

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Cambridgeshire County Council Children's Services.

Areas for development and Action Plan

	Area of Development	Response	Action	Person(s) responsible	Time scale
1	The introduction of an integrated access team within the councils contact centre has significantly improved the filtering of contacts which do not require assessment. However, in some cases, which are passed to the intake teams for assessment, delays are caused by further screening and information gathering. As the role of the contact centre continues to develop, there needs to be more clarity on decision making and in the level of work it undertakes prior to passing work to the intake teams.	<p>The Integrated Access Project Team are continuing to develop the triage concept to fit with a) the move within Children's Social Care to a social work unit model, b) the creation of county-wide functional teams i.e. there will be three Access Units to receive cases from the Integrated Access Team c) the maximisation of benefits offered by the Multi Agency Referral Unit (MARU) within which staff from Children's Social Care, Police, Health Trusts and Adult Social Care will be located.</p> <p>The Integrated Access Team is being reinforced by two additional Senior Social Worker posts and an additional Senior Child and Family Worker Post to complement the current staffing structure. In its final iteration (early 2012) there will be complete clarity on accountability and case transfer points. The target is for only 25% of contacts to be passed through to Access Teams and for strategy meetings or discussions to be completed within the MULTI Agency Referral Unit (MARU). Access Teams would then be responsible for completing the S47 investigation.</p>	<p>Integrated Access Project Work stream to:</p> <p>1) Confirm interim duty arrangements within areas – pending reorganisation</p> <p>2) Establish Integrated Access Team with additional staffing</p> <p>3) Agree case transfer points between Integrated Access Team and Access Units.</p>	<p>Tessa Bailey</p> <p>Jo Rabbitte</p> <p>Rebecca Gipp</p>	Dec 2011

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2	<p>Whilst there has been some improvement in the timeliness of assessment, too many assessments are not completed within required timescales reducing the effectiveness of the assessments and delaying the provision of services. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. In some cases there is a delay in allocating cases and in the recording of assessments. Too often the quality of recording does not sufficiently evidence the work that has been undertaken. Assessments do not always sufficiently identify risk and protective factors, although in some cases the quality of assessment and analysis is good.</p>	<p>Whilst we have not achieved our target of 73% Initial Assessments (I/As) completed within the timescale there has been significant progress towards this.</p> <p>In July 2009 53.7% of Initial Assessments were completed within the timescale. In February 2011 this increased to 64.7%. Using the new 10 day timescale (to be implemented from April 1st) the figure would have been 69% - just 4% short of target. This is in the context of a more than doubling of Initial Assessments undertaken in 2010 – 2011 compared to 2009 – 2010.</p> <p>Despite this increase in activity, fewer Integrated Assessments led to 'no further action', more were passed on to Locality Teams, more were offered / provided with a short-term service and a higher proportion also led to the initiation of a Core Assessment.</p> <p>Progress in Core Assessments (C/As) has been equally positive. In July 2009 43% of Core Assessments were being completed within the timescale and by January 2011 this had increased to 68.1% (a 37% improvement). However this still falls short of the 83% target.</p> <p>It is anticipated that progress will continue in 2011-2012, although the Munro Report (Part 2) has suggested that a more flexible approach to assessment timescales is needed in the future. A pilot group of 5 Local Authorities are trialling the temporary suspension of assessment timescales to allow the exercise of greater professional judgement to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.</p> <p>The quality of assessments has been the focus of the recent 'Audit of Initial Assessments and Children in Need</p>	<p>1) Change to Initial Assessments timescales (10 days) means target rate now achievable. Area Teams to achieve 70% within the timescales by 2012. (Note: Recent audits suggest many Initial Assessments are so comprehensive that they negate the need for a Core Assessment)</p> <p>2) Continued refinement of Core Assessment exemplar.</p> <p>3) Quality of Core Assessments to be audited as part of programme of Case File Audits and reported to referral board on half yearly basis.</p>	<p>Sue Knowles Cathy Smith Jilly Sage</p> <p>-Supported by Richard Davies</p> <p>Social Care Project Board (E Petch)</p> <p>Area Social Care Management Teams.</p> <p>Ashley Hinson / Richard Davies</p>	<p>Dec 2011</p> <p>Dec 2011</p> <p>Dec 2011</p>

