

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 19 January 2026

Report Title

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Short Inspection November 2025

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report is to advise Cabinet of the outcome of the Inspection of Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted in November 2025. This was a judgement Short Inspection, and the Local Authority received an Overall Effectiveness grade of Outstanding. All sub-categories also received a grade of Outstanding with the exception of 'the experiences and progress of Care Leavers', which received a Good. There are two improvement actions, both related to Care Leavers.

Recommendations

That Cabinet note the outcome of the inspection regarding the effectiveness of children's services in Rotherham and endorse the priorities identified for continued focus.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Inspection of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council local authority children's services 3 to 7 November 2025
- Appendix 2 Initial Equality Screening Assessment – Part A
- Appendix 3 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Framework for Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services, Ofsted, August 2025

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

n/a

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Short Inspection November 2025

1. Background

- 1.1 Children's Services across the country are subject to regular inspections by Ofsted in a variety of formats. The main vehicle for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the delivery of social care services is via the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). These judgement inspections take place approximately once every three years. Rotherham's last judgement inspection was in June 2022, when it received an overall rating of Good. When a Local Authority is Good or above, its next inspection is designated a short Inspection – this means one that takes place over a two week period.
- 1.2 Since Rotherham's last ILACS, Ofsted has added a new judgement category around care leavers and there are now four areas of scrutiny:
- Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
 - Experiences and progress of children in care
 - Experiences and progress of care leavers
 - Impact of Leaders on social work practice with children and families.

Culminating in an Overall Effectiveness judgement.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The ILACS had been anticipated for some time and was announced on 27 October 2025. Significant offsite work took place in that first week, including interviews with the Lead Member, the Chief Executive and the Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
- 2.2 Fieldwork took place in the second week with 10 Inspectors interviewing staff from all parts of the Service (Family Help, Front Door, Duty and Assessment, Locality, Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering, Adoption, Education services, and Commissioning) and reviewing significant numbers of children's files. Children and young people were also interviewed by the Inspectors and gave their views about services provided by the Council.
- 2.3 A final report was published by Ofsted on 16 December 2025. It was extremely pleasing to be judged Outstanding across 3 of the 4 categories, with an **Overall Effectiveness Judgement of Outstanding**. The impact of leaders on social work practice, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the experiences and progress of children in care were all rated Outstanding. The experiences and progress of care leavers was rated Good.
- 2.4 The report stated that:

Progress is evident across all areas of social work practice.

Children in need of help and protection, and those in care, now benefit from an outstanding service delivered by a stable, highly skilled workforce. Practitioners know their children well, advocate fiercely for them, and build relationships that promote safety and belonging. Further investment in the early help and family help model is enabling more children to remain safely within their family networks with timely, targeted support that is making a measurable difference to their lives.

Decisive action has been taken to strengthen pathway planning, embed relational support, and promote opportunities for safe independence when care leavers are ready.

The voice of children is now a defining strength of the service.

- 2.5 Inspectors found that the Council placed children's experiences and voices at the heart of decision-making and practice, recognising a strong culture of learning, continuous improvement and cross-organisational commitment to children and families.
- 2.6 This outcome reflects years of dedicated work by social workers, practitioners, leaders and partners across Rotherham to improve services, rebuild trust and keep children safe and supported. While this recognition is significant for the Council and the borough, it is important to emphasise that improvement is a continuing journey and that there is still work to do, as evidenced in the actions required in relation to Care Leavers.
- 2.7 This achievement places Rotherham among an elite group of just nine local authorities in England to hold both an Outstanding ILACS rating – the highest possible judgement under Ofsted's *Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services* framework – and the top Area SEND outcome, which assesses how effectively councils support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. It is the only council in the Yorkshire and Humber region to achieve this combination.
- 2.8 Ofsted highlighted a number of strengths across services, including:
- **Children's voices are central to assessment**, planning and support, with lived experience actively shaping services. This includes initiatives such as the Children in Care Council, 'In Care Voice' group, and 'Look Ahead' for care leavers, as well as outreach programmes, SEND sufficiency planning, and increasing placements within the borough. Young inspectors and young journalists also play a key role in holding services to account and improving practice.
 - **Leadership impact is strong**, with clear vision, stable management, and robust corporate and political backing, *reflecting sustained and visible council-wide commitment to placing children at the heart of strategic decision-making since the last inspection.*

