



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
Type in Ward

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

Scrutiny
Cabinet

5th April 2011
11th April 2011

Outcome of the Unannounced Safeguarding Inspection 2010

Report of the Strategic Director, Children

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise on the outcome of the Ofsted Unannounced Safeguarding Inspection of Duty and Assessment Services in Social Care and Safeguarding Division on 16th and 17th November 2010.
- 1.2 To summarise the findings of the Inspection, the recommendations and the response of the Division.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Social Care & Safeguarding division was subject to an unannounced Inspection by Ofsted on 16th and 17th November 2010. The findings were made public on 15th December. This Inspection was the second annual unannounced inspection completed by Ofsted and followed on from the first inspection carried out in August 09. These inspections are being undertaken across the country as a response to the Case of Baby 'P' and the subsequent findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Haringey Council in London in 2008. Inspectors focused on Frontline Duty and Assessment Services with a particular emphasis on whether children and the work being done with them and their families by social work staff was safe, timely and minimized risk.
- 2.2 The Inspection concluded that there were no areas for priority action, 3 areas of strength and 6 areas for further development. A finding of an area for priority action means that there is a significant shortfall in service and one that may place children at risk. A significant difference from the previous inspection is that in highlighting areas of strength Ofsted are now stating that these areas of strength are noteworthy on a national basis. Ofsted also stated that: "The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2009 have been addressed in part or fully".
- 2.3 Progress has been made with all of the areas of development, and most have been effectively addressed.

- 2.4 This Inspection was particularly positive for us given the very significant rises in demand particularly referrals and complexity of child protection work to the Authority over the last 2 years. This has been recognised by the Council as a priority area and one where additional investment and budget protection has been agreed at a time of considerable budget reductions overall.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the findings of the inspection and in particular the considerable strengths of the service as identified by the Inspectors and the hard work and dedication of staff who helped ensure the inspection was a success.
- 3.2 That Cabinet notes the identified areas for development, the steps being taken in relation to some of the areas identified and the intention to ensure that all areas so identified are actioned as soon as possible.

4. Report

- 4.1 On the 16th and 17th November 2010 Ofsted conducted an Unannounced Inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Leicester City Council Children's Services and specifically within the Social Care and Safeguarding Division.
- 4.2 This Inspection was the second annual unannounced inspection completed by Ofsted. These inspections are being undertaken across the country as a response to the Case of Baby 'P' and the subsequent findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Haringey Council in London in 2008. The Inspections are designed to determine whether a Council's initial response to issues of risk to children are adequate and that the Council delivers a safe service in accordance with national guidance.
- 4.3 The Outcome of the Inspection significantly contributes to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the Authority's Children's Services.
- 4.4 The inspection was rigorous and robust, and was led by three Inspectors over two days. It involved sampling the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and senior practitioners undertaking referral and assessment duties; and other information provided by staff, managers and professionals from some partner agencies. Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff.

4.5 Outcome of the Inspection

- 4.5.1 Overall the Inspection identified no areas for priority action, 3 areas of strength and 6 areas for further development.
- 4.5.2 From the evidence gathered, the inspection also identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance.
- i) Child protection enquiries are prioritised, with effective action taken by the response team. Section 47 enquiries are always undertaken by qualified social workers in a timely way, resulting in clear outcomes, and urgent action is taken when required.
 - ii) Inter-agency thresholds are applied appropriately resulting in a balanced provision of assessment and services through the common assessment framework and the children in need arrangements. The substantial increase in children with identified needs has impacted on all stages of intervention.
 - iii) Procedures and practice to protect children and manage risks are appropriately established and implemented. Additionally there are specifically targeted procedures and approaches, for example in situations involving child trafficking, sexual exploitation and honour based violence.
 - iv) The qualified and experienced practitioner workforce in the duty and assessment and disabled children's teams is well established and skilfully provides consistently effective outcomes. Staff have challenging but manageable workloads.
 - v) There are constructive and robust inter-agency relationships between social care and key partner agencies resulting in appropriate information sharing and contributions to assessments and plans.
 - vi) Senior managers use a range of quality audit, case monitoring and performance assessment mechanisms to identify and report on the effectiveness of service processes, arrangements and workforce related issues. These inform and support service improvement plans.
 - vii) Out-of-hours duty arrangements are responsive and timely, addressing risks to children in an appropriate way. There are also good links to daytime services, although the emergency duty team does not have the facility to record outcomes of interventions directly into the central database.

4.5.3 Strengths Identified

- i) The views, wishes and feelings of children are given significant priority. Substantial efforts are made to enable and ensure that all children are fully engaged in assessment processes. Examples of excellent practice were seen where practitioners sought the child's view in challenging circumstances and fully represented them even where the views were contrary to the professional assessment of risk.
- ii) Supervision is of a high standard being regular, assured, clearly recorded and supportive of practitioners' performance, enabling critically reflective consideration of practice. It is further linked to a wide range of other training and developmental opportunities including a strong focus on supporting the development of newly qualified social workers. This is a particularly significant area to have been identified as a strength as in 2009 it was identified as an area for development. It demonstrates the considerable progress made in this area in only a year.
- iii) Very good, timely responses are made by experienced practitioners in the Disabled Children's Team to address child protection concerns. The service is further strengthened by practitioners regularly and effectively screening referrals across the duty and assessment service for any concerns regarding other disabled children.

