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Melissa Caslake
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Dear Ms Caslake

Focused visit to Salford City Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Salford City Council children's services on 14 and 15 October 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Mandy Nightingale and Sally Sinclair.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need or subject to a child protection plan with a focus on neglect and children subject to pre-proceedings under the Public Law Outline (PLO).

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

Headline findings

Since the previous inspection in November 2023, the leadership team has continued to focus on improving services for children and their families in Salford. A dedicated focus on recruitment and retention has strengthened the development of a stable and experienced social work workforce. A well-structured quality assurance framework provides leaders with an accurate understanding of the quality and impact of social work practice. As a result, leaders know where practice is strong and areas where it could be further improved to best support children and their families. Targeted work around the PLO means that leaders now have strong oversight of this work and the progress for children is closely monitored. Prompt action is taken to ensure that children's needs are swiftly met.

Multi-agency working in Salford is strong and an ongoing focus on neglect across the partnership means professionals have an improved understanding of the signs and symptoms of neglect, and they respond appropriately. Children and their families in

Salford have access to a broad and varied range of resources, and this is ensuring that children's needs are met at the right time and at the right level.

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

- Ensure that timescales for actions in child in need and child protection plans are consistently set, agreed and recorded. (outcome 1, national framework)

Main findings

Partnership working is strong and effective in Salford. Agencies understand the local model of help and support for children and families, and this is consistently applied. When there is a difference of views about how best to support and protect children, professional discussions are facilitated, and an agreed way forward is implemented. This results in the interventions for children and their families being proportionate to their identified strengths and needs.

Established multi-agency working and a broad range of resources available to support children and their families mean that children's needs are consistently met. Social work interventions are considered in light of the families' changing circumstances and the decision to step up or down through child in need, child protection and pre-proceedings processes ensures that all interventions are proportionate, and children's needs are being met to improve their circumstances.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have robustly reviewed the pre-proceedings processes. This was previously an area for improvement. When a decision is made to move into pre-proceedings, the revised PLO flowchart and management tracker is swiftly initiated. This provides a structured framework to review the specialist interventions and ongoing social work with families. The impact this work has on children's experiences and the families' progress is carefully considered.

Alongside the PLO flowchart, leaders have implemented a structured workflow in the recording system which is helping social workers and their managers to ensure that timely decisions are made for children and recorded on their electronic file. Leaders have ensured that families have the specialist assessments they need and have trained a number of experienced social workers to undertake such assessments. The local model of help and support for children and families is appropriately applied when family situations change, and children are stepped up or down from pre-proceedings to meet their changing circumstances. For children this means that decision-making to safeguard them is prompt.

Child in need and child protection planning, plans and reviews are highly effective. Children and families' strengths and needs are understood well. Children are engaged in planning, and their plans are co-produced with them and their families.

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.

The co-production of children's plans has had a positive impact on developing, reviewing and progressing those plans. Multi-agency professional groups meet regularly to review children's plans. Robust conversations are held, and plans are updated in accordance with the families' changing circumstances. This means decisions to escalate or step down interventions are made swiftly. Reviews are clearly written so that all involved have a secure understanding and record of the review.

Contingency plans are routinely in place when children are the subject of child in need or child protection plans. They are co-produced with families and clearly recorded, which ensures that all involved understand their roles and responsibilities. When children's circumstances or needs change, contingency plans are promptly initiated.

For some children, timescales for the completion of actions are added to their plans, and this makes it clear to professionals and families what is expected of them and when. However, most children's plans do not contain timescales for actions. Although the effectiveness of social work practice and partnership working means this has limited detrimental impact on children, adding timescales would further hold professionals and families to account for their contributions.

Social workers talk warmly about the children they work with and clearly know them well. Children are seen and spoken to in different environments to ensure that their views and behaviours are heard and observed. Children's views are clearly included in their planning, and they are therefore active players in what is agreed with them and their families about next steps.

Social workers see children regularly and their engagement is planned in accordance with the child's plan. The time social workers spend with children is purposeful and creative. Social workers are creative in their work with children and families, and this has included the translation of key documents and the use of a broad range of visual tools. Social workers develop effective relationships with children, and this supports their ongoing work. Social workers have a good understanding of the needs of unborn and newborn children and show compassion and sensitivity in their written records to capture children's views.

An experienced and consistently stable leadership team knows its service well. Leaders are outward facing and understand what needs to improve further. They welcome opportunities to learn from others and further develop the effectiveness of their services for children and families. Leaders have strong political and corporate support.

Leaders know their local area well; they understand the impact of high levels of poverty and deprivation on children and families. Since the previous inspection, leaders and partners in the Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership have had a robust focus on neglect. This has included several development opportunities for staff across the partnership, including multi-agency conferences and joint and single

agency training. This has created an improved understanding across the partnership of the signs and symptoms of neglect for children. Leaders within the local authority have implemented a new role of 'neglect champion'. All these developments are having a positive impact on improving the lives of children in Salford who experience neglect. Leaders continue to focus on ensuring that all agencies consistently use the newly agreed neglect assessment tool to assess and support children's circumstances and are currently undertaking a review of this resource with partners.

A determined focus, supported by corporate and political leaders, on recruitment, retention and staff well-being has led to the development of an established and stable workforce. Leaders have created several routes into social work and a refreshed focus on staff well-being is cited by social workers as a significant contributor to recruitment and retention. Support for staff extends across the management structure and into workforce development. As a result of this, children experience minimal changes of social worker. This is supporting the implementation of the local authority's practice model of co-production and getting to know families well to work in partnership effectively.

Regular high-quality and reflective supervision supports social workers to evaluate their work with families and provides managers with an overview of progress for children. Manager and senior leader oversight is clearly recorded on children's electronic records, and this is supportive to practitioners.

Leaders have created a well-structured, robust and embedded quality assurance framework. This provides assurance on the quality of social work practice and the impact it has on the experience and progress of children and families. Effective audits include discussions with social workers, observations of practice and a moderation process. Audits of children's files and multi-agency thematic deep dive audits provide leaders with the information they require to continuously improve their services. Well-informed analyses of audits are shared with leaders and the workforce, and the outcomes inform planning for next steps. Staff are aware of and are included in the audit cycle, and they report that this gives them additional opportunities to reflect on their practice and the impact it has for children and families.

A comprehensive and accessible training programme is informed by audit outcomes and learning from practice reviews. Training relevant to practice provides social workers and managers with the opportunity to refresh and build on their knowledge and skills, and this learning informs their practice with children and families.

Social workers told inspectors that Salford's inclusive and collaborative culture, supportive managers and leaders, accessible training, manageable caseloads, flexible working and positive work-life balance encourage them to continue working in the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Mandy Nightingale
His Majesty's Inspector