The positive impact of recent ambitious changes to transform our support for vulnerable children in Cambridgeshire was highlighted during a recent Ofsted inspection.

Ofsted undertook the unannounced two week inspection of children's services in January. In the report published today (18 February), they said that overall, children's services in Cambridgeshire require improvement to be good and that we have put in place a package of measures to swiftly address those areas that we know we need to improve.

The report rated the impact of senior leaders as good and praised our accurate assessment of strengths and areas for improvement, as well as our use of peer review and evidence-based analysis to improve children's social care. They said, that leaders had recognised that improvements were needed, and had taken a series of well-considered actions, which are now improving the quality of services for children and young people. They also noted how we have worked closely with the local safeguarding children board and partner agencies in order to drive and monitor progress.

Inspectors said that the leadership of the change programme that resulted in a major restructure of children's services - the 'Change for Children' programme - which was implemented in November 2018 'has been intelligent and effective'. They noted that despite the inevitable disruption in any major restructure, staff were kept well informed and engaged in the process.

The report said, "Whole Council ownership of the change programme and strong political backing had secured significant additional investment." The areas for improvement identified by inspectors had all been covered in reports to the Children and Young People's Committee. Members have, in turn, supported investment into the service to implement the changes and boost staffing levels.

Councillor Simon Bywater, Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee said, "I welcome the report: it is telling us that we understand what needs to be addressed, and that we have put the foundations in place that will deliver positive change.' He continued 'It is great that inspectors acknowledged the hard work and dedication of our staff and I want to thank all our staff and managers for continuing to improve the lives of vulnerable children and young people in Cambridgeshire. I also want to thank them for their confidence that the changes that we introduced in November will deliver a much improved service."

Council Leader Councillor Steve Count said, "I am very pleased that inspectors recognised the commitment to supporting children's services by the Council as a whole. Children's services are a very high priority for me personally..."
as Leader and it gives me great confidence that Ofsted have given us an independent vote of confidence that the changes and investment we have made will deliver the improvements needed.”

Inspectors highlighted a number areas where there is good practice. They were impressed by our Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Hub which makes sure that any young person who has been missing from home or from care has an opportunity to speak to an independent person about any issues that may be troubling them. This team works closely with the police and other partners to ensure that action is taken in relation to any adults who are seeking to target vulnerable young people for exploitation.

Similarly, they praised the work of some of our children in care teams and said that the new team supporting care leavers was already having an impact. They praised the quality of our fostering service and the training and support provided to our carers. They also noted that a strengthened approach to recruitment of foster carers to provide local loving homes for our children in care is also beginning to have an impact. They also said that our support for children with disabilities is good.

We are taking swift action to address the recommendations highlighted in the report. Inspectors said that the number of children that each individual social worker supported remained too high but despite the inevitable pressure that high caseloads bring that," our staff are upbeat and work hard to make a positive difference for children" and that, “social workers and other staff who spoke to inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the future.”

The need to reduce caseloads in the face of the continuing national and local shortage of qualified social workers was the driver behind the introduction of new Children's Practitioner roles. These practitioners support our social workers so that they can focus on the most complex or urgent cases. The additional investment in children's social care services has resulted in an increase in the number of case-holding practitioners from 151 to 183 full time workers.

We had also previously identified a need to increase the level of management supervision and oversight of our work with children, young people and their families. Recognising this need, the Children and Young People's Committee and the wider Council supported the development of additional specialist team manager roles across the service.

The full report can be viewed at https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80445
Media enquiries (journalists/media)