

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee/Panel:	Cabinet
Date:	26 September 2011
Title:	Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services
Reference:	3319
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to inform Cabinet of the findings of the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services that was carried out in Hampshire between 27 June and 8 July 2011. The report on the findings of the inspection was published by Ofsted on 12 August 2011.
- 1.2. Cabinet are invited to note the outcomes of the inspection, in particular the nine gradings of outstanding and thirteen gradings of good covering all areas inspected. With the majority of this round of inspections now complete, this set of grades identifies Hampshire Children's Services inspection results as amongst the very best in the country and, at this point, the best in the South East.
- 1.3. Cabinet are also invited to note the areas for improvement that were identified from the inspection. An improvement plan has been put in place to address these matters.
- 1.4. A full copy of the published inspection report is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The inspection carried out by Ofsted is part of the revised regulatory framework that was implemented after the death of Peter Connelly in Haringey in 2007 and subsequent government reports in 2008/9. As such it is a relatively specific inspection, when compared to the previous Joint Area Review, which has a very explicit and deep focus on children's safeguarding (including child protection) and the quality of services for children looked after by the local authority. These are arguably the two most vulnerable groups of children in any community. The inspection lasts two weeks and authorities receive two weeks notice during which period a number of randomly selected

case files are audited and a range of data and other documentation is required to be submitted to Ofsted.

- 2.2. In Hampshire the inspection was carried out between 27 June and 8 July. The inspection team consisted of 5 inspectors, 4 from Ofsted and one from the Care Quality Commission (CQC). During the course of the inspection the team reviewed over 60 cases, often with the relevant practitioners. They also observed three frontline Referral and Assessment teams (Basingstoke, Fareham and Gosport and Andover), the Children's Reception Team in Hantsdirect as well as observing and discussing cases with social workers in Children Need teams (Fareham and Gosport, Basingstoke), Children in Care teams (Andover and Basingstoke) and a Children with Disabilities team (Basingstoke).
- 2.3. As well as testing front line practice, the inspection team met with staff and managers from Children's Services and with representatives from across the range of partnerships concerned with safeguarding and looked after children including front line police officers, health professionals, schools and voluntary sector staff together with senior managers from those and other organisations. Three inspectors also attended a performance by Hampshire young people who had attended the Wessex Dance Academy.
- 2.4. Inspectors met with children and young people, parents and carers. They also sent out a survey to all looked after children which received a high response rate.
- 2.5. As befits a toughened inspection regime, a review of the inspection reports published so far shows that it is very hard to achieve grades of 'good' or "outstanding". A significant number of authorities, including at least three in the South East, have received overall 'inadequate' grades with serious repercussions for those services in terms of the improvements required and the degree of intervention imposed from the Department for Education. There is a particular dimension for very large authorities. Because the inspection is essentially a deficit model in which authorities are judged by their "weakest link", it can be especially hard for larger authorities to achieve stronger results and the scale and complexity of Hampshire was an issue for this process.
- 2.6. The inspection reaches a number of firm conclusions about both areas of service, safeguarding and children in care. There are two main judgements for each, overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement, followed by a series of more specific judgements. The Hampshire judgements are as follows:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Good
Quality of provision	Good
The contribution of health agencies to keeping children and young people safe	Good
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Outstanding
Partnership working	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good
Services for looked after children	
Overall effectiveness	Good
Capacity for improvement	Outstanding
How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?	
Being healthy	Good
Staying safe	Good
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Good
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Good
Ambition and prioritisation	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Performance management and quality assurance	Outstanding
Equality and diversity	Good

3. Finance

3.1. There are no immediate financial implications that flow from this report. It should be noted that the Ofsted report makes explicit reference to the fact that ‘..political leadership of the council is strong and elected members have ensured, alongside key partners, that safeguarding priorities are underpinned by the provision of resources...’ (p.19) and ‘...strong political leadership and a commitment to safeguarding are ensuring high prioritisation within the council. Additional financial resources have been committed in order to strengthen aspects of services, to increase capacity and to sustain improvement’ (p.8). And in relation to looked after children ‘...financial support for children’s

services has been secured with additional investment in key services...
(p.25).

- 3.2. However, demand for services remains high and the inspection notes that *'...case loads of individual members of staff and in some Referral and Assessment teams are comparatively high but are reported to be manageable. Similarly, the workloads of independent reviewing officers are above national average levels but this is not impacting on the quality of timeliness of initial and review conferences'*(p.13), this comment in the report leads to a specific recommendation (see below).

4. Performance

- 4.1. Performance management was rated as outstanding in both areas of inspection. In this context it is important to note that there was also a strong emphasis on quality assurance and the degree to which there is management oversight of the quality of social work practice.
- 4.2. Inspectors were particularly impressed by the quality of the Children and Young People's Plan and the way in which that was used to create a 'golden thread' of prioritisation and performance and quality improvement.

