see how their feedback has been asked for, both individually and collectively, and taken into account to improve practice and services.

During a standard or short inspection, an inspector may meet with a group of foster carers, either an established group or a group identified through an open invitation to meet the inspection team.

Documentation

The inspection team will review the documentation requested in Annex A. If the local authority wants to share any information additional to what is listed in Annex A, it must discuss this with the lead inspector first. The local authority must be clear why it believes the information is relevant to the inspection. The lead inspector will make the final decision about whether to accept the information as part of the inspection evidence.

Where inspectors are seeking further information

We sometimes have to ask for further information. This may be about a service or strategy or about an individual child's experiences.

Requests for further information about an individual child's experiences should not be seen as a negative. Sometimes it is because inspectors have insufficient information to know that a child is safe and it may appear that the child is at risk of harm. For example, the inspectors may be unable to find the information or it may not have been recorded by the local authority. After the local authority senior leadership team has responded to the request, inspectors are able to make a more informed judgement about the quality and impact of the practice they have seen. In some cases, requests for further information enable inspectors to explore good practice.

At the start of the inspection, the lead inspector will set up a record of requests for further information and share this with the DCS. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to enter responses to a request for information on the record.

Engaging with leaders and staff

Interviews with practitioners, managers and stakeholders

Inspectors will triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/or managers, either by telephone or in person. If children and young people are supported by a third-party provider as the result of statutory functions being delegated, inspectors will talk to the practitioners and managers of that provider in the same way as they would to local authority staff. Lead inspectors will only request that groups of people are brought together for discussions or meetings if this is the only way to triangulate evidence and is based on lines of enquiry arising from case evaluations.

When talking to social workers about practice, inspectors are likely to ask questions about a range of issues, for example:

- the quality and impact of supervision and management oversight
- the ways in which they are helped to strengthen families and minimise risk
- workloads and workload management
- the availability, quality and impact of training and development opportunities
- the impact on practice of multi-agency training and the dissemination of learning from national or local learning reviews

Inspectors will usually speak about these issues alone with social workers. They may ask for the social worker's line manager to be present.

If these individuals are not available, inspectors may talk to those who are deputising for them in their absence.

If local authorities are in a process of reform or implementing an improvement plan, the lead inspector will ensure that the impact of these changes is evaluated throughout the inspection and discussed with the senior managers. This is likely to be reflected in the report, particularly the impact of leaders on frontline social work practice judgement.

If, as part of the assessment of the impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families, inspectors identify an issue arising from the arrangements for discharging the functions of the DCS and lead member for children's services, they will look at the quality and effectiveness of the local authority's assurance and compliance process.

Statutory guidance states that the DCS and lead member should provide a clear line of political and professional accountability for children's well-being. The DCS should report to the chief executive and the lead member should report to the council leader or mayor, as the individuals with ultimate responsibility for the political and corporate leadership of the council.

It is legal for the DCS and lead member roles to be combined with other operational and political functions. However, given the breadth and importance of children's services functions that they cover, local authorities should give due consideration to protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of the DCS and lead member before allocating any additional functions to individuals performing these roles.

If issues arise during inspection, inspectors will look to see the local lens of scrutiny. Inspectors will consider whether the local authority's support for children and young people has been weakened or diluted as a result of decisions made by the local lens. This is always a matter for judgment, but it may be a significant factor in the inspection judgments about the quality of any contributed grade. For example the impact on both children and adult services if there is a 20% cut in the budget for children and young people.

Engaging the CCG leading on inspection

Inspection teams will include a senior clinical leader member of the senior staff participating. Inspection teams will include a CCG member. This is always to be a daily basis through a brief face-to-face meeting, which may involve other members of the team. The CCG member will be a senior clinical leader, clinical lead or clinical commissioner. The CCG member will be a senior person who is able to make decisions on behalf of the CCG. The CCG member will be able to contribute to the inspection team and to contribute to the local lens of scrutiny.

Engaging the local authority and partnership

In evaluating services for children subject to care, supervision and adoption services, inspectors will need to understand the local authority's support for the content of the local lens. Inspectors will need to understand what a good and valuable evidence, particularly in reviewing the child's journey in coming into care and being in care. Inspectors will need to see the local authority's Corporate Parenting Board and Virtual Schools Head of Service to have the experience of local authority performance and get its perspective on the local authority's ambition.

Inspectors may, in some circumstances, decide to speak with the local authority's Lead Member for Children's services and the local authority's Chief Executive. Inspectors will need to understand the local authority's corporate offer to support the children and young people in care and care leavers.

We will not make judgements about the quality of local authority organisations or the policies in the report, but may report system-wide strengths and weaknesses.

The range of information gathered will vary according to the lines of enquiry and the local authority context.

Contact with the local Ofsted service area will add to the evidence base. Inspectors will need to:

- response to referrals and requests for information
- the appropriateness of thresholds for care applications and timeliness of care proceedings
- tracks and appropriateness of decisions made in relation to children in emergency protection orders
- the quality of the assessments for care proceedings and within the Public Law Outline
- the quality and quantity of assessments and reports to court, including quality assurance processes
- the effectiveness of independent reviewing officers
- the quality of the work of the Children and Family Services Justice Board
- the involvement of children in the Family Justice Review and the impact and their effectiveness
- the quality of the local authority's legal advice and representation
- the appropriate allocation of resources to the Family Justice Review and the local authority

Inspectors will pay special attention when a court is considering any question with respect to a child under the Children Act 1989, it can set a Calendar plan for the proceedings, which is a timetable for the proceedings, and in cases where a child disposal order is made, the court may give directions in circumstances where parents are disorienting or repeating. A national protocol between Ofsted and Cafcass will be in place. Inspectors will need to see the local authority or partnership's response to the report that should be prepared by the local authority. The protocol, called Determining whether a child is in care or voluntarily accommodated", is available under Cafcass/Ofsted practice guidance.

Recording evidence

Throughout an inspection or visit, inspectors will maintain a record of the evidence they gather. The record will include their individual and team judgments, and will be used to inform the feedback to the local authority and to the lead inspector.

Each inspector will maintain records of the evidence they gather throughout the inspection or visit. The record will include their individual and team evidence they gather. If the evidence is not sufficient to make a judgment or claim that is essential to the inspection, the inspector will ask it to add inspectors colleague to the online record.

The lead inspector must allocate time for team inspectors to analyse their evidence and make judgments and claims and to record the evidence in the evidence record.

Inspectors should meet at least once a day to discuss their individual evidence and to make judgments and claims. Inspectors should be prepared to discuss their individual evidence with their colleagues. Inspectors will be more than one inspector – they are essential for underpinning feedback and keep in touch OFSTED's overarching judgments and claims and evidence.

Evaluative summaries must set out the inspector's in-team view about the quality of the local authority's services. The lead inspector will need to describe the picture for the local authority and to be able to set out the local authority does not appear to be aware of and/or is not responding to. Inspectors will need to be able to set out the evidence base on which the inspection should record.

Inspectors should also record summaries of examples of outstanding practice.

Inspectors should not use the names of individual children, young people or family members in their evidence. They should use case reference numbers or initials. Inspectors should not use the names of individual staff or practitioners.

The quality assurance team will review the evidence record and challenge the team's findings to make sure that the 2 steps. They will add comments to the evidence record. The quality assurance team will also ensure any further investigations to be undertaken are recorded.

Finishing evidence

Towards the end of the inspection or focused visit, the inspection team will complete its inspection activities and inspectors will need to agree their individual judgments. The lead inspector will need to make sure that the delayed evaluation of the evidence.

Inspectors will weight the evidence against the evaluation criteria. It's a question of team judgment. Inspectors will need to be prepared of all the characteristics set out in the frameworks are underpinned and common sense. Inspectors will need to be able to set out the evidence base on which set out their professional judgments. Inspectors will need to be able to set out significance of their findings. They will make a judgement of good if the evidence is good. They will make a judgement of inadequate if the evidence is inadequate. They will make a judgement of adequate if the evidence is adequate.

At the end of a focused visit, the team will agree the main strengths and areas for improvement and whether there is a pattern to report.

Before formal feedback at the end of a standard or short inspection, the team will provide a summary of its evidence and its initial views for the OFSTED the provisional judgments from the inspection.

