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

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To receive an update from the Director of Children and Adults Services in relation to the improvements made within Children's Services and Darlington Safeguarding Children Board following the inspection of 2015.

Information and Analysis

2. Attached at **Appendix 1** is a report which was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 4 April 2017, in relation to progress on the improvements required following 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.

Ofsted Monitoring Visits

3. Ofsted has undertaken two further monitoring visits in line with the framework for monitoring and re-inspecting Local Authority Children's Services judged inadequate. The third in February 2017 focused on the following areas:
 - (a) the Authority's response to contact and referrals
 - (b) information sharing between agencies and professionals
 - (c) the quality of child protection enquiries
 - (d) the quality of children's assessments and plans
 - (e) management oversight of practice.
4. The monitoring visit letter (**Appendix 2**) was published in March 2017. In it, Inspectors found that contacts to children's social care receive a timely and effective response with robust checks and appropriate decisions. They also noted good progress to the timeliness and quality of child protection enquiries, and found much evidence of improved compliance in meeting statutory timescales.
5. Inspectors noted that there was now evidence of compliance, although they add, overly focusing on timescales could limit Managers focus on quality of assessment.

6. In the fourth visit in June 2017 (**Appendix 3**) inspectors focused on:
 - (a) The effectiveness of performance management information
 - (b) The quality assurance framework
 - (c) The quality of social work practice and management oversight
 - (d) The effectiveness of scrutiny by senior leaders and Elected Members
7. In the letter, published in July 2017, inspectors confirmed that governance arrangements had been strengthened, performance management was much improved and quality assurance systems were becoming more effective. The stability of the workforce was also noted as improving.
8. Inspectors found sustained progress in services to children in need of help and protection, in relation to response times to contacts and referrals. Worth noting is the reference to timely completion of assessments, statutory visits and reviews. Areas for improvement were highlighted in relation to the life stages work. All of this work has now been progressed and completed.

Department for Education Reviews (DfE)

9. The second DfE Review took place in November. Following this, the Minister advised that the Children's Services Improvement Board (the Board) would meet bi-monthly from February 2017, due to the pace and improvements being made.
10. The next DfE review took place on 28 June attended by the DfE Link Officer, and the Independent Chair of the Children's Services Improvement Board. During this review they met with a range of Social Workers and Managers as well as stakeholders, to discuss their progress and work to date.
11. Initial feedback was positive, with the review team praising the improvement progress to date, and acknowledging the continued improving morale of the workforce. This usually results in a letter from the Minister for Children. However the Council have been informed that he is taking a more risk based approach and is writing to those Councils giving greater concern, and that Darlington will therefore not receive a letter.
12. The DfE Link Officer has agreed subsequently to provide her written account of the review.

Children Service's Improvement Board

13. Since December 2016, the Board has received specific reports and presentations on the following themes:
 - (a) Young adults leaving care
 - (b) Workforce Development
 - (c) Early Help
 - (d) Quality Assurance
 - (e) Independent Reviewing Officer Service

(f) Placement Stability of Looked after Children

Themes for future meetings include updates on Early Help, the direction of travel for Placement Stability and the impact of improved outcomes for children.

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that Members note the actions already taken to improve performance.

Suzanne Joyner
Director of Children and Adults Services

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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	Looked After Children and Care Leavers and Children in Need of Help Protection.
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 made.
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	N/A
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Should assist in helping the Council meet its duty towards this group.