5. Other key issues – headline findings

- 5.1 With regards to safeguarding there are a number of themes that emerge from the inspection report, many of which are interlocking.
- 5.2 Capacity to Improve – Ofsted's findings in this area require no interpretation. However, it is important to be aware that this outstanding grading is given in the context of major social work reform being proposed through the Munro Review of Child Protection. This latter report, which has now been accepted by government, proposes significant changes to the way in which social workers carry out their child protection tasks, the organisational context within which they work, their professional development and performance management. Whilst the recommendations from Munro will challenge all authorities, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that Hampshire is well placed to meet these challenges.
- 5.3 Partnership working - The role of the Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board and the Hampshire Children's Trust were praised as providing effective and joined up leadership. The report also highlights that the effectiveness of partnerships has a demonstrable impact upon improving the lives of vulnerable children. Examples of this were the effectiveness of the partnership with schools in relation to ensuring that vulnerable children were included and safeguarded within schools; and the leadership of services that improve educational attainment for children in care. Of particular note was the fact that *'...those who have been in care longest at the end of key stage 1 attain a comparable level in writing as their school peers'*(p.32). In other words, being in care for this group of children has not had a negative impact on their learning, and indeed, given their backgrounds, it is likely that being in care has improved the likelihood of these children achieving their potential. The report is clearly a very strong endorsement to the approach to

partnership working for children led by the County Council and well supported by all the key agencies and the voluntary sector.

- 5.4 Leadership and Management - Throughout the report there is explicit and implicit reference to managerial 'grip'. In particular, in different sections of the report it is clear that '*all child protection cases are appropriately allocated*' (p.13); '*all looked after children have an allocated and suitably qualified social worker*'(p.29) and '*there is no unallocated work despite the size and complexity of the county*' (p.38)[my emphasis for each quote]. On the face of it, these may seem straightforward things to achieve but in reality they testify to the consistency of managerial practice and the consistently high standards that are applied.
- 5.5 Leadership, both political and organisational is praised regularly in the report, often in terms of the ambition and prioritisation for services for vulnerable children. Whilst this is highlighted in section 3 above in financial terms, the inspectors were also impressed with the fact that '*..stable and effective leadership has secured many service improvements, including in some of the most intractable and difficult service areas*' (p.9) and that '*...political leaders have acted to ensure that all council departments exercise their corporate responsibilities to looked after children and young people*'(p.38). Ofsted also noted that leaders and managers provided '*strong and visible leadership and ensure service quality is sustained*' (p.7) and that staff reported being well supported and supervised by their managers (p.21). The report also references '*prompt and decisive action*' (p.8) being taken where issues are raised through internal processes. It was also evident that the inspectors were impressed by the range of political engagement at all levels and across the council, particularly with regard to corporate parenting, and the effectiveness of the roles of scrutiny and the advisory panels.
- 5.6 Workforce Development - although not separately assessed this emerges as a clear strength throughout the report. Inspectors were impressed with the quality and impact of training for social workers and other professionals which was based on '*...robust models of best practice and leading to effective staff recruitment and retention*' (p39). Workloads are also effectively managed and newly qualified social workers have protected case loads. The consequence of this is that '*...staff morale is good overall*' (p.13).
- 5.7 Early Help – threaded throughout the report are references to the effectiveness of early systems of support and help for families, '*...there is a strong sense of safeguarding being everyone's business*'(p20). Partnership working with schools is highlighted as a strength (p.14, 32) as well as work with voluntary sector organisations (p.21). The report notes that the Children's Services Department's family support services show '*...some outstanding examples of innovative practice*'(p.14)
- 5.8 With regards to children in care, many of the above strengths (eg workforce development, leadership and management) apply. Additionally Ofsted highlighted the following themes.
- 5.9 Permanency planning – our systems for identifying and planning for children who need permanent care arrangements (such as adoption) were assessed

as robust (p.24). In addition, the report notes that '*...placements are well matched to the assessed needs...with suitable priority given to religious and cultural identity.*' (p.29). The report also noted innovative approaches to foster carer recruitment (p.24) and that placement stability is now in line with similar areas and improving (p.24).

