

Devon County Council Report to UPC

June 2023

Monitoring visit to Devon children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Devon children's services on 18 and 19 April 2023. This was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2020. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Steve Lowe and Sarah Canto.

Areas covered by the visit Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the quality and impact of services for children in care, with a particular focus on the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- Permanence planning for children.
- The quality and timeliness of life-story work.
- The assessment of children looked after placed with parents.
- Strategic oversight and grip on areas for improvement and oversight by senior leaders, including case audits and supervision.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Headline findings. The quality of social work practice across Devon remains inconsistent. Most children in care experience delays in securing permanent homes. This is for a variety of reasons but is mostly due to social workers lacking the confidence, professional curiosity and guidance required to understand children's needs and plan for their futures. Weak management oversight through supervision, insufficient challenge by independent reviewing officers, gaps in recording and poor care planning are often the root cause of these delays. Quality assurance through auditing still lacks sufficient impact in driving improvements in practice and has required a significant restart.