4.5.4 Areas for Development Identified

- i) There is still insufficient managerial oversight of those contacts and referrals that do not proceed to either initial assessment or to child protection enquiries. This was one aspect of an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- ii) Assessments continue to be variable in quality. Many fail to sufficiently or clearly identify risk factors, or evaluate the impact on the safeguarding needs of children within an analysis of risks, strengths and needs. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- iii) The ethnicity, religion and culture of children are well recorded and their importance is recognised by practitioners, resulting in some good examples of sensitive and insightful work. However, the specific impact of these factors on the strengths and vulnerabilities of individual children is not consistently considered in assessments.
- iv) Child protection strategy discussions between social care and the police child abuse investigation unit are inappropriately used as a means of general information sharing outside of Section 47 enquiries. While records of these discussions are kept they are not routinely shared.
- v) There is an absence of an effective screening mechanism to address the many domestic violence notifications, adding unnecessary pressures to the duty and assessment service.
- vi) There had been some delays in starting and completing a small number of child in need assessments. While not initially indicating a risk of harm, some initial assessments subsequently identified child protection concerns.

4.6 Response to the Inspection

4.6.1 The Division and Children's Services have accepted the Inspection findings as accurate and in accordance with our own evaluation of our services. We are particularly pleased that the hard work and commitment given by our staff has been recognised by Inspectors and that staff have continued to deliver a quality service despite a difficult national climate regarding child protection and social work in general. The Division also accepts the areas for development and has already taken a number of steps to address the issues identified.

4.6.2 Action already taken in relation to developmental areas

- i) The inspectors again highlighted an issue of managerial oversight in relation to those referrals where the service makes a decision not to take further. The Division did recognise this issue at our first inspection and subsequent to that inspection had initiated a review of the Duty and assessment structure which reported in December 2010 just after the second inspection. We will be making changes to our Assessment structure from April of 2011 which aims in part to ensure that there is greater managerial capacity to ensure oversight and that all signoffs of referral will have to be authorised electronically by a manager from that point.
- ii) Variable assessment quality is being addressed through the division's series of case file audits and senior management inspections of teams. Our findings indicate that whilst we believe that our assessments are robust, staff in some cases are not providing sufficient detail in their written work of the 'thinking' behind their findings and recommendations. This is an ongoing area of work development where we expect and will need to see further improvements.
- iii) The impact of cultural and diversity issues not being consistently considered in assessments is in a similar vein to the previous issue. This has also been recognised in our internal inspection work and all team managers have had their attention drawn to this area as one which they need to ensure is clearly present in all our assessments. It would also be fair to say that whilst there are gaps here we have also seen some very good examples of how culture and diversity issues have been included in assessments and subsequent work with service users.
- iv) Use of Strategy discussions between the Police and Social Care. The purpose of such discussions is to plan whether and how we will jointly approach a child protection investigation. The inspectors felt that in the two discussions that they observed we and the police should have been more focused and not used the discussion for more general information sharing. We accept this and will shortly be introducing an agreed format for recording of strategy discussions designed to ensure that all the salient issues and points are both discussed and recorded electronically. This will be used from March 2011.
- v) The inspectors noted an absence of an effective screening mechanism to address Domestic Violence notifications. This essentially is a matter for the police, who currently notify our Duty and Assessment service of every domestic violence incident irrespective

of whether children are involved or not. The head of safeguarding is in dialogue with the Police about this matter.

- vi) The Inspectors identified some delays in starting and completing a ‘small’ number of assessments. We expect that this will be addressed in our re-structure of the Duty and Assessment Service. Increased managerial oversight should ensure that all assessments are started in a timely manner.

4.7 Overall the Inspection determined that our services in Duty and Assessment were child focused, timely in their responses and sought to identify and minimise risk through concerted and co-ordinated intervention by skilled and motivated staff. We are particularly pleased that a development area identified in the first inspection, supervision of staff, has now been identified as strength in the second inspection.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.
Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext 7750

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Whilst Safeguarding obligations are heavily intertwined in statutory and case law principles, the inspection report acknowledges that the Safeguarding Division has robust practices in this regard and strong links with the Legal Division.
Kamal Adatia, Barrister, ext 7044

5.3 Climate Change Implications

This report does not contain any significant climate change implications and therefore should not have a detrimental effect on the Council’s climate change targets.
Helen Lansdown, Senior Environmental Consultant - Sustainable Procurement

6. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equal Opportunities	No		
Policy	Yes	Entire report	
Sustainable and Environmental	No		
Crime and Disorder	No		
Human Rights Act	No		
Elderly/People on Low Income	No		
Corporate Parenting	No		
Health Inequalities Impact	No		

7. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

None.

8. Consultations

None.

9. Report Author

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Key Decision	Yes
Reason	Is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising more than one ward
Appeared in Forward Plan	Yes
Executive or Council Decision	Executive (Cabinet)