		Plans' (January 2011); the 'Audit of Children's Involvement in Assessment' (October.2010) and the 'Summary Report of Case File Audits: September-December 2010' (February. 2011). From this it is clear that the structure of the Integrated Children's System exemplars does not lend itself to expounding the narrative of the child's situation leading to a proper analysis. A less rigid and formulaic approach to assessment coupled with the adoption of a consistent social work methodology - Systemic Family Work from 2012 onwards will generate more analytical assessments with measurable outcomes.			
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3	Within two areas child protection enquiries are often commenced by one worker and subsequently completed by another worker. This negatively impacts on continuity for the family, the social worker and the management of the case, and in some cases results in unnecessary delay. A pilot child protection team in the third area enables child protection enquiries to be completed by one worker, which maintains consistency.	<p>Children's Social Care are piloting the effectiveness of a specialist child protection team which, among other things, improves consistency and continuity by ensuring that a specific worker has case responsibility- from the point at which a strategy meeting or discussion takes place, through the Section 47 investigation and up to the conclusion of the initial child protection conference.</p> <p>Initial findings are positive and the child protection team model will be easily transferable to the social work unit model within the framework of a County Access Service. From the roll out of social work units in 2012 onwards case responsibility will be held by each unit's Consultant Social Worker – who in conjunction with their unit will completely manage all the cases – providing continuity and uniformity.</p>	<p>1) Evaluation of Child Protection Team pilot in South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City to be reported back to Directorate Management Team.</p> <p>2) Positive aspects at practice to be incorporated into Social Work Unit Model and specifically the Access Units.</p>	<p>Sue Knowles / Paul Evans</p> <p>'Working with Families Project Group'</p>	<p>Sept2011</p> <p>Sept 2011</p>

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4	Information shared in strategy discussions is often too limited and there are delays in the recording and sharing of their outcomes. However, within the pilot child protection team, reasons for strategy decisions and actions to be undertaken are recorded more clearly.	<p>The recent 'Audit of Strategy Discussions' (March 2011) corroborated this Inspection finding. The action plan now being implemented provides for the development of better practice guidance and training. In addition, major adjustments to the recording exemplars will lead to improvement in practitioners' recording of decision making and actions required. Participants in Strategy Discussions will be guided towards the consideration of specific issues such as: sibling assessment; dealing with consent issues; arrangements for medical assessments and what information is to be shared.</p> <p>In addition, the development of the Integrated Access Team and the Multi-agency Referral Unit (See 1. above) will mean that responsibility for taking all threshold decisions regarding Strategy Meetings across the County is assumed by a single unit. Again this will improve consistency of practice and decision making.</p>	<p>1) Completion of Audit Action Plan by end of 2011 and report back on progress to Directorate Management Team / Performance Board</p> <p>2) Confirmation of arrangements for Integrated Access Team undertaking Strategy Discussions before transferring case to Area Teams to undertake Section 47 investigation.</p>	<p>P Wilson / A Hinson</p> <p>Tessa Bailey / Directorate Management Team</p>	<p>Dec 2011</p> <p>Sept 2011</p>

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5	Unqualified social workers are undertaking some initial and core assessments, which is not in accordance with statutory guidance.	<p>The practice of “unqualified Social Workers” (Senior Child and Family Workers and Child and Family Workers) undertaking initial and particularly, core assessments alone is now exceptionally rare and will cease entirely when the social work unit model is adopted from 2012.</p> <p>Where unqualified workers are involved in some aspect of an assessment, a qualified social worker or senior social worker will always oversee the work and be responsible for signing off the assessment – prior to its counter signature by the Team Manager.</p> <p>From 2012, Cambridgeshire’s new ‘Social Work – Working With Families’ approach will be implemented and unqualified staff completing Assessments will no longer be an issue. The Social Work Units, which lie at the heart of this approach, will be composed of qualified Consultant Social Worker, a qualified Senior Social Worker (or Social Worker) and a qualified main grade Social Worker supported by a qualified Clinician and a Unit Coordinator – the latter being the only person not qualified in social work or clinical practice – but who may have a qualification in a related discipline.</p>	<p>1) As an interim measure, (pending development of Social Work Units) Service Managers and Team Managers to ensure that all Assessments are overseen by a S/W or SS/W who undertakes the ‘sign-off’</p>	Service Managers / Team Managers	From April 2011