Feedback at the end of the inspection/visit

On the first day or visit, the team leader will provide the local authority senior leaders to meet with the inspection team to have the provisional findings. The meeting should include the lead member for children's services and the local authority director of children's services. Because the strengths and areas for improvement will be based on the evidence that the inspection team has found to be consistent and reliable and evidence of inspection judgments, the lead inspector will inform the OFSTED of the provisional judgments before the feedback.

Senior leaders are invited to respond to the provisional feedback with evidence supporting the provisional findings and/or judgments to:

- challenge the evidence base and/or the provisional findings and/or judgements to support improvement (for local authorities judged to be inadequate or requiring improvement, this will be a challenge to the proposed judged outstanding)
- participate in a dialogue about the areas for development that are likely to be included in the inspection report, and the wording of the report's findings
- ensure that the report is factually accurate
- understand what will make the most difference for the individual local authority, children and young people and their families
- support understanding of the inspection judgments and how the inspection judgements of the inspection can be disseminated accurately and informed internal discussions and decisions

To make findings and/or judgments clear and to inform the discussion with senior leaders, inspectors will need to be able to provide a summary of the thematic areas evidence. The summary should include the areas for development across the scope of the inspection/visit. This is an opportunity for senior leaders to challenge the evidence base and/or the provisional findings and/or judgements. Senior leaders will need to be able to set out the evidence base and/or to set out the evidence base. This meeting will usually last no longer than 60 minutes. Inspectors will have produced a written summary of the evidence base for the meeting.

The lead inspector will notify the local authority senior leaders and the Members of the inspection team will then decide to the local authority the provisional findings. The lead inspector will provide the local authority with a written summary of the evidence base and the reasons. The discussion should relate to the scope of the inspection/visit and the focused inspection and the overview of children's services and inspection.

At the feedback meeting, the lead inspector will set out the provisions for ensuring the draft report/letter the factual accuracy check, publishing the report/letter and making a complaint.

Engaging children's services commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for Education

At the time of an inspection or visit, a commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Education may be in place. Inspectors will expect the local authority to secure improvement to children's services. This is usually in a letter from the Secretary of State for Education. Inspectors will need to be able to support to the commissioner. The commissioner is an important stakeholder.

The role of the commissioner is to ensure the inspection or visit. The local authority should inform the commissioner of the inspection or visit. Ofsted will also inform the DfE that an inspection or visit has started. The DfE would also inform the commissioner.

The lead inspector should contact the commissioner for their view of the local authority's prospects for improvement. The lead inspector should seek further information. The lead inspector should request the commissioner's information to refine their lines of enquiry, not as primary evidence.

It is the local authority's responsibility to provide the commissioner with all the feedback meeting. If a commissioner does attend, this will be an observer role.

Inspection reports and letters

The following tables set out the kind of report we publish after each type of inspection or visit.

Type of inspection	Type of report
Standard inspection	Inspection report with judgements in the Ofsted Inspection Framework
Short inspection	Inspection report with judgements in the Ofsted Inspection Framework
Short inspection	Inspection report with judgements in the Ofsted Inspection Framework
Focused visit	Letter setting out our findings about strengths and areas for improvement
Monitoring inspection	Letter setting out our findings about progress since the last inspection
Focused inspection	We do not publish a letter after the first monitoring visit, unless this is a focused inspection of adoption services
Joint inspection	Joint letter setting out our findings about the quality of services

The lead inspector will write the inspection report/letter. The lead inspector will provide the report/letter to the quality assurance team for ensuring fidelity framework and a quality assurance for quality and integrity.

We will not publish this report/letter. We will send it to the local authority at the same time that we send the pre-publication version of the main report. It will be in the form of a letter addressed to the local authority's director of children's services and professional lead for children's services.

Writing the report/letter

When identifying the things that need to improve most, inspectors must ensure that these are proportionate to the overall grade in inspection report/letter. The report/letter should be written in a way that is easy to read by the local authority's staff and the commissioner. The report/letter should set out what the inspection team's evidence base and reasons for the judgements and claims. The report/letter should be written in a way that is easy to read and understand. The report/letter should be written in a way that is easy to read and understand.

Letters following local visits will set out the findings from the visit. The report/letter should be written in a way that is easy to read and understand. Inspectors must in relation to the practice inspection (some of. Inspectors first consider what the local authority's practice is doing well and what is not providing enough. Inspectors should be able to set out the evidence base and to be able to set out the evidence base. Inspectors should be able to set out the evidence base and to be able to set out the evidence base.

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Inspectors must make clear the extent of all the issues reported and the seriousness that children and young people and their families are facing. The report must outline the local authority's knowledge about those children and young people and their families. The report should also outline the children's partnership offered in the local authority, including the community or ethnic group, disabled children or those with a specific language need. The report should also outline the local authority's knowledge about those children and young people and their families. The report should also outline the local authority's knowledge about the experiences and progress of care leavers.

Reports following a standard or short inspection will include a section on the local authority's:

If children and young people are supported by a third party provider providing under delegated authority, the report/letter the inspectors must include the extent to which the local authority ensures itself of the quality of the provision and the impact it is having on children and young families and carers. This includes the local authority's knowledge about management and quality assurance arrangements, as defined by The Children Act 1989 Representations and Complaints Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

Clearing and publishing inspection reports and letters

The quality assurance manager (QAM) will clear the report/letter, review the report/letter and support the lead inspector throughout the report writing process. The QAM will also provide a quality assurance for the final version of reports.

Local authorities will be given an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report/letter before we publish it.

We will send the final version of the report to the local authority (copied to the DfE) and the lead inspector. We will publish the report/letter on the website of OFSTED in Ofsted's Children's Services Inspection Reports. We will also send it to the DfE. We will publish the final version on our reports website.

Quality assurance check	Standard and short inspection reports	Focused visits and monitoring letters
Report sent to local authority for factual accuracy check	10 days after inspection ended	10 days after inspection ended
Summary letter from the local authority that has been accepted by us	15 days after inspection ended	15 days after inspection ended
Final version sent to the local authority	20 days after inspection ended	20 days after inspection ended
Report published on Ofsted's website	30 days after inspection ended	30 days after inspection ended Monitoring letters

Quality assurance

The provision of quality assurance for all inspections, focused visits and monitoring visits are based on the assumption that the lead inspector owns the inspection and the report/letter.

Quality assurance arrangements ask the families and psychometrical practitioners to provide a quality assurance for the quality of local authority services will be influenced by:

- whether it is an inspection resulting in a judgement or a visit resulting in a letter
- the inspection and the report
- the influencing factors of the local authority, including size and location
- local intelligence held by us

After the inspection

Information about a identified issue or gaps in response to an inspection and making a complaint to us about the inspection.

Action plan after an inspection or visit

After a standard or short inspection, the local authority should write an action plan in response to the report/letter. The local authority should send action plan to us at Inspection2ChildrenServices.gov.uk, within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection report. The requirement for this is set out in the Children Act 1989 Representations and Complaints Procedure Authorities (Representations Act 1989).

Following a focused visit, updating the existing action plan from the previous inspection or visit. The local authority should send the action plan to us at Inspection2ChildrenServices.gov.uk, within 70 working days of receiving the final self-evaluation in preparation for the next annual engagement meeting.

Focused visits make up the 3 inspections in the 3 year inspection cycle. We should submit an action plan that responds to the priority action within 70 working days of receiving the final report/letter. We will also ask for a 2 page update on progress against the action plan 6 months after the date of receiving the focused visit letter. This is so we can be assured that the local authority is making sufficient progress to secure improvement in the sufficiency of the fostering.

The local authority does not need to submit an action plan to us after a monitoring visit.

Complaints

Our aim is to deal with a complaint sensitively and without incident. If a complaint is about a practice, these should be dealt with in accordance with the quality assurance manager as soon as possible during the inspection visit. Inspectors should be able to set out the evidence base and to be able to set out complaints. Any complaint made about the inspection or the findings in the report can be raised after the inspection and will be considered as part of the quality assurance process.

If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a strong complaint can be raised using our complaints process.

