

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	1 JULY 2021		
TITLE:	ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT MEETING		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN
SERVICE:	CHILDREN'S	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	DEBORAH GLASSBROOK	TEL:	0118 937 4665
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides context and information about the Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted which took place in March 2021.
- 1.2 Each year the Executive Director of Children's Services, the Director for Children's Social Care, Director of Early Help and Prevention and Director of Education within Brighter Futures for Children meet with Social Care and Education Ofsted Inspectors to discuss what is working well and what needs further work and development. These annual meetings were established by Ofsted with the purpose of 'catching Local Authorities before they fall' referring to the identification and support Ofsted can provide to prevent Local Authorities being judged 'inadequate'. Previously there was only a three-yearly inspection with no opportunity to quality check performance and outcomes.
- 1.3 In the appendices are the self-evaluations that were used to form the evidence for the meeting. The letter from Ofsted was the response we received in relation to the discussions about our Children's Social Care and Education services.
- 1.4 The Annual Engagement Meetings do not result in any gradings and are not directly linked to a full inspection. However, if there were any significant concerns identified it is likely that a full inspection could be triggered. This has not been the case for Brighter Futures for Children/Reading Borough Council.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Since December 2018, services for children have been delivered by Brighter Futures for Children. There was a full Inspection of the Local Authority Children's Services Inspection (ILACS) in November 2019 which resulted in an improved outcome from 'inadequate' in June 2016 to 'requires improvement to be good'.
- 2.2 In March 2020 we had our first Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted Inspectors and our second on 3 March 2021. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an opportunity

for Brighter Futures for Children's Directors and Ofsted to discuss any performance issues, what is working well, areas of concern and areas for improvement.

- 2.3 In preparation for the meeting, two key documents were written which are appended. The first is a comprehensive self-evaluation of all key services within Early Help and Prevention, Children's Social Care and Education including SEND highlighting what is going well and areas for further development. The second is a Covid-19 report written in response to questions posed by Ofsted prior to the meeting which focused on challenges and opportunities with a particular focus on vulnerable learners and post 16.
- 2.4 The letter from Ofsted following the Annual Engagement Meeting provides a summary of the key elements noted by the Inspectors as a result of the discussions including:-

Children's Social Care

- Government direction lifted - a reflection of BFFC's progress
- BFFC's ambition
- New Chair of the BFFC Board and tighter governance arrangements
- Stable and permanent staff and senior and middle management
- Strong partnerships
- Developing our practice approach which is Trauma Informed
- Turnover of staff and higher caseloads in some teams
- Opportunities to become a social worker
- Increased complexity in families' situations during Covid-19 with a need to focus on babies and young children
- Increase in serious violence
- Focus on quality assurance

Education

- Embedding the school improvement model
- Impact of Covid-19 on school performance data
- Reading having above average Attainment 8 scoring in 2020
- High ambitions for children with SEND
- Co-production
- Commitment to inclusion
- Increase in numbers of families choosing Elective Home Education
- Improved performance in relation to young people who were Not in Education, Employment or training

- 2.4 There are Continuous Improvement Plans and Service Plans that capture the actions required to address areas for development and improvement which are regularly reviewed and up-dated. We continue to be very ambitious for the children and families of Reading and are committed to achieving the very best in partnership with them.

List all appendices here.

1. Self-evaluation of Education (including SEND), Early Help and Children's Social Care
2. Annual Engagement Meeting - Covid-19 response
3. Letter from Ofsted

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the contents of the evidence provided to Ofsted and the letter from Ofsted be noted.**

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The focus of service delivery for the children, young people and families of Reading within Brighter Futures has been given some assurance through the Annual Engagement Meeting. This contributes to the strategic aim within the Corporate Plan 2021/22 'Thriving communities' which includes focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable, ensuring young people, older people, those with long term health conditions or disabilities and those most affected by Covid-19 get the help they need to successful, independent lives in vibrant thriving communities.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 There was no specific community engagement for the Annual Engagement Meeting however, some of the information included in the self-evaluations reflected feedback from key stakeholders.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There are no decisions to be made therefore the Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal implications.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no financial implications

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 There are no additional background papers. All relevant papers are included as appendices.