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6	Some Children in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans are not sufficiently specific, and do not have clear, measurable outcomes.	<p>The need for Children in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans to be more specific and contain specific measureable outcomes has been identified as an issue within a recent Audit of Initial Assessments and Child in Need Plans (January 2011) in the Summary Report of Case File Audits (February 2011) and in the Audit of Core Groups (September 2010).</p> <p>A comprehensive improvement plan derived from audit findings includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking core group recording tool to the child protection plan exemplar so that core group meetings are focused on developing and progressing the plan (i.e. the former pre-populates the latter) • Child protection plan to include prompts and mandatory fields to ensure that actions recorded are SMART. • The child protection plan requires professionals from different agencies – as well as the family – to sign up to the stated aims and outcomes and participate fully in those aspects of the plan necessitating their input. Recent changes to procedures now require the formulation of combined chronology of family involvement with all agencies. • Audits of Child in Need / Child Protection plans to be specific focus of forthcoming round of case file audits and to re-audit some cases included within the previous audit samples. • When discussing the agenda item 'Summary of events since previous conference' at child protection conferences, the chairperson now must monitor the frequency and attendance at core 	Action Plan from Audit of Core Groups to be completed and reported back to Directorate Management Team / Performance Board.	P Wilson / A Hinson	By end 2011

		groups and the progress made against previously identified actions and areas for intervention.			
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7	Managers within the service have regular access to a wide range of performance information, which has significantly improved since the last inspection. However, some performance management information on the service provided by the council for this inspection was not accurate, or was not sufficiently specific or clearly structured to enable them to effectively performance manage the service.	<p>Data on Integrated Children's System constantly needs 'cleansing' in order to eradicate duplicate records; wrongly coded records and typing/inputting errors. Integrated Children's System is able to provide very useful management information on a wide range of activity but the complete accuracy of the information can sometimes be compromised if the data is not cleansed first. This requires careful scrutiny of data sets and the opening and correcting of individual case records where data errors are suspected. This exercise can delay the presentation of the data significantly.</p> <p>In the area of Strategy Meetings and Section 47 Investigations, it is acknowledged that some of the data is not yet sufficiently accurate - for the reasons stated above. Therefore whenever management information is presented in its 'raw' form, clearer advice must be provided on the likely margin of error, pending a data cleansing exercise being carried out.</p>	<p>1) Programme of data cleansing checks to be undertaken and to include areas of practice which are not necessarily part of the indicator set e.g. Strategy Meeting outcomes and Section 47 Investigation outcomes.</p> <p>2) Data reports on Strategy Meetings and Section 47 Investigations to be reported to Performance Board by end of year 10/11. (via Children in Need Census)</p>	<p>Richard Davies / Sarah Bowman</p> <p>Richard Davies / Sarah Bowman</p>	<p>Ongoing from April 2011</p> <p>End of June</p>

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8	Whilst there has been some improvement in its performance, the electronic recording system does not effectively support social work practice. Staff report significant delay in accessing and recording information, which negatively impacts on their time management and ability to promptly exchange information with colleagues and partner agencies. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.	<p>The Integrated Children's System (ICS) continues to present Cambridgeshire Children's Young Peoples Services (and many other Local Authorities in England and Wales) with considerable challenges. The issue was forcefully articulated in the report of the unannounced 'rehearsal Inspection' (carried out by a former OFSTED Inspector) which stated that "the electronic system is not fit for purpose".</p> <p>Huge amounts of work have been undertaken to improve the performance, functionality and user-friendliness of the system and, while progress has been made, the system is still not sufficiently reliable and practitioner's time is frequently wasted when the system freezes or users are spontaneously logged out.</p> <p>Two recently developed strategies will improve the reliability and performance of Integrated Children's System. Firstly the additional investment in server capacity (from March 2011 onwards) has already improved the system's reliability as long as users log out every two hours. Secondly the introduction of a second system – Children Support Service – to 'sit above' the Integrated Children's System to generate data, management information and statistical reports – will considerably lessen the burden on Integrated Children's System and allow Integrated Children's System functions to be tailored entirely to practitioners and operational managers</p>	Social Care Project Board workstream to report on progress to Directorate Management Team on development of Integrated Children's System and Children Support Service systems.	E Petch Social Care Project Board	1) Mar 2011 2) End 2012

Peter Wilson
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April 6th 2011