Sharing information with other inspectorates

We share the final version of our local authority reports with our partner inspectorates under protocols with Ofsted and Cafcass. Our partner inspectorates are the CQC, HMICFRS, HMIP, HMI Prisons and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

If there is evidence of a serious or significant issue in the work of other agencies, we will write to the relevant inspectorate setting out the concerns and the evidence. We will do this if we think it is in the interest of children and parents. There may be a serious risk of harm to children and parents. If there is concern, we will share information with other inspectorates during the inspection.

It is the responsibility of the lead inspector to draft and submit letters to other inspectorates. The letter should be sent to the lead inspector and report is submitted for quality assurance.

If inspection evidence suggests that there are weaknesses in practice in other providers or agencies that are regulated or inspected, we will record this to inform future inspection of those providers and services.

Alternative delivery models and delegation of local authority functions

Alternative delivery models and delegation of local authority functions. Alternative delivery models and delegation of local authority functions.

This section provides information about inspectors where a local authority has delegated statutory functions to a third party provider or has set up a separate delivery body.

In these circumstances (with the exception of arrangements under section 497A(4A) of the Education Act 2006), the inspection is still inspection of the local authority. This is because the third party is acting on the local authority's behalf.

Local authority functions

Under Part 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, local authorities in England may delegate their functions to third parties. The functions of the local authority's statutory care functions.

Relevant care functions are those set out in section 1(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and regulation 2 of the Children and Young Persons (Delegation of Functions) (England) Regulations 2009 (SI 2009/2821). Relevant care functions are those set out in section 1(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and regulation 2 of the Children and Young Persons (Delegation of Functions) (England) Regulations 2009 (SI 2009/2821). A local authority cannot delegate its duty to secure sufficient accommodation for the discharge of a function set out in regulation 2 of the 2009 Regulations.

Direction by the Secretary of State for Education

Under section 497A(4A) of the Education Act 1996, the Secretary of State for Education may direct a local authority to contract out its social services functions, including its children's services functions, to another provider. At the time of writing, the delegation of children's services functions to another team on a voluntary basis (with no direction from the Secretary of State for Education) is not permitted. The Secretary of State for Education has not yet used this power. The Secretary of State for Education has not yet used this power.

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Judgements about leadership when there are alternative delivery models

If a local authority makes arrangements with a third party provider to deliver services, inspectors will need to be able to set out the local authority. Therefore, inspectors will need to be able to set out the local authority.

When applying the criteria, inspectors will consider whether:

- effective control monitoring arrangements by the local authority are in place to ensure that children services are managed with proper oversight to ensure their responsibilities are carried out to a high standard
- the local authority has a robust commissioning strategy in place to ensure ensure that it fulfills its role as the corporate parent
- the local authority has a robust commissioning strategy for managing local provision and that provision is managed with proper oversight to ensure that their responsibilities are carried out to a high standard
- the local authority has a robust commissioning strategy for managing local provision and that provision is managed with proper oversight to ensure that their responsibilities are carried out to a high standard

- provider discharge the individual and collective responsibilities of local authority leaders (as outlined)
- in cases where only some functions have been delegated, the arrangements for how the local authority holds the provider to account are proportionate to the nature and extent of delegation

All references in the evaluation criteria to a 'local authority' also refer to all arrangements for alternative delivery models.

Action plans when there are alternative delivery models

We and the DfE have agreed that the local authority and alternative delivery model (ADM)/trust are responsible for different aspects of any action plans. Our expectations are that:

- arrangements reflect what has already been agreed as part of existing service contract
- the local authority will draft the overarching strategic elements (information taken from any existing services contract) that would include any wider issues that are not the responsibility of the ADM/trust (for example governance, relationship with trust, scrutiny function and support services)
- the ADM/trust should draft the operational content describing how outcomes will be achieved to address our findings
- the local authority is responsible for submitting the plan (copied to the ADM/trust)

It must be made clear whether the plan has been agreed and, if there is any disagreement, these areas must be set out.

If the ADM/trust has been created at the direction of the Secretary of State for Education, the plan should be copied to the Secretary of State to enable these issues to be addressed through the appropriate route.

Evaluation criteria and grade descriptors

Our description of what a good experience for children and young people looks like. Inspectors use this to make their judgements.

Overall effectiveness

Inspectors will determine the overall effectiveness graded judgement by taking account of the grading of the other judgements that have been agreed and by looking at:

- the extent of good practice across the service
- the extent and impact of any areas for improvement
- whether areas for improvement have been identified and the extent to which leaders and managers have a 'grip' on the issue

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

A local authority is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

Evaluation criteria heading	Description
Early help	Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated.
Identifying and responding to children's needs and appropriate thresholds	Professionals identify children and young people in need of help and protection. They make appropriate referrals to children's social care and are able to access social work expertise and advice. There is a timely and effective response to referrals, including out of normal office hours and referrals to the designated officer. Professionals understand thresholds. This leads to children and families receiving effective, proportionate and timely interventions, which improve their situation.
Making good decisions and providing effective help	Children and families experience child protection enquiries that are thorough and lead to timely action, which reduces the risk of harm to children. Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously. Steps are taken to protect children and young people and the management of allegations against staff is robust and effective. Assessments and plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. Assessments (including early help assessments) are timely and proportionate to risk. They are informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. They result in direct help for families if needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective and lawful. Children in need of help and/or protection have a plan setting out how they will be helped, how their needs are going to be met and how risk will be reduced within the timescales appropriate for the child. If families refuse to engage, clear contingency plans are in place. These are based on the assessment of need and risks to the child. Action is taken to avoid drift and delay. Plans and decisions are reviewed. Alternative decisive action is taken if children's circumstances do not change and the help provided does not meet their needs, or the risk of harm or actual harm remains or intensifies. Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key participants attend multi-agency meetings (for example, case conferences, strategy meetings, core groups and multi-agency risk assessment conferences). These meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring. Actions happen within agreed timescales and the help and protection provided reduce risk and meet need.
Management oversight of frontline practice	Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Actions are clearly recorded. Systematic and high-quality management oversight of frontline practice drives child-centred plans and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child. Effective and timely planning, support and decision-making takes place during pre-proceedings work.
Participation and direct work with children and families	Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers if it is in the best interests of the child. Practice is based on understanding each child's day-to-day lived experience. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive. Children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development.
Identifying and responding to all types of abuse recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children.	Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse are effectively identified and responded to. Children and young people who live in households where at least 1 parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill-health, or where there is domestic violence, are helped and protected. Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately. This includes, but is not limited to, disabled children, children who are privately fostered, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of radicalisation or exploitation or becoming involved in gangs. Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them. The local authority has arrangements in place to identify the number of children not in full-time school education and to respond if there are concerns about their welfare. For those who are missing or often missing, there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.
Outstanding	'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged outstanding if the response to children and families is consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children, young people and their families.
Requires improvement to be good	'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged requires improvement if there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. However, the local authority is not yet consistently delivering good help and protection for children, young people and families.
Inadequate	'The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' is likely to be judged inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures, which leave children being harmed or at risk of harm.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

