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Jill McGregor
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Dear Ms McGregor

Focused visit to Trafford Council's children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Trafford Council's children's services on 30 September and 1 October 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Gareth Dakin and David Cohen.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children subject to an existing child-in-need or child protection plan. This included arrangements for disabled children and children subject to pre-proceedings under the public law outline.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Since the last inspection in 2022, social work practice for children who are the subject of child-in-need and child protection plans has improved and strengthened in some areas. The overall quality of assessments and plans has shown positive progress, practice for children subject to the Public Law Outline (PLO) has been strengthened and the support and protection offered to disabled children have significantly improved.

There remain areas of practice highlighted in the last inspection where sufficient improvement has not been realised or embedded quickly enough for children in Trafford. Assessments are still not updated regularly enough to inform planning. Child-in-need and child protection plans are not always clear or specific enough to ensure progress for children, and the quality of supervision and management oversight is not consistently effective. Leaders recognise this and accept that for a

small number of children, there has been a delay in them receiving the help and support they need.

Improvements made so far are having a positive impact for most children. However, further work is needed to ensure that the quality of help and protection offered to the children and families of Trafford is consistently effective.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?¹

- The quality and impact of recorded supervision and management decision-making. (enabler 2, national framework)
- The quality and consistency of child-in-need and child protection plans. (enabler 2, national framework)
- The progress of children subject to the Public Law Outline (PLO) to support prompt decision-making and inform permanence planning for children. (outcome 1, national framework)
- The effective use of family networks to support children at the earliest stage. (outcome 2, national framework)

Main findings

Thresholds for the help and protection of children subject to child-in-need and child protection planning in Trafford are clearly understood, and most children receive support that is proportionate to their assessed needs. A wide range of services across the council and partner agencies support the progress and experiences of children and their families.

Most children now receive intervention from social workers when they need it. Improvements in the overall timeliness and quality of assessments is resulting in the stronger identification and response to risk and need for children. Not all assessments are updated when children's circumstances change. Consequently, this means that not all children have an up-to-date assessment that reflects their current needs and experiences. This has an impact on planning for some children and the progress they make.

The quality and impact of child-in-need and child protection planning have improved overall since the last inspection. Stronger plans are focused, clear and timebound, which supports improvements in children's experiences. Some plans remain too vague, lacking clarity about specific responsibilities and timescales for agreed

¹ The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

actions. This ambiguity in plans can cause delay in the progression of necessary actions to help and protect children.

Plans are regularly reviewed in multi-agency forums. As a result, most children benefit from effective partnership working, which is informed by purposeful information-sharing and oversight. Professionals regularly attend and participate in review meetings, and this supports children to receive effective support from relevant agencies.

Children are seen regularly by their social workers, and when it is appropriate, they are seen alone. Social workers take time to develop trusting relationships with children, and this is reflected in how social workers articulate and understand children's family dynamics and experiences. This informs and supports the progress of children's plans.

Variability in the depth and analysis of children's records means that they do not always capture and reflect the quality of social work interventions or what this means for children and their families. Day-to-day recording on children's records is contemporaneous, and some social workers write directly to children, which centres the child's experiences in social work practice. The overall quality of recording remains too variable to demonstrate this progress for all children and families.

There is an inconsistent approach to the involvement of family networks across child-in-need and child protection planning. This means that some children are not afforded the additional safety and support of family and friends as part of their assessments and plans. Improvements in including family and friend networks in children's assessments and plans are starting to address this, although it is too soon to see the impact of this for most children.

Senior leaders continue to focus on strengthening management oversight and supervision because this was an identified area for improvement in the last inspection. There has been an improvement in the timeliness and visibility of management oversight of children's records. Stronger practice in some teams demonstrates the effective review of actions and work to address need, alongside reflective and challenging conversations that drive progress. This is not consistent across all areas. Some management oversight and supervision do not demonstrate sufficient rigour in ensuring that timely and proportionate progress is made for children.

Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made in the support offered to disabled children. The members of the children with additional needs team have made fundamental changes to how they respond to risk and need. Children now benefit from comprehensive and holistic assessments. The resulting plans accurately reflect risk and need while also considering how children's additional vulnerabilities and circumstances affect them. As a result of these improvements,

disabled children are receiving the right support and are making tangible progress in line with their needs.

Since the last inspection, the pace of improvement has been too slow for children subject to PLO, and leaders acknowledge this. The impact of this is that some of these vulnerable children have experienced avoidable drift and delay in having their needs fully met. For a small number of children, this has resulted in missed opportunities for decisive actions to be taken in order for them to achieve a sense of permanence earlier.

More recent action by leaders, a targeted improvement plan, and a revised legal gateway process are improving the practice environment within the PLO. This includes strengthened management oversight and tracking and improving safeguarding practice. This is having a positive impact on children subject to the PLO, with pre-proceedings work now being more effective for children as a direct result. More recently, timely and decisive action is taken when children's circumstances have not improved. This is reducing the risk of children being in harmful circumstances without effective support and protection. Nevertheless, it remains too soon to see the full impact of these changes for some children, and there is still more to do for children who need the safeguards of the PLO.

Performance and quality assurance information provides leaders with an accurate line of sight to current practice. It informs the understanding that leaders have about the quality of social work practice and children's experiences, and it enables them to respond swiftly to any areas of concern. Leaders actively embrace the outcomes from quality assurance activity, which helps them to understand children's experiences and inform their service development plans.

A range of audit activity is utilised to support leaders in building a more accurate picture of practice. Although leaders have improved audit processes, they do not yet provide enough insight into how practice and management affect children's progress. Leaders in Trafford know their services well and understand areas of strength and areas for development. With transparency and integrity, their self-evaluation reflects that more needs to be done to ensure that social work practice is having a consistently positive impact on outcomes for children.

Since the last inspection, leaders have taken a measured approach to improvement and acknowledge that they have been slow to implement change in some areas. This has had a detrimental impact for a small number of children who have not made sufficient progress as a result of these changes. More recently, the pace and progress of improvement have accelerated and there is evidence of strengthening practice. This is improving outcomes for children in Trafford.

Social workers said that they enjoy working in Trafford. They feel well supported by their immediate line managers, their colleagues and senior leaders. They value

opportunities for professional development. Social Workers report that they are confident in their leaders and described a supportive and accessible culture that is improving their working conditions and the services they offer to children. Social workers want to stay and be part of the Trafford journey.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Dakin
His Majesty's Inspector