**MARCH COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT**

**Inspectors have praised Children’s Services at Norfolk County Council, judging the authority as “good” and highlighting “exemplary” and “exceptional” areas of practice.**

In an inspection report recently published Ofsted said “significant improvements” had been made in services for children and their families, recognising stable and determined leadership, investment in services, and “compassionate, warm and committed workers and carers.”

Inspectors said children’s “voices, wishes and feelings shine brightly” in case records and described children and young people’s participation as a strength of the authority.

The report follows a two-week inspection in November, the first full inspection of its kind since 2017, when Norfolk was judged as “requires improvement.”

Known as an Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS), the inspection looked at the support the council offers children and families from before birth through to adult life. The judgement relates to all services from early help and prevention, to more specialist support for families with the greatest needs.

In the report, inspectors said:

“Significant improvements have been made in services for children and families since the last inspection in 2017.

“A stable and determined children’s senior leadership team, endorsed by councillors, has been innovative, establishing a shared practice culture and new ways of working which have transformed services.”

Inspectors said that “the vast majority of children in Norfolk receive high quality services and have good relationships with their social workers, which is leading to continued improvements in their circumstances.”

Ofsted described support for care leavers as demonstrating “exemplary practice” and said children in care are provided with “exceptional services.” In essence

Ofsted has recognised the huge progress we have made in recent years, which is testament to the tremendous effort of all those working across the service. I want to thank all of our staff and carers for their dedication and commitment to Norfolk’s children and young people and for the role they have played in this Ofsted judgement.

Ofsted said that adoption services remained a strength, independent reviewing officers are “strong advocates for children” and planning and decision making for babies needing early protection was a “particular strength.”

They also highlighted the “effective support” of the Targeted Youth Support Service, in diverting children away from criminal exploitation and the skilful work of the social workers taking calls where there were concerns about children (known as the Children’s Advice and Duty Services).

Inspectors described the Executive Director of Children’s Services as an “exemplary leader” and recognised the strength of partnership working in the county.

They said further improvement was needed in the response to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless; the recognition and response to neglect, and the support and decision-making for children placed with family and friends.

Sara Tough, Executive Director of Children’s Services at Norfolk County Council, said:

“This report reflects the huge effort of all of our staff in improving services for children and young people in the county. It has taken a huge amount of work and has come amidst a global pandemic and when public services are under significant pressure which makes it all the more impressive.

“This report shows that outcomes for children are at the heart of everything we do and the work we are doing is helping to improve the lives of children and families across the county. Ofsted recognised our commitment to participation, our efforts to listen to children and young people and the strength of our social work practice, which is based on developing strong and effective relationships with children, families and our partners.

“We are ambitious for every child and young person and will continue to build on this positive inspection outcome, to help make Norfolk a county where all children and young people can flourish.”

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| **Norfolk to benefit from new Family Hubs and Start for Life funding** |
| **Children and parents in Norfolk are to benefit from a new cradle to career approach to family support.**  The government has just announced that Norfolk County Council will be one of 75 local authorities receiving some of the £302m new Family Hubs and Start for Life funding.  It means the county will receive approximately £6m to further develop its prevention and early help services for families with children and young people up to the age of 19 (25 if they have special educational needs and disabilities).  This is not about introducing a new service or opening new buildings but to allow the county to further develop support for families. Using a whole family approach, the Family Hubs network will give families a single access point to support services that are integrated across health (physical and mental health) and social care as well as voluntary and community organisations and education.  Whilst there will be at least seven physical Family Hub sites in existing community buildings, which families will be able to walk into, services will be delivered largely on an outreach basis. The Family Hub approach will bring together a wide range of services so that families can access support in the spaces and places that they live and visit, such as libraries and community buildings.  The Family Hubs network will provide simple access to ‘Start for Life’ services, providing the best support for babies in the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age of two, setting them up to maximise their potential for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing including:  • Perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships support for families who are expecting a baby or have a baby under the age of two  • Infant feeding support services  • Parenting support for parents of children aged 0-2  • Home learning environment support for parents of children aged 3-4  The County Council want Norfolk’s children to flourish and have the very best start in life, no matter their background or circumstances, so we’re really pleased to have been identified as one of the authorities to benefit from this programme. Family Hubs can provide families with advice and support across a whole range of family issues spanning the 0-19 (25 with SEND age range).  Family Hubs will enable the join up of different agencies supporting families in the county, including from across social care, health, education, and the voluntary sector.  “Family Hubs will support all families across the county, with a focus on reducing inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children, and families, which includes support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and support in preventing parental conflict. These are areas where we know the earlier we can help families, the greater the impact on children’s futures.” |