This area is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

Evaluation criteria	Description
Making good decisions for children	Children and young people become looked after in a timely manner and in their best interests. Decisions that children should be in care are based on clear, effective, comprehensive and risk-based assessments, involving, if appropriate, other professionals working with the family. If it is not possible for children to return home, suitable and timely plans for permanence are made for them to live away from the family home. If the plan for a child is to return home, there is purposeful work carried out with the family so that it is safe for the child to return. Further care episodes are avoided unless they are provided as a part of an appropriate plan of support. The wishes and feelings of children, and those of their parents, are clearly set out in timely and authoritative assessments and applications to court. Assessments of family members as potential carers are carried out promptly to a good standard. Children's care plans comprehensively address their needs and experiences, including the need for timely permanence. Children's plans are thoroughly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff and other adults who know them. Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate and ambitious.
Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers	Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them. Children have positive and stable relationships with professionals and carers who are committed to protecting them and promoting their welfare. Children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. They know how to give feedback or complain and understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken and services improve when necessary. Children and young people have access to an advocate and independent visitor when needed. Care leavers are well-informed about access to their records, assistance to find employment, training and financial support. The local authority celebrates the achievements of children in care and care leavers. It shows it is ambitious for their futures. Children in care and care leavers are well represented by a Children in Care Council or similar body, which is regularly consulted on how to improve the support for these children and young people.
Helping and protecting	Children in care and care leavers are protected or helped to keep themselves safe from bullying, homophobic behaviour and other forms of discrimination. Any risks associated with children and care leavers offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited or exploited in any other way are known well by the adults who care for them. Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm. Children and care leavers are safe and feel safe. They are helped to understand how they can keep themselves safe.
Health	Children in care and care leavers are in good physical and mental health, or are being helped to improve their health. Their health needs are identified and met. Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history.
Learning and enjoyment	Children and young people make good educational progress at school or other provision since being in care. They receive the same support from their carers as they would from a good parent. Children and young people who do not attend school have prompt access to suitable good-quality registered alternative provision. There is regular review of their progress. Urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces. Children and young people enjoy what they do and have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities. Adult carers have suitable delegated authority to make prompt decisions about children's day-to-day lives.
Stability and permanence	Children and young people are safe and settled where they live. They move only in line with care plans, when they are at risk of harm or are being harmed. They do not live anywhere that fails to meet their needs. They are able to live with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests, including when they are adopted. Children and young people have appropriate, carefully assessed and supported contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them. Children and care leavers who live away from their 'home' local authority have access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they move outside of their 'home' area. Placing local authorities notify the 'receiving' local authority that a child is moving to their area promptly and ensure that services are in place to meet the child's needs before the child moves. There is a sufficiently wide range and choice of placements available to meet the needs of children in care. Effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers (including, as appropriate, foster carers, adopters, special guardians and residential staff) ensure that children and young people receive high-quality, safe and stable care that meets their diverse needs. All agencies and professionals work together effectively to reduce any unnecessary delay in receiving support and achieving permanence for children. Children are effectively prepared for, and carefully matched with, a permanent placement. Their wishes and feelings influence the decisions about where they live. Children are helped to develop secure, primary attachments with the adults caring for them. They are helped to understand their life histories, experiences and identities. The accessibility, style and clarity of case records enhance the understanding that children in care and care leavers have about their histories and experiences. Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. This includes good use of concurrent and parallel planning, the Adoption Register and Fostering for Adoption. Fostering and adoption panels, and the respective decision-makers, ensure that children are effectively matched with families. Local authorities have arrangements in place to ensure consistently good practice and receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of the work of panels. Children who are adopted, their adoptive families, their birth relatives and adopted adults are informed, and are aware of, their entitlement to receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. When support is needed, it is provided quickly, effectively and leads to improved circumstances for the children, young people, families and carers involved.
Care leavers and transitions	Care leavers have timely, effective pathway plans (including transition planning for children in care with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). These plans address all young people's needs. Reviews of plans for care leavers are thorough and involve all key people, including the young person, who understands their pathway plan and contributes to its development. Plans for their future continue to be appropriate, as well as ambitious. Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. Care leavers have trusted relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including with family and friends. They receive the right level of practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, when necessary, until they are 25. Care leavers move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Young people are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday when this is in their best interest. They can remain living with their carers beyond their 18th birthday or, if more appropriate, receive ongoing support to live in permanent and affordable accommodation that fully meets their needs. Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through either being in further or higher education or in their chosen career/occupation. Care leavers have accommodation that best meets their needs and helps them to develop their independence skills safely. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and addressed; alternative plans are put in place promptly when necessary. Houses of multiple occupation are only used when it is a young person's preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests. When young people live in unregulated settings, the local authority takes steps to ensure that their accommodation is suitable and that they are protected against any risks to their safety or welfare. Care leavers are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.
Outstanding	'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers' is likely to be judged outstanding if the response to children in care and care leavers is consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement to the lives of children in care and care leavers.
Requires improvement to be good	'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers' is likely to be judged requires improvement if there are no widespread or serious failures or unnecessary delays that result in the welfare of children in care or care leavers not being safeguarded and promoted. However, the local authority is not yet consistently delivering good help and care for children in care and care leavers.
Inadequate	'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers' is likely to be judged inadequate if there are widespread or serious failures, including unnecessary delay in achieving permanence, which result in their welfare not being safeguarded and promoted.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

When reporting, it should be clear which tier of management the strengths and areas for improvement relate to.

This judgement is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

Evaluation criteria	Description
Strategic leadership	The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member (and other members) and the DCS recognise and prioritise the needs of children and this is reflected in corporate decision-making, action and active attendance at key committees and boards. The chief executive and lead member are well informed and hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area. This is exemplified through accurate assessments of practice that drive improvement. Strategic leaders ensure that relationships with key partners, including the health community, the police, schools, Cafcass and the family courts, provide a helpful and effective context for social workers and practitioners to work effectively with children and families. The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles (see Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017). There is a corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the chief executive leads a local authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects, such as housing, career opportunities, education and learning.
Learning culture	The local authority has a track record of responding appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands, and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority's self-evaluation of practice is accurate. The local authority has detailed and relevant knowledge of its local communities, including children in care and care leavers and uses this knowledge effectively to meet their needs. Leaders identify the vulnerable groups in their local areas and their needs and ensure that there is an effective response for these groups of children. Commissioned and in-house services have sufficient capacity and meet the needs of local children, young people and families in need of help, care and protection. The local authority can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services. The experiences of children, young people and families who use them are important, including learning from their complaints and from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.
Performance management	The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness and uses this to drive improvement. Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.
Workforce	Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of the impact of wider systems on working conditions for practitioners ensure that practitioners have the capacity and ability to develop meaningful relationships with children and families. The impact of any systems change is well managed, with a sustained focus on the experience of children and families. The local authority social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and accredited to deliver high-quality services to children and their families. (For more information about accreditation, see the national assessment and accreditation system (NAAS)). Managers and practitioners are experienced, effectively trained and supervised and the quality of their practice improves the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. There is effective organisational support for the training and professional development of social workers and managers. Leaders and managers have created an environment where good social work can flourish and this is evident in the overall quality and impact of social work.
Outstanding	'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' is likely to be outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a 'good' judgement, there is evidence that leaders (both professional and political) and managers are confident, ambitious and influential in changing the lives of local children, young people and families, including children in care and those who have left or who are leaving care. They inspire others to change the lives of these children and young people and their families. They innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services, including early help services, for all children and young people. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and both respond to and are resilient to new challenges. Professional relationships between the local authority and partner organisations are mature and well developed. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement of the quality of help, care and protection that is provided.
Requires improvement to be good	'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' will be judged as requires improvement when any widespread or serious failures have been identified by the local authority and are being effectively addressed, but the characteristics of good leadership are not consistently in place.
Inadequate	'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' is likely to be inadequate if either of the 2 practice judgements is inadequate and leaders and managers have not been able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the failure. They have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements.

Guidance on inspecting local authorities that are part of a regional adoption agency

An RAA in itself is not a separate legal entity. Ofsted does not have powers to inspect the effectiveness of the RAA as a single entity. We inspect through the local authority lens: evaluating how the RAA is delivering the local authority's statutory responsibilities (except when a group of local authorities has set up a separate trading company or the host local authority is a trust – see the frequently asked questions later in this annex).

On inspection

The ILACS framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance outline how we evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster and adoptive carers and the approach inspectors follow when inspecting local authorities that may be part of an RAA.

If groups of local authorities and VAAs work together in an RAA to improve their adoption services, each local authority is still responsible for demonstrating how the arrangements comply with their statutory responsibilities and meet the needs of local children. We have the right to access records relevant to the performance of a local authority, wherever they may be held. HMI will arrange this access with the local authority.

If a local authority is part of an RAA, inspectors will still look at the planning, decision-making and matching for the children in that local authority. Each local authority is required to have an agency decision-maker. In some local authorities, the agency decision-maker is supported by the RAA at different stages in the case management process. We would want to be assured of the effectiveness of the agency decision-maker role. We have the right to access records relevant to the performance of a local authority, wherever they may be held. This is an HMI task.

We will seek assurance that there is a sufficient and suitable pool of adopters for the local authority's children. We will evaluate this through, for example, checking whether children are waiting to be placed and how quickly they are placed. We will also want to understand how the local authority ensures that there are sufficient suitable adopters available and what action it has taken if this is not the case. This is an HMI task.