- 5.10 Service user feedback – the views of children and young people were sought by Ofsted and they found a '*good level of general satisfaction*'(p.25). They also reported that the '*...majority of children who are looked after express satisfaction with their placements and nearly all feel that they are given opportunities to express their feelings and wishes in respect of their care plans*'(p.30). The role of the care ambassadors in representing the views of children in care was also praised (p.31,33).
- 5.11 Gatekeeping – Inspectors did not feel that our numbers of looked after children or children subject to child protection plans were too high, indeed verbally they reported that we are not risk averse. In the report they highlight that '*...good gate-keeping systems are in place to monitor the use of care and determine actions to secure stability and permanence for children*'(p.30).
- 5.12 Ambition – Ofsted were impressed with the authority's ambition for children in care, '*...political leaders have been committed to raising levels of aspiration and have acted to ensure all council departments exercise their corporate responsibilities.*'(p.38) That ambition is also demonstrated by the progress made in educational attainment and in projects such as the Dance Academy and access to music services.

6. Areas for Improvement

- 6.1. Overall, Ofsted identified eleven areas for improvement. All of these recommendations are consistent with the department's own self assessment and are part of an established cycle of continuous improvement. As such, and as acknowledged by the lead inspector, they represent 'no surprises' and were seen to be areas that are already in hand.
- 6.2. With regards to safeguarding it is recommended that the council and partners should:
- i) Ensure case records demonstrate that the recording of ethnicity, culture race and language has been actively considered in the development of children in need and child protection plans
 - ii) Ensure that records clearly demonstrate how the views of children and young people are being taken forward in planning and appropriately acted upon
 - iii) Ensure supervision records in children's social care services include all components of effective supervision, including case and worker reflection
 - iv) Review arrangements for the provision of specialist equipment for children and young people with disabilities, to ensure there is equitable provision across the county to meet assessed needs.

- v) Audit the effectiveness of the new joint protocol in respect of children and young people who go missing and ensure joint arrangements for de-briefing children and young people on their return are robust
- vi) Review joint processes for evaluating and prioritising domestic abuse notifications from the police to test the potential for further service integration within CRT
- vii) Review the workloads of independent reviewing officers to ensure they have enough capacity to involve children and young people and their parents/carers in initial and review conference processes
- viii) Ensure that looked after children and young people are made aware of the wide range of participation opportunities in the county, linked to their individual planning, the advocacy and complaints systems and the commitments made within the current and new version of the pledge
- ix) Ensure that core assessments and care plans are routinely updated in light of any significant changes and that risk assessments are fully documented for looked after children and young people returning to live with their parents
- x) Conduct an audit of looked after children's cases that are referred to CAMHS, to ensure the new arrangements are fully meeting expectations in terms of prioritisation, accessibility and timeliness
- xi) Monitor case recording to ensure there is regular commentary on children and young people being seen alone during social worker visits.

6.3. These recommendations can be grouped into three broad bands:

- 1) improvements in case recording (i, ii, iii, ix and xi)
- 2) Reviewing a particular aspect of service delivery (iv, vi, vii)
- 3) Auditing/reviewing the effectiveness of some relatively new developments (v, vii, x)

6.4. It is likely that the third band will be more challenging but may also, particularly in the case of the recommendation about domestic abuse referrals, present the most significant opportunities to develop improved services. All of the areas for improvement will be addressed through a detailed improvement plan that has been prepared by officers.

6.5. The references to improving recording practice also point to another issue which is alluded to in the report, this being the current IT software that is intended to support social workers. The contract for this software must be re-tendered during 2013 and this presents an opportunity to develop better, more integrated software, which supports the social work task rather than hinders it and is in line with the principles of the Munro Report.

7. Future direction

7.1. This Ofsted report enables Cabinet to have confidence that Hampshire Children's Services Department is well equipped to face the future challenges

of the Munro review of child protection and the challenges facing all local authority Children's Services Departments in meeting demand for services for vulnerable children. This is a vigorous and testing inspection and the positive results are a credit to our frontline staff and partners. An independent and objective analysis has presented a strong endorsement of the approach of the Council and partners to the most vulnerable children in our community.

- 7.2. Having said that, experience and evidence shows that the best of these services are always fragile and require constant attention and support. Especially with regard to child protection, there is great danger in complacency. It would be remiss not to note that child protection is a 'risk business' and that in Professor Munro's words '...there is no option of being risk averse since there is no absolutely safe option...' (Munro report p.43). Ofsted's inspection demonstrates that, in Hampshire, we continue to manage these risks very well. However, this does not diminish the constant vigilance with which managers and social workers will need to continue to practice. Members should be assured that the responsible officers will continue to drive at service improvements.

8. Recommendation(s)

- 8.1. Cabinet is invited to note the contents of the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services.
- 8.2. Cabinet is invited to note the areas for improvement which will be addressed by officers in an improvement plan and which will be brought to Cabinet for information.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
Ofsted – Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in Hampshire	Oftsed website
The Munro review of Child Protection	Department for Education website.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1. This report has no impact on equalities as it is for information

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. This report has no impact on crime and disorder

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? N/a

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? N/a