
Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	6 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	AnnMarie Dodds
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4745

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Ofsted visited West Berkshire's Children's Services to conduct a short ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) between 8 – 19 September 2025. The council's previous ILACS inspection occurred in March 2022. The inspection report is published by Ofsted on 28 October 2025. This report provides an overview of Ofsted's findings.
- 1.2 The Judgement from Ofsted is
- Overall Effectiveness: Good
 - All key areas inspected were graded Good:
 - Impact of leaders on social work practice
 - Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
 - Experiences and progress of children in care
 - Experiences and progress of care leavers

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To inform the Executive of the "Good" overall effectiveness rating and commend the progress made since 2023.
- 2.2 To inform the Executive that for the continued development of children's services that Executive note the requirement for:
- Investment in Early Help capacity to ensure timely support for families.
 - Propose a revised multi-agency Early Help strategy with clear delivery milestones.

- Targeted improvement in practice for children experiencing chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
- Standardising contingency plans across child protection and child-in-need cases.
- Continued recruitment and retention efforts.
- Twice yearly progress reports to the committee on Ofsted development progress concentrating on Early Help capacity, participation metrics and Workforce stability & caseloads.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
Financial:	There are no financial implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Human Resource:	There are no Human Resource implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Legal:	There are no Legal implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Risk Management:	There are no Risk Management implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report; the rating of good overall assists in managing the Council's corporate risk register.			
Property:	There are no Property implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Policy:	There are no Policy implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:		x		

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		
Environmental Impact:		x		
Health Impact:		x		
ICT Impact:		x		
Digital Services Impact:		x		
Council Strategy Priorities:	x			<p>The publication of this report positively impacts the following strategy priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services we are proud of • A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all • Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Core Business:	x			<p>The publication of this report positively reinforces the deliver of quality services as business as usual for Children's Services.</p>
Data Impact:		x		<p>The publication of this report has no impact on the rights of data subjects.</p>

Consultation and Engagement:	Service Director for Children's Social Care Service Director for Education and SEND Lead Member for Children's Services
-------------------------------------	---

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 West Berkshire has made significant progress in the past year despite previous challenges linked to leadership changes and financial pressures. It was noted that prior to the change in administration, during the summer of 2023, the limited focus on and funding for children's services had resulted in a noticeable decline in the performance of children's services. Leadership is now stable and focused, resulting in improved practice and outcomes for children and families. While early help and responses to cumulative harm remain areas for development, the authority demonstrates strong commitment to continuous improvement, workforce stability, and partnership working.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 The Ofsted report covers in detail the key strengths and areas for further development across children's social care. It identifies three specific areas for improvement relating to the development of early help, the consideration of the impact of cumulative harm for children and the use of contingency planning when working with children and families.

Background

- 5.2 Key Strengths are identified throughout the services.
- 5.3 In the domain of Leadership & Governance Ofsted recognise a strong and stable leadership team since late 2023 has driven improvement. There is Increased workforce capacity and creation of new roles. There is evidence of strengthened partnership working with police, health, and most schools. The council's corporate parenting commitment evident, including reverse mentoring and plans to boost participation.
- 5.4 For children in Care permanence planning is highly effective; most children achieve stability quickly. Kinship care options are significantly improved. Foster care recruitment and retention have strengthened, fostering hubs support carers. The Adoption processes for children is timely and well-supported.
- 5.5 Care Leavers in West Berkshire have a stable, experienced team of social workers and personal advisers. The revised local offer has been co-produced with care leavers; accessible and clear. Care leavers have good access to health, education, employment, and housing support. Peer mentoring and participation forums positively impact service design.
- 5.6 Across the Safeguarding & Protection of children there are effective multi-agency responses to exploitation and extra-familial harm. Children's services provide prompt

and proportionate child protection interventions. Improved support for disabled children and young carers are recognised.

5.7 Areas for targeted Improvement are defined by Ofsted

5.8 Early Help is underdeveloped due to insufficient resources and results in delays in providing timely support.

5.9 Practice with children experiencing chronic neglect/domestic abuse needs strengthening may lead to the cumulative harm of children.

5.10 Contingency Planning with families varies and some plans lack clarity for parents.

5.11 We continue to experience workforce pressures and caseloads remain high in some areas; experience levels across the workforce are uneven.

5.12 Participation of our children and young people is limited with minimal reach of children's voice initiatives (e.g., R:Vue council).

5.13 System & Processes are impacted by the current case recording system which is inflexible.

Proposals

5.14 It is proposed that Children's Services' development plan aligns the with the widescale transformation activity delivering the Families First Reform in West Berkshire. This will achieve a single plan of development and transformation activity. The Ofsted specific developments are

5.15 Strengthen Early Help Provision

- Action: Develop and implement a fully resourced Early Help strategy with clear timelines.
- Why: Current capacity is insufficient, causing delays in support and prolonged statutory involvement.
- Next Step: Secure additional funding and workforce; formalize multi-agency contributions.

5.16 Improve Practice for Children Experiencing Cumulative Harm

- Action: Introduce targeted training and tools for identifying and responding to chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
- Why: A small but significant number of children remain in harmful situations for too long.
- Next Step: Embed use of chronologies and escalation protocols; monitor impact through audits.

5.17 Enhance Contingency Planning

- Action: Standardize contingency planning templates and guidance for child protection and child-in-need plans.
- Why: Current variability risks unclear expectations for families.
- Next Step: Include contingency planning in supervision audits and performance dashboards.

5.18 Reduce Caseloads and Build Workforce Expertise

- Action: Continue recruitment drive and accelerate induction for new staff
- Why: High caseloads and uneven experience levels affect timeliness and quality.
- Next Step: Expand assistant team manager roles and mentoring schemes; monitor caseload distribution monthly.

5.19 Upgrade Case Management System – In delivery

- Next Step: Engage frontline staff in design/testing; ensure training plan is ready by Q1 2026.

5.20 Expand Participation and Voice of Children

- Action: Strengthen R:Vue council and participation officer roles. (This is the participation group led by and for our children in care to ensure the voices of our children are represented)
- Why: Current reach is limited; children's voices need greater influence.
- Next Step: Launch engagement campaign; set measurable targets for participation.

5.21 Embed Practice Model and Continuous Learning

- Action: Ensure consistent application of the chosen practice model across all services.
- Why: Variability remains despite progress.
- Next Step: Use audit findings to target coaching; integrate model into performance reviews.

6 Other options considered

6.1 No other options are considered.

7 Conclusion

7.1 For children's services to continue to develop it is essential that the recommendations from this Ofsted inspection inform next steps to ensure children in West Berkshire are appropriately supported and cared for to achieve their best outcomes.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Final report

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees or associated Task Groups within the preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All
