



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

9th March 2011

Ofsted Annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements in Children's Services

Electoral Wards Affected: All wards

 Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call-in

Not Eligible for Call-in
(Details contained in the Report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.0 This report covers the Ofsted Annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements that took place during January 2011.
- 2.0 The last unannounced inspection in July 2009 highlighted many of the issues that subsequent improvement activity has addressed. The positive overall outcomes of this latest inspection are therefore a very encouraging reflection of the impact that this improvement work has made and the efforts of officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.0 It is recommended that Executive Board:
 - (i) Note the outcomes of the Ofsted unannounced inspection
 - (ii) Acknowledge the significant positive impact made overall since the unannounced inspection in July 2009 and recognise the significant efforts of all those who have contributed towards this.

1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 This report provides details of the Ofsted Annual Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements that took place during January 2011.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The latest unannounced inspection took place on the 18th and 19th January 2011. It is particularly significant for Leeds as it was the previous unannounced inspection, carried out in July 2009, that highlighted many of the challenges that have been the focus of improvement activity and resources over the past 18 months.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The latest unannounced inspection involved visits to services at Roundhay Road (Disability Team) and the White Rose House and Hunslet Hall Duty offices. Inspectors spoke to a range of staff and considered evidence including electronic case records, supervision files and notes, and observation of social workers undertaking assessments and referrals.
- 3.2 The letter summarising the findings of the inspection is attached as an appendix. The unannounced inspection does not have a single overall judgement, but does address a variety of key issues. Critically, no priority areas of action were identified by Ofsted and the main findings include the following:
- (i) That strong leadership has resulted in a 'remarkable and impressive' improvement in the quality of the services inspected and the safety of children in the city.
 - (ii) That no cases were identified where children had been left at risk.
 - (iii) Significant investment has ensured that front line assessment services are now fit for purpose and with the capacity to continue to improve.
 - (iv) Social work staff have manageable caseloads, regular supervision and access to appropriate training. Newly qualified social workers receive a comprehensive support package.
 - (v) Thresholds for referrals have been clarified.
 - (vi) Child Protection procedures are up to date.
 - (vii) In all cases examined by inspectors, children were visited and seen alone where appropriate.
- 3.3 Many of these areas were highlighted as priorities for action in the last unannounced inspection, so the fact that they have been highlighted as positives at this inspection is particularly encouraging.

3.4 Areas highlighted for development were:

- (i) The electronic social care record system, though the inspectors acknowledge the steps the Council is already taking to commission a new system (reported to the Board in January 2011).
- (ii) The quality of recording (information). Again the inspectors recognise that steps are being taken to address this.
- (iii) Adherence to the protocol for when joint visits should be undertaken. We are working with relevant partners to address this.
- (iv) How the arrangements for the out of hours service link in with the daytime service. It is acknowledged that a review of this is underway.

3.5 A significant amount of work has been undertaken by a wide variety of staff and others to support the improvements reflected in this report. As well as the positive leadership and direction recognised from within the Council, partners and the independently chaired Improvement Board have also played an important role. We wish to take this opportunity to thank the Board and particularly its Chair Bill McCarthy for their contribution to this improvement.

4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1 Addressing the issues highlighted by the July 2009 unannounced inspection of children's services has been a major priority for the Council and our wider partners over the last eighteen months. Whilst we continue to face significant challenges and pressures in this area and across other aspects of children's services, the progress highlighted in the latest unannounced inspection signals important progress for the service and the Council. It is important that a collective focus is maintained on this area of work to ensure ongoing shared-responsibility and joint action to reduce the risk of harm to children and young people across Leeds.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal or resource implications within this report.

5.2 Members may wish to note that the unannounced inspection letter positively recognises the impact of the significant investment in children's services and particularly child protection services that the Council has made since 2009.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Overall this is a very positive report for Leeds that provides a platform from which the next stage of children's services developments can move forward. Whilst there continue to be some priority challenges in relation to safeguarding and child protection services, and the ongoing high demand on the service will require significant attention and resources to be focused on this area, the unannounced inspection findings suggests that the level of service being provided to children, young people and families is much closer to the standard and consistency we would hope for. Building on this we will work over the year ahead to continue moving these services forward, embedding the

improvements made across our practice, strengthening partnerships that contribute to the safeguarding agenda and addressing the areas for development that the latest unannounced inspection has highlighted.

- 6.2 The unannounced inspection has followed other important recent inspections of children's services, including Adoption and Youth Offending Service inspections, both of which were reported to Executive Board in February. Again, we know we have some important continuing challenges, but the combination of these various inspection outcomes indicates a positive overall trajectory for the standard of services being provided to some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Leeds.
- 6.3 The findings of these various external inspections are complemented by the ongoing performance monitoring work being lead by the independently chaired Improvement Board. The work of the Improvement Board is referred to in a related item on the Executive Board's agenda which gives an update on children's services.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that Executive Board:
- (i) Note the outcomes of the Ofsted unannounced inspection
 - (ii) Acknowledge the significant positive impact made overall since the unannounced inspection in July 2009 and recognise the significant efforts all those who have contributed towards this.

Background Papers

Letter from Ofsted 16 February 2011 (appendix)