If any of the local authority's children are placed for adoption, inspectors will look at the quality and impact of the recruitment and assessment of those specific carers in up to 4 cases. A social care regulatory inspector will do this based on cases identified by the lead inspector. If they identify issues, the HMI will discuss with the local authority the steps it takes to assess the quality of adopters.

It remains the local authority's responsibility to demonstrate how the individual needs of children are met when the plan is adoption, even though this may be delivered through an RAA.

Inspectors will only visit the premises of the RAA if that is the only way to access the records they need to see as part of the inspection of the local authority. Many RAAs are co-located with local authorities.

We are not inspecting the effectiveness of the RAA, but we do take into account the interface between the individual local authority and the RAA. We focus on how the local authority discharges its functions through the RAA and whether the RAA meets the local authority's needs. We always look at this through the lens of the local authority. Our judgement on the progress and experiences of children in care and care leavers takes into account a whole range of information, including the range of options the local authority uses to secure permanence for these children. The experience of adoption is only one aspect of permanence that we consider.

If the RAA arrangements hinder children achieving permanence and/or other issues emerge, inspectors will follow this as a line of enquiry and seek assurances from the local authority about the steps they are taking.

If the local authority being inspected is the host local authority for the RAA, we only focus on the children of that local authority and equally on the availability and suitability of adopters for their children.

The DCS should notify the management team at the RAA that an inspection has started.

Evaluating practice and writing the report

If a local authority is involved in an RAA we will, factually, name the RAA. However, we only evaluate what the local authority is doing for its children and this will be the focus of our overall evaluation and final report. We will only comment on the RAA's performance for the local authority when this represents a strength or area for improvement in meeting local need.

We do not share any findings with the RAA directly. Our inspection relationship is with the local authority.

The report should not make or imply any broader evaluation of the performance of the RAA. We are not judging the performance of the RAA. The ILACS is an inspection of the local authority and how it is discharging its duties to children. We have no powers to inspect the collective effectiveness of an RAA. Also, the use of any judgement language is likely to be misleading as the impact of the RAA may differ across the region.

Summary

We want to determine whether children in need of adoption are well served. At each inspection, we are only interested in the children that the local authority is responsible for.

Whatever the local arrangements, we will ask whether there is a sufficient and appropriate supply of adopters for the local authority's children.

If there are failings for children, we will ask what the local authority has done to challenge or remedy this.

We will report factually the name of the RAA. While we will report on any strengths or weaknesses for children in the local authority, we will not imply or make any judgement on the RAA.

The evaluation of the quality of children's experiences, local authority oversight and leadership are HMI tasks. If there is an RAA, the social care regulatory inspectors will only look at the adoptive carer cases as identified by the lead inspector.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Should the RAA register with Ofsted?
The majority of RAAs will be several local authority services working together under a host local authority arrangement to deliver services. The RAA will therefore not need to register. However, there are some RAAs that are formed of other types of bodies (such as local authority trading companies or not for profit entities) or are hosted by trusts. These types of RAAs will be required to register as VAAs and/or independent fostering agencies (IFAs). If you are in any doubt about the legitimacy of the arrangements then seek legal advice.

Q: Some RAAs comprise a group of local authorities operating as a trading company. Are these RAAs required to register with Ofsted?
Yes. As a trading company, the RAA is a separate legal entity from the local authority and is required to register as a VAA and/or IFA (as appropriate).

Q: Under which framework do we inspect those local authority children's services that are also a trust, registered as a VAA/IFA and are part of a RAA?
We inspect VAAs and IFAs under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) and local authority children's services under ILACS. If the local authority adoption provision is delivered through a trust and registered as VAA and IFA, both frameworks will apply. The timing of inspections in these circumstances will be determined by the Ofsted regional office.

Q: Can the local authority children's services delegate the role of the responsible officer to the RAA?
For local authority hosted RAAs, each local authority must appoint one of its officers as the responsible officer of the adoption service. The officer can sit in the RAA if that is what the local authority and the RAA agree, but the person must be one of that local authority's officers and not an officer from another local authority.

RAAs that have chosen to set up as a local authority trading company model must register as a VAA (see question above). For that reason, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 apply to the VAA. The local authority would still need a responsible officer for adoption services.

Q: Should local authorities that are participating in RAA arrangements continue to notify Ofsted of the named officer responsible for each local authority children adoption service?
Yes. Individual local authorities should use form SC3 to notify us of a change of officer for the adoption service. The regulations continue to require all notifications of a change to the named local authority officer responsible for the adoption service to be sent to us by the individual local authority. This includes all participating local authorities in regional adoption arrangements.

Q: Where can I find more information on the government's plans for adoption?
In 2016, the DfE published 'Adoption: a vision for change', which sets out how the government plans to address challenges in the adoption system over the next 4 years.

Guidance on ILACS focused visits during the restart of routine inspection

On 17 March 2020, the Secretary of State for Education wrote to HMCI

working for suspected locally independent but because of COVID-19 restrictions, we will be unable to do this. We will instead use the time to carry out a sample of Ofsted that focuses on the quality of education provided to children who are vulnerable or in receipt of an EHCP, as many local areas as possible.

We will also be in touch with local authorities ahead of the visit to discuss and impact of practice with children and families between inspections that are not carried out because of the pandemic. We will also be in touch with local authorities on an appropriate way to hold local authorities to account for their work in the pandemic but without making a graded judgement on Ofsted's 4-point scale.

Ofsted's decision to run SEND inspections during the pandemic, and to carry out a sample of local authorities' work with children and families who are vulnerable, follows the guidance and methodology in the main body of the ILACS framework.

How the focused visits will work

Focused visits usually unfold on single areas (field identifies particular service areas (for example, the children's social care, children's services, youth justice, care leavers). The main ways in which these focused visits differ from our usual arrangements are that:

- they will have a broader scope, but with a particular focus on the quality of services provided to children
- fieldwork will take place over 3 days, rather than 5 days, and inspectors can be 1-2 social care HMI or Ofsted's HMI in order to deliver this broader scope
- as with a standard inspection, we will gather evidence from a wide sample about what the best ILACS stand will be and when it will take place. We will notify local authorities of the sample we have chosen, and the focus of the visit, 48 hours before the visit

For local authorities that are inadequate and whose monitoring visits identified no concerns, we will carry out a focused visit within 6 months of the last ILACS focused visits. Ofsted, the local authority and the relevant children's services inspectorate (Care Inspectorate) or a return to routine monitoring visits, depending on what the inspectorate judges to be the most proportionate.

For local authorities that are inadequate and whose monitoring visits had identified concerns, we will carry out a focused visit within 6 months of the last ILACS focused visits. The scope of the focused visit will be agreed between the local authority, Ofsted and the relevant children's services inspectorate. The focused visit will take place over the course of a month, or other local authority.

Deferrals

Local authorities may request a deferral of a focused visit. We will decide whether a deferral is appropriate, taking into account the local authority's circumstances.

Inspectors will take all reasonable steps to work within the arrangements that the local authority has put in place to keep children and staff safe in COVID-19. The local inspector will work with the local authority to ensure their safety and that of their families, in line with the guidance issued by the DfE and in line with current government guidance.

Scope

These focused visits will evaluate the quality and impact of key decision making in the following practice areas:

- help and protection
- children in care and care leavers
- impact of leaders

Help and protection

In the children in care and care leavers area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the effectiveness of the front door, with specific reference to any rise in referrals to children's social care services, and the quality of assessments
- the progress of children subject to child protection plans and child in need plans (those who have experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation)
- the quality of plans for children in need and children who are being cared for and the voice of the child
- stage of care proceedings, particularly, local authorities' plans for children who are being placed for adoption, and how well the needs and priorities are being met for children who are being placed for what needs to change if they are to avoid family court proceedings)

Children in care and care leavers

In the children in care and care leavers area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the focus on physical and mental health of children in care and care leavers, including the extent to which children in care and care leavers have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis
- placement decisions, including the quality of matching, particularly where sufficiency is challenging

Impact of leaders

In the impact of leaders area, inspectors will evaluate:

- the quality assurance of practice and 'line of sight' to the quality and stability of frontline practice during COVID-19
- management and leadership oversight, including how responsive it has been to the challenges of leaders and managing staff
- the effectiveness of leaders in leading and contributing to multi-agency working that leads to effective social care practice

Focused visit arrangements

During the visitation period, all focused visits will have the same scope and the methodology will follow the same principles. In keeping with ILACS, inspectors will evaluate the quality and impact of leaders' work with children in emergency identified through the local authority's duty and assessment arrangements. They will take into account the context of the local authority, including the impact of COVID-19 on its services.

