
**OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND
DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD 2015**

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Cyndi Hughes,
Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Alison Murphy,
Interim Director of Children's Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides a summary of the key findings and progress to date from the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board which Cabinet is asked to consider.

Summary

2. Between 23 June 2015 and 16 July 2015 Ofsted undertook an inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The inspection report was published on 1 September 2015.
3. The report resulted in a judgement of 'inadequate' for children's services overall due to a number of areas where the inspection team found that key aspects of arrangements for safeguarding children were not well managed.
4. The Local authority has taken immediate steps to make improvements in respect of the inspection findings and an update on actions taken and the impact on performance is included in the detail of this report.
5. Red Quadrant the DFE improvement partners are satisfied with progress on the Improvement Plan and Members will note immediate actions on priority areas.
6. Although this is the first report to Cabinet, a report was considered by the Health and Well Being Board on 20 October 2015, a verbal update was given by the Interim Director of Children's Services to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 2 November 2015, and Council has been updated by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 24 September 2015 and 19 November 2015.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Receive the content and outcomes of the Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
 - (b) Note the actions already taken to improve performance.

Reasons

8. The recommendations are supported as the Local authority is highly committed to ensuring that services in Darlington are of the highest quality and that children are safeguarded and protected from harm and that all children and young people in Darlington get the best start in life.

Alison Murphy
Interim Director Children's Services

Background Papers

Ofsted Inspection Report: Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (1st September 2015).

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| S17 Crime and Disorder | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Health and Well Being | The Health and Well-being Board will require regular updates on the progress made in implementing the Improvement Plan in response to the inspection findings and recommendations. |
| Carbon Impact | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Diversity | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Wards Affected | All |
| Groups Affected | All |
| Budget and Policy Framework | In responding to the Ofsted inspection recommendations the Improvement Plan will require that the Local Authority makes additional resources available both in terms of staff time and financial commitment so that the required improvements are. |
| Key Decision | N/A |
| Urgent Decision | N/A |
| One Darlington: Perfectly Placed | N/A |
| Efficiency | N/A |

MAIN REPORT

Background and Introduction

9. The Ofsted Single Inspection Framework was introduced in November 2013 on a universal three year cycle, replacing the previous Safeguarding and Looked after Children inspection framework. The single inspection framework is conducted under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and focuses on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, and children who return home. The framework also focuses on the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and the experiences and progress of care leavers.
10. The single inspection is unannounced and took place over a four week period between 23 June 2015 and 16 July 2015. The inspection involved 9 inspectors being on site during the field work stage which lasts for two weeks. The inspection report was published on 1 September 2015.

Findings

11. The outcome of the inspection is set out in the table below and was as follows:

Table A – Ofsted Inspection Judgement

| | |
|--|--|
| Overall Judgement is Inadequate | |
| There are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. | |
| It is Ofsted’s expectation that all children and young people receive the level of help, care and protection that will ensure their safety and help prepare them for adult life. | |
| 1. Children who need help and protection | Inadequate |
| 2. Children looked after and achieving permanence | Requires improvement |
| 2.1 Adoption performance | Good |
| 2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers | Good |
| 3. Leadership, management and governance | Inadequate |
| The Effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board (LSCB) | Requires Improvement - the arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children require improvement. |

12. The inspection resulted in a judgement of 'inadequate' for children's services overall due to a number of areas where the inspection team found that key aspects of arrangements for safeguarding children were not well managed.
13. The Authority will be subject to intervention from DFE for the next 12 months whilst actions to improve the service are implemented.
14. The inspectors noted that there were some areas of good practice and identified that Social workers in Darlington "are committed to children and their families and many know the children they work with well and ensure that they receive a good range of support, including services from the family intervention team. These services are resulting in good outcomes".
15. The inspectors also noted that the multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation is reducing risk for many children and young people and front-line practice is mostly well co-ordinated.

Progress and Reporting

16. An improvement Plan has to be submitted within 70 days of the report publication. The Improvement Plan is being developed in conjunction with Red Quadrant who are the DfE improvement partners. Red Quadrant have spent time on site developing the plan in conjunction with DBC officers and the plan is nearing finalisation for submission to DFE. Red Quadrant are pleased with progress to date. Members are asked to note the initial priorities set out below. It should be noted that the Plan will not be a static document, and will be reviewed and updated as the improvement journey continues over the coming twelve months.
 - (a) Strengthen management capacity and oversight of practice.
 - (b) Put in place robust data reporting system (against all key performance indicators with clear targets for improvement that provides managers at all levels and Members with data needed to maintain an accurate picture of performance).
 - (c) Improve timeliness and quality of assessments.
 - (d) Implement monthly thematic audits of practice.
 - (e) Provide training in target areas to equip staff with the necessary practice and supervisory skills to drive up the quality of practice.
 - (f) Develop recruitment and retention strategy.
17. The oversight of the Improvement Plan is by an internal group and externally chaired board.
 - (a) **Improvement Group** - Chaired by Chief Executive overseeing actions and development of the Improvement Plan.
 - (b) **Improvement Board** - has been established and Chaired by a member of Red Quadrant. The first meeting took place on the 13 October 2015 and the second meeting is on 9 December 2015.

