

Report to: People Committee

Date of meeting: 20 November 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Ofsted Focused Visit – July 2025

Purpose: To inform the Committee of the outcome of the recent Ofsted Focused Visit of East Sussex Children's Services

RECOMMENDATIONS

People Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the findings of the Ofsted Focused Visit which were published on 1 September 2025.

1 Background

1.1 Ofsted undertook a Focused Inspection of the East Sussex Children's Services 23 -31 (on-site 30-31) July 2025. The purpose of this type of inspection is to evaluate an aspect of service, a theme, or the experiences of a cohort of children. For this inspection visit, the theme was **Children in need or subject to a protection plan**, covering:

- thresholds
- step-up/step-down between children in need and child protection
- children on the edge of care
- children subject to a letter before proceedings and the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions, such as family group decision-making meetings
- children in need at risk of family breakdown
- the quality of decisions about entering care
- protection of disabled children

1.2 This visit forms part of the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Our last ILACS was December 2023, where we achieved the overall rating of 'good'.

1.3 Focused visits usually occur between standard and short inspections. ESCC had not had a focused visit within this framework, neither following the ILACS in 2018 nor the ILACS in 2023.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The report, published on 1 September 2025, can be found at appendix A.

2.2 This type of visit does not provide an outcome grading but instead sets out key findings within the area of focus or theme, and any associated recommendations.

2.3 The response letter highlights the following key findings:

Children in need in East Sussex, and those who are the subject of a child protection plan, are receiving services that make a positive difference for them and whose effectiveness is being continually developed.

The senior leadership team, with strong corporate support, continues to invest in services for vulnerable children. Leaders have continuously developed and refined services to ensure they have a positive impact on children's lives.

There is a strong focus on providing integrated, multidisciplinary support to children and families. This approach ensures that children and families benefit from consistent, high-quality practice that supports their progress and improves their lives.

There is relentless focus on supporting a stable and committed workforce, enabling staff to develop their skills and feel valued within the council. Leaders are actively creating the right conditions to strengthen social work practice and improve the quality of services for children and families.

2.4 Ofsted also recognised the work to support many children to remain at home through our connected families approach:

Children on the edge of care but not receiving support through the pre-proceedings process can also benefit from exemplary and transformational support from an integrated multidisciplinary team of social workers, connected coaches and therapists. As a result, many children are supported to remain living at home with their families.

2.5 The visit and the subsequent response letter were resoundingly positive, including the encouraging recognition of leadership and of ESCC as a reflective and improvement driven local authority:

Leaders have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development. The local authority's self-evaluation is reflective and demonstrates a commitment to learning, developing social work practice, and responding to areas where development is needed. This understanding has been used by the Director of Children's Services and her wider leadership team to drive ongoing improvement in the quality and impact of services for children.

2.6 We have received one recommendation for improvement:

The timeliness with which child protection strategy meetings are held, as this is not consistently timely for all children (outcome 3, national framework).

2.5 The findings recognise, however, that this was associated to a small number of children and, where risks are urgent, the holding of strategy meetings is consistently prioritised. Also noted in the response was 'once held, child protection strategy meetings are attended by the relevant professionals, who appropriately consider the level of risk and the impact on the children involved. There is timely progression to child protection conferences when required'.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe. The response letter recognises the improvements made following the last ILACS in 2023 in relation to the Public Law Outline, private fostering arrangements and neglect.

3.4 People Committee is asked to consider and comment on the contents of the inspection report and note that the areas of improvement set out in the 2023 ILACS have been addressed and recognised by Ofsted. It should be noted that the findings of this visit will be considered when

planning the next inspection. This is likely to be an ILACS later next year (in line with the three-year cycle for this Ofsted framework).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ofsted report for the Focused visit to East Sussex children's services