Inspectors will also take into account the impact of children and families in the 12 months before the visit to understand children's experiences. Inspectors will also evaluate how well the local authority and its partners have kept children safe. Our focus will be on children who have been identified as being vulnerable but who have not reached the threshold for children in need or who are in need of a child protection plan. We will also evaluate how well the local authority and its partners have kept abreast of practice within a challenging context, when circumstances may have resulted in decisions that may have been different in normal times. We will also evaluate the quality and the evidence of practitioners and managers having the right time for children in the circumstances.

Inspectors will seek to understand how any of the changes to regulation set out in The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2020 have been implemented by children services and families. This will include inspectors evaluating the impact on children.

We will give 10 working days' notice of the visit. The inspector team will consist of 2 social care HMI inspectors, who will be the lead inspector, and 1 other inspector who will be drawn from a pool of social care HMI inspectors.

The 2 days of fieldwork will usually start on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. The inspector will discuss the schedule with specific dates when they notify the local authority of the visit.

Week 1 - notice period

Day	Activity
Day 1	Notify local authority of the visit
Day 2	Notify parent/carers (including those who are in care)
Day 3	Report of the visit published (14 calendar days after the visit)
Day 4	Feedback - 14 days - local authority to publish action plan

Week 2 - off-site evaluation

Day	Activity
Day 5	Local authority to share information of three Duty Social Care Analysis by Ofsted service manager (or equivalent)
Day 6	Lead inspector to review information and discuss with other inspector
Day 7	Lead inspector may request further information from local authority
Day 8	Lead inspector may request further information and specific questions about children, to be sent through the local authority
Day 9	Inspector leads briefing

Week 3 - fieldwork

Day	Activity
Day 10	Report of the visit published (14 calendar days after the visit)
Day 11	Feedback - 14 days - local authority to publish action plan

Notifying the local authority and requesting information

We usually notify a local authority's inspectors and visits with 3 working days' notice. We will carry out these focused visits with 10 working days' notice to the local authority. We will also request information from the local authority to the local authority know how it plans to collect the information we request.

We will inspect to will telephone the DCS 10 working days before fieldwork begins, or around 5 days from the start of fieldwork, to discuss the information from Annex A and offer a more detailed call the same afternoon to set up the visit.

In addition to the usual members consent of a set-up call, the lead inspector will:

- establish whether there have been any changes to strategic oversight of the local authority's children services, including any changes to senior leaders at school, senior leaders at safeguarding partnerships and lead members for children's services, and any changes to the local authority's ILACS judgement since the last inspection. We will also seek to understand how children who were seen in the 12 months before the visit have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis
- discuss with the local authority senior leaders and above the work it has been doing to support children who are vulnerable or who are in need of COVID-19 or because they were already missing from education
- discuss with the local authority the 3 Duty Social Care Analysis (or office or front door and duty manager equivalent)

To minimise the burden on the local authority, the lead inspector will not request information that is already in the public domain or that is not needed. The local authority will have 48 hours to respond to it, except if it has queries or difficulties arise. Ofsted senior analytical officers will also be available to support the local authority to collect the data they need, providing the information listed in Annex A.

Off-site evaluation

When the lead inspector notifies the local authority of the visit, they will request some of the information set out in Annex A.

We recognise that due to COVID-19, the data and information we are asking may have been different to usual. The local authority should set out any differences to the information in Annex A, and the lead inspector will be in touch with the local authority to discuss this.

For example, as schools is open for all children, there may be increased attendance at school, and this will be reflected in the data. Inspectors will also request information from the local authority's children in care (as outlined in Annex A items 2.19 or 2.20 of Annex A).

Week 2 - notice period

The lead inspector will give notice on 10 days before fieldwork. They will offer a more detailed call on the first day.

By the end of day 4, the local authority shares child level data (n=10 cases) with the lead inspector. The lead inspector and other inspector will ask the local authority for access to case records, and the local authority will respond with the DCS at the set up call.

Inspectors will use the information, the individual case data, they should initiate the specific data range that each visit covers.

Week 3 - off-site analysis

By the end of day 5, the local authority shares information 3 cases to manager (or equivalent) and lead inspector. Inspectors will review the information, and have provided feedback to the local authority. The feedback will specify the focus of these visits. The request is set out in the table below.

Area	Items needed by three (n=cases)
Children in care	2.19 - Children who have been looking after or ceasing to be a looked-after child for a period of at least 12 months, who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.20 - Children who have been looking after or ceasing to be a looked-after child for a period of at least 12 months, who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.21 - Children who have been looking after for a period of at least 12 months, who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.22 - Unaccompanied information requests that the local authority plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of its decision making and practice with children who are in care or who are care leavers, including those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis.
Child protection	2.23 - The most recent child protection of concern and any plans for alternative formal and informal ways of working with children and families, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.24 - The most recent child protection plan, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.25 - Information requests that the local authority plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of its decision making and practice with children who are in care or who are care leavers, including those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis.
Help and protection	2.26 - Information requests that the local authority plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of its decision making and practice with children who are in need, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.27 - Information requests that the local authority plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of its decision making and practice with children who are in need of a child protection plan, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis.
Children in care and care leavers	2.28 - Information requests that the local authority plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of its decision making and practice with children who are in care or who are care leavers, including those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.29 - Information the local authority plans to track and manage cases into Post 18 services, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis. 2.30 - Information the local authority plans to track and manage cases into Post 18 services, including those who are in care, care leavers and those who are placed in other local authorities, and who have had their health needs identified and addressed during the COVID-19 crisis.

The lead inspector will carry out most of the off-site analysis. They will prepare a briefing for the inspector team and identify tasks for team members to undertake during fieldwork.

A senior analytical officer will provide the lead inspector with management information provided by the authority. This is to give the lead inspector an overview of the local authority's performance in its CSCS. This will take place, the lead inspector will also consider other information, such as the local authority's unregulated unregulated settings. They will also use the data to identify children whose experiences inspectors will want to track.

Before fieldwork, the lead inspector will engage the lead member for children services, the director of children services, the relevant senior and assistant managers as necessary. They will also engage with representatives, such as the local family advocacy, Cafcass, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the local police force, to inform them of the focus of the visit and the timetable.

The lead inspector will notify the local authority of which cases inspectors want to look at. This is so the local authority can arrange access to case records and documents in the most suitable alternative provisional during fieldwork.

Fieldwork (gathering primary evidence)

Inspectors are likely to carry out most of the on-site of the evidence gathering. They will determine the balance between these on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the local authority's circumstances. We will make arrangements will be agreed with the local authority. We will take every step to ensure of the lower working remotely for the full duration of the visit. We will also ensure that we do not place any additional burden on the local authority's arrangements in government guidance and working with children and families.

Inspectors will use phone and video calls to speak to social workers. This will include using the screen sharing function to look at case records or other examples of their work or of the inspectors were sitting with them.

In line with ILACS, the lead inspector will meet regularly with the senior lead on the local authority's children's services inspection (CSIS). This will take place, involve asking the local authority to make rapidate available to inspectors or to make it available to them in a secure way, and to provide the local authority's office to access the system.

Inspectors will use video calls to engage with groups of children, foster carers and/or residential care staff.

Role of the schools HMI

Schools HMI are usually deployed on standard and short (judgement) inspections and not on focused visits. However, for these focused visits, we will deploy schools HMI to work with the lead inspector to carry out the evaluation at a time when schools are fully open to all children. Schools HMI will play a critical role in providing early help and identifying 'hidden harm'.