18. Based on the priorities outlined in draft Improvement Plan, a number of actions have already been taken:

(a) Governance/Senior Management

- i. The Lead Member, Interim Director and Chair of Scrutiny have accessed support and advice from the Local Government Association, which has a role in supporting service improvement through mentoring, sharing best practice, and other resources.
- ii. An Interim Director of Children's Services has been appointed with a handover period from the retiring director.
- iii. An Assistant Director from within the Council has been seconded to support the Interim Director with the Improvement Plan
- iv. The Council's new Director of Adults and Children's Services, Suzanne Joyner, will start in post on the 7th December 2015 and will provide additional leadership support to the management team for children's services.

(b) Area Social Work Teams

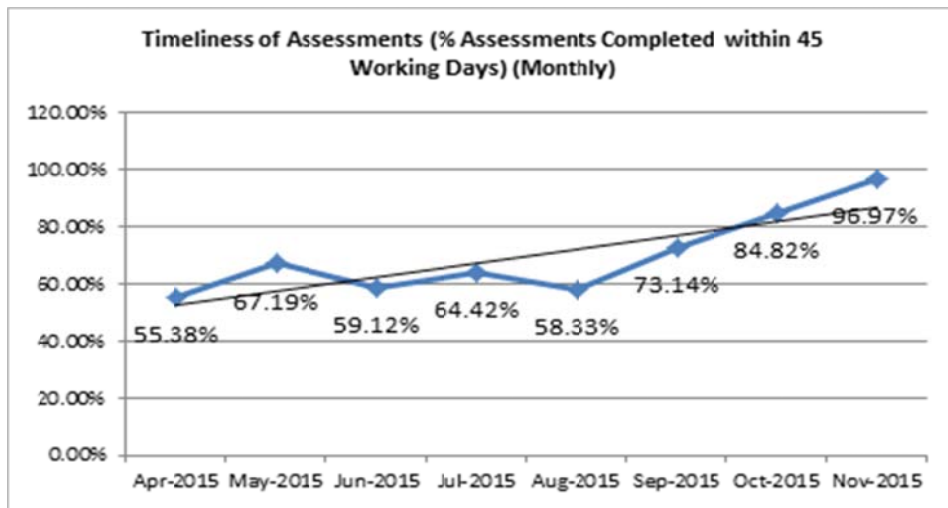
- i. Additional administrative support is in place to enable practitioners to focus on practice.
- ii. Management strengthened in area social work teams
- iii. On-going campaign to recruit permanent staff and the development of a recruitment and retention strategy.
- iv. Training on a Signs of Safety approach in child protection for all social work staff completed with 60 multi-agency partners also trained in the approach.

(c) Auditing the Quality and Timeliness of Practice

- i. A new casework audit tool has been developed and is now in use.
- ii. Full Audit of Section 20 cases underway and a full report will be complete by mid-December 2015.
- iii. Further audits will be undertaken in key improvement areas to feed into improvement plan.

(d) Updated Policies and Procedures - procurement completed of a suite of Children's Social Care policies and procedures through an independent provider.

- (e) Performance Framework - work is underway to establish a robust suite of performance information and a system for utilising it regularly to monitor performance and drive improvement. Two management information officers have recently been appointed as part of the re-shaping of the performance management function.
- (f) Timeliness and Quality of Assessments
 - i. The Head of Service receives a daily report on all current assessments awaiting completion. The Practice supervisors also now have access to up to date management reports which also outlines the number of assessments via their own team and timescales.
 - ii. As the data is now available on a daily basis it can be seen by the graph below that there has been a month on month improvement and currently November is likely to be above the national average. Although the impact on the 2015/2016 figure is small due to the low performance in the first 5 months of the year the direction of travel is a positive one.



Summary

- 19. Overall the single inspection reported a number of strengths including areas where services were judged to be good. However the overall judgement for Children's Services was judged to be inadequate due to the failures identified in terms of services to children in need of protection and in respect of leadership, management and governance.
- 20. Working with Red Quadrant an Improvement Plan has been developed which will shortly be sent to DFE for sign-off. Robust progress is also being made on key priorities in the Improvement Plan.