

**Outcomes from Annual Unannounced Inspection of  
Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements**

**Report of the Executive Director Children's Services**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: Learning City, Safe City  
CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT: Delivering Customer Focused Services,  
Efficient and Effective Council**

**1. Why has this report come to the Committee?**

- 1.1 This report is presented to Scrutiny Committee to provide a summary of the outcomes from the Annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements in Children's Services, which took place on 18th and 19th October 2011.

**2. Background – The Inspection Process**

- 2.1 Unannounced Ofsted inspections of contact, referral and assessment arrangements were introduced in June 2009 under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. All local authorities had been inspected by August 2010. Ofsted is now at the end of its second inspection cycle. Sunderland was first inspected in July 2010.
- 2.2 Inspections focus on the local authority as the lead agency for child protection and assess how well practice helps to manage the risk of harm to children and young people and minimises the incidence of abuse and neglect.
- 2.3 Inspectors spend the majority of their time looking at direct practice, including scrutinising individual case files with frontline workers. These inspections do not grade the effectiveness of the service, but identify where the authority is meeting the requirements of statutory guidance, and identify areas of particular strength, areas for development and any areas for priority action (which identify any serious weaknesses that place children at risk of inadequate protection from significant harm).
- 2.4 No grade is awarded from the inspection; however the outcome does contribute to the overall annual performance assessment of Children's Services.

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1 The 2nd unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements was carried out in Sunderland on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Following the inspection, on 16 November 2011 the Executive Director of Children's Services received the letter from Ofsted confirming the outcome of the inspection. ( A copy of the letter is attached at Appendix 1 )
- 3.2 The inspection identified an area of strength, many areas of practice which met requirements and some areas for development. It should be noted that, in line with the previous inspection of 2010, there were no Priority Actions.
- 3.3 From the evidence gathered during the inspection, the inspectors recognised the following strength:
- The council's continuing commitment to Safeguarding and the significant investment made to strengthen the Safeguarding workforce.
- 3.4 The inspection also identified a number of services which met the requirements of statutory guidance, including:
- Section 47 enquiries are timely, risks effectively identified and decisions made are appropriate.
  - Record keeping is up to date and management decisions are clearly recorded.
  - Staff demonstrate appropriate awareness of the diverse needs of children and families.
  - Staff are suitably qualified and benefit from a wide range of training opportunities.
  - Lessons learned from serious case reviews are shared and contribute to improvements in practice.
  - A well established and effective out of hours service is staffed by qualified and experienced social workers.

### **4. Areas for Development**

- 4.1 The following areas were identified for development:
- The quality of assessments need to be more consistent, the views of children are not always clearly recorded or taken into account when planning. The quality of analysis is too variable. However, Children's Services has made this a priority action in its service improvement plan.
  - Greater understanding of thresholds. Improved screening process will lead to a higher update by early intervention services.
  - The council's integrated children's system (ICS) does not support efficient practice. This was an area highlighted for development in the

previous inspection. Through the recommendations from the Munro Review, local authorities have been given greater freedoms to develop systems and processes which better fit the needs of the service.

- Strategy discussions are held with police as a matter of course, however improvement is required in regard to multi-agency strategy meetings.

## **5. How we are addressing the areas for development**

### **5.1 Variable quality of assessments**

Action taken:

- Improved system for management oversight to review requirement for workers to record children's views on assessments.
- Analysis workshop held in Initial response team - November 2011
- Themed Case file Audit focussing on children's views – November 2011
- Assessment sign off arrangements reviewed to ensure children's views are evidenced - Dec 2011

### **5.2 The threshold for referral to the children's social care service is not widely understood by partner agencies.**

Action taken:

- Further analysis of partners' understanding of thresholds through Peer Challenge – December 2011
- SSCB subgroup established to agree strategic thresholds document and promote shared understanding of agreed thresholds
- First draft of strategic thresholds document – Jan. 2012

### **5.3 ICS does not support efficient practice**

Action taken:

- High level meeting chaired by Executive Director
- ICS Task Group set up under ICS Improvement Group
- Urgent improvement plan and medium term ICS improvement strategy agreed
- New Electronic Social Care Record (ESCR) linked to ICS in place from 9<sup>th</sup> January, facilitating the development of reports and plans in Word format to replace ICS format reports and plans
- New report formats for Review CP conferences in place from 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012
- Other new report formats introduced from February 2012

### **5.4 Strategy meetings are not routinely held on a multi-agency basis**

Action taken:

- Joint work with police and health colleagues underway to agree unified approach – January 2012

## 6. **Next Steps**

6.1 Children's Services have now confirmed their three year priorities. The actions identified above to address the areas for development will be included in all plans associated with these priorities. The three year priorities are:

- New relationship with schools
- Early Intervention/Review of Early Years/Children's Centres
- Safeguarding – an improving story which includes ...
- Whole family, whole community responsive service approach.

## 7. **Conclusion**

7.1 Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of this report and associated appendix and to agree to receive regular progress reports regarding the actions identified to ensure that the areas for development are addressed and that outcomes for the City's most vulnerable children and young people continue to improve.

**Contact Officer:** Meg Boustead  
Head of Safeguarding  
Telephone number: 0191 561 2356  
meg.boustead@sunderland.gov.uk