Schools HMI will focus on:

- the educational progress of children in care
- the education of care leavers
- stay/leaving home school/college
- how the local authority has promoted school attendance
- partnership working between schools and the local authority
- the effectiveness of the virtual school
- the local authority's support for education, employment or training (NEET)

To carry out their evaluations, schools HMI may speak with children and their carers, carry out lesson observations, look at pupil work and look at a sample of schools. These conversations may be individual or in groups, and may be conducted by phone, video call or face to face.

They will not be engaged in the overall judgement, but will provide a comment on the effectiveness of schools' work and partnership with the local authority to the lead inspector. The lead inspector will then integrate their findings with the findings of the social care inspectors.

Letter of findings

We will set out our findings in a letter following the focused visit. The letter may identify areas of strength and practice that need to improve. We will not make judgements or recommendations in our letter of inspection. Instead we will:

If inspectors find serious and/or widespread weaknesses, they will include a section that identifies why we think the local authority's children's services are not fulfilling its statutory duties. The letter will be subject to additional moderation. If this is the case, we will also write to the local authority's lead member for children, the DCS to outline this.

During the related period, inspectors will not raise an area for priority action. Instead, we will agree with the local authority, DfE and Ofsted, the timeline for the local authority to address the issue. We will not require a priority action at the previous visit. The letter will state that the priority action from the previous inspection is paused (continue to be a priority but we will not require a response).

We will quality assure letters before we send a draft copy to the local authority. We may have to delay sending a letter if we need to do this.

Local authorities will have 14 working days after we send the draft letter to comment on factual accuracy. We will publish the letter 2 working days after the local authority's comments or sooner if we feel that it is ready to do so. If the local authority wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have 5 working days after we send the letter to do so. We will publish the letter.

We will usually publish the letter on our reports website 6 working days after we send the letter to the local authority. We will do this on a working day and on a weekday when the deadline is not about. We will not publish the letter while we consider the complaint.

Timeline for writing the letters of findings

Activity	Timeline
Draft letter sent to local authority for review	10 working days after inspection ends (fieldwork ends)
Local authority to review letter and return to the Finding and the inspection process	14 working days after inspection ends
Final version of the letter sent to the local authority (after moderation, quality assurance)	20 working days after inspection ends
Letter published if local authority's Ofsted rating is outstanding or good	25 working days after inspection ends
Letter published if Ofsted's rating is inadequate	20 working days after fieldwork

Conduct and complaints

Inspectors must uphold the highest professional standards in their work and treat everyone they encounter during their visits with respect and sensitivity. Inspectors must at all times adhere to the Code of conduct.

Local authorities can make a complaint about the conduct of inspectors or Ofsted's complaints system. We will not take any action against individuals who complain. It will have 5 working days after we send the final version of letter to make a formal complaint. We will not publish the letter while we consider the complaint.

Post-inspection surveys

We will ask the local authority for its feedback after the visit through a survey. We will share details about how you can do so when we share the fieldwork with you.

Action plan after a focused visit

After a focused visit, updating the existing action plan for improvement post inspection and the action plan should be approved by Ofsted and the DfE's purposes. The local authority should send the updated action plan to the lead inspector for approval, and should update it to reflect ongoing engagement meeting.

If a visit results in an area for priority action, the local authority should produce an action plan that responds to the priority action. The action plan should set out how the local authority will address the priority action. The local authority shares a draft of its action plan within 20 working days of receiving the letter. The lead inspector will then have 2 working days to provide feedback. Working with our Ofsted's senior analytical officer, we will outline the letter while we consider the complaint.

Thus, the end of the action 'guidance on ILACS focused visits during the period of routine inspection' for more information.

We will provide any support we can to the local authority during the process. We will also provide a list of other local authorities and organisations that the local authority can learn from and share. Guidance on how to prepare and respond to Ofsted inspections.

Annex A: Information requests from the local authority

This annex sets out the information inspectors will ask the local authority to share to support the inspection/visit. The intentions for sharing this information are set out in the Ofsted's ILACS inspection framework. The focused visits that take place during COVID-19 will be based on ILACS focused visits during the period of routine inspection. for more information.

We will provide any support we can to the local authority during the process. We will also provide a list of other local authorities and organisations that the local authority can learn from and share. Guidance on how to prepare and respond to Ofsted inspections.

Information	Important because	Practicalities
Information	Important because	Practicalities
Information about vulnerable children and their families	Ofsted's ILACS framework requires us to look at how well children who are vulnerable are being kept safe during the COVID-19 crisis	Only information relevant to the inspection will be requested. We will work with the local authority to ensure that this is the most up-to-date and accurate information
Information about children who are in care or care leavers	Ofsted's ILACS framework requires us to look at how well children who are in care or care leavers are being kept safe during the COVID-19 crisis	Only information relevant to the inspection will be requested
Information about specific children in care	Ofsted's ILACS framework requires us to look at how well children who are in care are being kept safe during the COVID-19 crisis	Only information relevant to the inspection will be requested. We will work with the local authority to ensure that this is the most up-to-date and accurate information

The lead inspector will make the final decision about whether to request or accept additional information or clarification if:

- it is necessary for an accurate understanding of children's experiences and what practice
- there is already sufficient information on the issue available through other sources or there is an emergency safeguarding issue

The lead inspector will maintain a record of requests for further information.

Child-level data

Where the lead inspector contacts the local authority, she/he will ask for lists containing child-level data. The local authority should provide the child-level data in a password-protected Excel spreadsheet. The lead inspector will use the information to select a sample of cases to look at during the visit. It is also for us to date on provide. However, the local authority may provide lists that it has selected on criteria that it has chosen and up to the Wednesday before visit notification.

Please provide these lists in Excel.

Below is an outline of the broad contents of each list. Detailed guidance on the specific information we require will be in the accompanying spreadsheet (an optional template for each information).

To reduce the burden on local authorities, we have aligned the information we ask for with that we ask for in our other data collections, such as children in care and care leavers.

The spreadsheet templates includes an overview of the data codes to use and how these link to the relevant data collection specifications in the DfE guidance.

The children's data lists should cover a period of 6 months before the visit notification. When the local authority shares the lists, they should indicate the specific date range that each list covers.

The information we request

List	Description
List 1	All contacts received in the 6 months before the visit notification
List 2	All children being assessed in the 6 months before the visit notification, including those who are being considered through the duty and assessment
List 3	All children who started in the 6 months before the visit notification
List 4	All children who ceased to be assessed in the 6 months before the visit notification, including those who are being considered through the duty and assessment
List 5	All children who ceased to be looked after in the 6 months before the visit notification
List 6	All children who ceased to be subject to a child protection plan in the 6 months before the visit notification

List 7 | All those who are the subject of a child protection plan at the point of inspection. Include those who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan in the 6 months before the inspection.

List 8 | All children in care at the point of inspection. Include all those children who ceased to be looked after in the 6 months before the inspection.

List 9 | All those who are receiving leaving care services at the point of inspection.

List 10 | All those children who, in the 12 months before the inspection, have:

(a) been adopted

(b) had the decision that they should be placed for adoption but they have not yet been adopted

(c) had an adoption decision reversed during the 12 months

List 11 | All those individuals who in the 12 months before the inspection have had contact with the local authority adoption agency for any of the following reasons:

(a) prospective adopters at any stage of the adoption process (only include information about prospective adopters who have made an application, you do not need to include people who have only made enquiries)

(b) prospective adopters who have made an application, even if they are being matched to children from another authority

(c) prospective adopters who are no longer going through the process (for example, those who have chosen to withdraw from the process or have been refused)

It is likely that children will appear on more than 1 list. The consistent use of the child ID across lists will enable the lead inspector to recognise when this occurs.

For lists 6 to 10, please provide only 1 row for each unique child ID. Information should relate to the most recent event (for example, list 6 should show the most recent episode of need).

Some of the requested data – particularly in relation to list 1 'contacts' and list 2 'early help assessments' – may not be recorded on the local authority's main ICS system. In these circumstances, the local authority is free to use the solution that suits it best and enables them to provide the data in the timeframe requested. Whatever the format, the data should be clearly identifiable.

If certain data is unavailable, we will ask the local authority to demonstrate how it has sufficient management oversight of the specific issue.

After the local authority shares Annex A, we may arrange a brief telephone conversation between an Ofsted analytical officer and a local authority analyst. This is to help us understand the composition and content of the local authority's information and the layout of its management information systems.