- **Children who need help and protection** receive timely, effective support, and risk is managed well.
- **Children vulnerable to exploitation** “receive a highly effective service from Evolve, the specialist exploitation team”. Multi-agency work is strong and the relational approach increases safeguarding of children.
- **Children in care experience stability**, feel listened to and are supported to achieve their ambitions.
- **A culture of reflective practice, learning** and sharing good practice is embedded across teams.

2.9 The inspection also recognised the Council’s approach to workforce engagement, which meant staff felt valued, proud to work for Rotherham, and inspired to deliver the very best for children, young people, and families.

2.10 **Plans for Care Leavers**

Although services to Care Leavers were judged Good, there were also two improvement actions in relation to this area of practice:

- The quality of pathway plans for care leavers
- The quality of health history information provided to care leavers

2.11 These areas of practice will form part of the Care Leaver Service Delivery Plan, and updates will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board at regular intervals. The improvement actions will also be scrutinised formally by the Improving Lives Select Commission.

3. **Options considered and recommended proposal**

3.1 That Cabinet note the outcome of the inspection regarding the effectiveness of children’s services in Rotherham and endorse the priorities identified for continued focus.

4. **Consultation on proposal**

4.1 There was no consultation on this report as it is an external document.

5. **Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

5.1 The Executive Director will be accountable for ensuring all actions are undertaken to address the improvement actions stated in the report. These will be complete by September 2026.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no procurement or financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The legal basis for a Chief Inspector to inspect the overall performance of a local authority is under section 136 of Education and Inspections Act 2006. This focusses on how effectively local authorities undertake various functions toward children in care and care experienced young people under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 as referenced under section 135 of the Act. The outcome of the report under section 137 is noted as outstanding overall with improvement action points required to care leavers services.
- 7.2 By virtue of section 3 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007, the local authority must provide a written statement of action which they propose to take in light of the report. In view of this, there are no legal implications by following the recommendation at 3.1.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 Human resources will continue to provide advice and support the Directorate with workforce issues.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The Ofsted report demonstrates significant progress since the last inspection in 2022. It highlights improved practice across the service impacting positively on children and their families. The report recognises how children's voice has helped shape service delivery.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The Initial Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to the report at Appendix 2.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A climate impact assessment has been completed and is available at Appendix 3.
- 11.2 There is no anticipated carbon impact associated with the report and its recommendations: a carbon impact from attendance at bimonthly delivery meetings is assessed to be negligible, as most meetings are hosted online. Improving outcomes for children in need of help and protection may have benefits for their resilience to climate change, in the longer-term.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 It is recognised that achieving an outstanding grade for the effectiveness of children's services requires effective joint working with internal and external partners. The inspection report demonstrates strong collaboration between partners is underpinning the work to achieve better outcomes, especially for vulnerable children.
- 12.2 Ofsted highlighted a "cross-organisational commitment to children and families" as central to the borough's success. Ofsted praised the Evolve exploitation team, part of a broader multi-agency model, for delivering trauma-informed support to vulnerable children.
- 12.3 The inspection noted that children's voices are integrated into all assessment, planning, and support processes.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The Children and Young People's Service Directorate Leadership Team oversee delivery of children's services through Performance Management, Assurance and Change Management boards. The identification of risks and the mitigations will be managed through these governance arrangements.

14. Accountable Officers

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Service

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	24/12/25
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	24/12/25
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	24/12/25

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