Queries about the child-level data should be sent to SocialCare5AOIBofsted.gov.uk. However, if you have any queries after you have been notified that an inspection is to take place, please contact the lead inspector.

Local authority audits

The local authority should share a list of the audits that they have carried out in the 6 months before the inspection/visit. The list should identify the child unique ID for those children whose experiences were evaluated, the audit theme and when the audit was completed. If the local authority has an overview report, learning or action plan from the audits, it should share this too.

Case file documents

The lead inspector will not ask the local authority to carry out audits specifically for the inspection. Before fieldwork, the lead inspector will identify 6 to 12 cases the local authority has already audited and ask the local authority to provide the audit document for each of these cases. They may ask for other case file documents about these children, for example the most recent assessment, care plan, chronology and supervision record.

Inspectors will evaluate these cases during fieldwork. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to speak to the children, young people, parents and carers to see if they are happy to speak to an inspector.

Information the local authority uses to manage its services

The lead inspector will ask the local authority to share information it uses to understand and manage its social work practice. The local authority should share its best and most recent information. The local authority must clearly direct the lead inspector to the relevant documents or sections within them. If the reasons for sharing a particular piece of information are unclear or the lead inspector decides the information is not relevant to the scope of the inspection/visit, inspectors will not read it.

The local authority should provide the information below as soon as it is able to and by the deadlines set out at the beginning of Annex A.

Each of the topics is numbered. When the local authority shares the information with inspectors, it should include the number in the document name as a prefix. This will enable inspectors to easily identify and retrieve information and support the local authority to link its evidence to the topic.

Impact of leadership on social work practice with children and families

Item number	Text
1.01	Organisational structure showing lines of reporting and accountability (when relevant, this should include information about structures for alternative delivery models).
1.02	The local authority's scheme of delegation, case transfer policy (including step-up/down from or to early help) and any workflow documents/flowcharts that will help inspectors understand how children's social care work is structured.
1.03	Management information reports that the local authority uses to monitor and improve performance. This should include the most recent monthly/quarterly report(s) and the last annual overview document.
1.04	The local authority's arrangements to gather feedback from children and their families, complaints and serious case reviews and what the local authority has done in response to improve practice.
1.05	The most recent self-evaluation of social work practice and any peer review or similar external evaluation of practice, carried out in the last 12 months.
1.06	A sample of local authority and multi-agency practice audits of work with children in need, those at risk of significant harm and those who are looked after or care leavers carried out in the 6 months before inspection and any associated improvement/action plans.
1.07	The workforce profile for social care staff working with children in need, children subject to child protection plans, children in care and care leavers (including the number of qualified social workers and their post-qualifying experience, the number of vacancies for permanent staff, the number of accompanying staff, the extent of staff turnover/stability and sickness levels, and average caseloads of staff by team). This should include information the local authority uses to understand its workforce profile within particular localities, offices or teams.
1.08	The workforce development strategy, including the core training and development offer for social workers and their managers and an evaluation of the impact of this carried out in the last 12 months.
1.09	The social work supervision policy and a list of all case-holding social workers, including the number of cases held on the date of inspection. This should include a list of all workers' allocated cases, the number of open cases they have and the day of notification and their job title. Include the number of open cases unallocated on this date. If possible, please provide this information on an Excel spreadsheet. This list should be as up to date as possible. However, the local authority may provide a pre-prepared version showing the position up to the Wednesday before notification.
1.10	The thresholds/criteria for the provision of services to children at different levels of need.
1.11	The annual report by the local safeguarding partners.
1.12	The safeguarding arrangements agreed by the local safeguarding partners.
1.13	Minutes from the last 12 months of meetings of the local safeguarding partners.
1.14	Rapid reviews carried out following child safeguarding incident notifications in the 12 months before the inspection. You can find guidance on rapid reviews in chapter four 4 of 'Working together to safeguard children'.

Children in need of help and protection, including early help

Item number	Text
2.01	The early help strategy, any associated action plan and relevant management information on the quality, timeliness and impact of the early help provided to children and their families. This should include a list of all cases, the date of the early help assessment or similar (for example, the common assessment framework), completed in the last 12 months and the number currently receiving a service through a team around the family.
2.02	Information about children missing from home or care and children suffering or at risk of sexual exploitation, and the services these groups of children receive. This should include: - a list of children who have been missing or at risk of sexual exploitation within the last 12 months, including the child unique ID for each child (in line with the ID used in the children lists). This should indicate the current status of each child (care leaver, looked after child, child protection, child in need or not receiving a statutory service) and highlight those that are both missing and at risk of sexual exploitation; - any child sexual exploitation or missing strategies and associated action plans; - any workflow documents/flowcharts that will assist inspectors in understanding work done to reduce the risks to children from sexual exploitation and going missing and how this work is structured and delivered; - the most recent performance management and quality assurance information used to monitor and develop practice in these areas of work.
2.03	A report on those children known to the local authority who are currently being privately fostered. This report should include, for each child: - child unique ID and the date of birth; - date private fostering arrangement commenced.
2.04	The information the local authority uses to monitor the welfare of electively home educated children, in particular those children who are electively home educated and are either on a child protection plan, education, health and care (EHC) plan or are a child in need. If available, please provide the policy on elective home education.
2.05	A report on children for whom the local authority is responsible who are of school age and who are not in receipt of full-time school education at the time of inspection. This report should include for each child the: - child unique ID or unique pupil number (UPN) and the date of birth; - type of educational provision that they are receiving, including home tuition; - number of hours of provision per week (in particular, whether they are receiving more or less than 25 hours per week); - type of exclusion (if the child has been excluded); - date when alternative provision commenced.

Children in care and care leavers

Item number	Text
3.01	The strategic plan for children in care, the corporate parenting strategy/plan and the last 3 sets of minutes from the meetings of the corporate parenting board.
3.02	The latest sufficiency strategy and any associated action or commissioning plans.
3.03	The arrangements for permanence planning and any associated strategy, action plan and management information used to monitor performance.
3.04	The most recent adoption and fostering panel reports to the local authority.
3.05	The CAFHYI strategy, any associated action plan and recent, relevant management information, including length of waiting time, average length of help offered and any outcome information routinely collected.
3.06	The management report of the independent reviewing officer service.
3.07	The annual report of the headteacher of the virtual school and any other relevant plans.
3.08	The data the headteacher of the virtual school and the local authority use to monitor the attainment, progress, attendance, exclusion, employment and training of children in care and care leavers.
3.09	Evidence of an appropriate focus on maintaining and improving the health of children looked after, including data on health (physical, psychological and emotional) assessments and dental checks.
3.10	The number of young people currently placed under secure accommodation welfare orders (section 25 of the Children Act 1989).
3.11	Any care leavers strategy, associated action plan and relevant recent management information used to monitor and develop practice (to include 'in-touch' figures and information about the completion of pathway plans).
3.12	Information the local authority uses to track and manage cases in the PLO.
3.13	The local authority's offer for care leavers.
3.14	A list of care leavers known to be living in houses in multiple occupation. This list may be up to 1 month before the date of notification.
3.15	Information about the recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. This should include: - the local authority's register of foster carers; - the 3 most recent fostering panel minutes (if the local authority's part of a partnership arrangement to deliver its fostering services, this should be the most recent minutes that relate to children that the local authority is responsible for); - overview of training for foster carers and data about take-up/completion; - recruitment strategy for foster carers; - statement of purpose for the fostering service; - list of support groups run for foster carers
3.16	Information about the recruitment, assessment, training and support of adoptive carers: - the local authority's list of adopters - the 3 most recent adoption panel minutes (if the local authority's part of an RAA, this should be the most recent minutes that relate to children that the local authority is responsible for) - overview of training for adopters and data about take-up/completion - recruitment strategy for adopters - statement of purpose for the adoption service - list of support groups run for adopters
3.17	The information the local authority uses to monitor which of its children are in unregulated provision (this includes provision that should be registered with Ofsted but currently is not). This should be a list of each child living in unregulated provision and include their unique ID, age, the date this provision started and details of the provision. The local authority may share a list that they created any time in the month before they are notified of the inspection.

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