

OUTCOME OF OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SKILLS (OFSTED) ANNUAL UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **24.05.11**

From: **Adrian Loades Executive Director: Children and Young People's Services**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **None** *Key decision:* **Not applicable**

Purpose: **To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the Unannounced Inspection of Cambridgeshire's Children's Social Care Referral and Assessment Teams by Ofsted on 16th and 17th February 2011**

Recommendation: **Cabinet is asked to note the outcome of the Inspection and agree the action plan arising**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In April 2009 the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) introduced new arrangements for the inspection of Children's Services. A key element of the new arrangements is an unannounced inspection of the intake and assessment functions of children's social care. The unannounced inspection involves inspectors visiting several offices over two days with no prior notice. The inspectors assess the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the teams visited.
- 1.2 In August 2009, Cambridgeshire became one of the first local authorities to receive an unannounced inspection and a number of priority actions were identified by inspectors to address areas for improvement.
- 1.3 The second unannounced inspection took place on 16th and 17th February 2011 and the Ofsted letter reporting the outcome of the inspection was formally published on the 17th March 2011.
- 1.4 The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over two days and involved visits to all three Children's Social Care Area offices and the Contact Centre in St Ives. The inspectors considered a range of evidence which included supervision files and notes, observation of staff and discussions with managers. On the second day of the inspection they fed back their initial findings to Senior Managers, a draft letter was then issued to enable senior managers for comment and the amendment of factual inaccuracies. The final letter was published on the Ofsted website on the 17th March 2011.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 The inspection identified an area of strength which is defined as an area where the Local Authority has evidenced that it has gone over and above statutory guidance. It also identified a number of areas of practice that met (statutory) guidance and some areas for development. The full report can be found at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The area of strength was:

“Considerable and effective action has been taken, since the last inspection, to improve recruitment and retention of staff which has resulted in a stable and appropriately qualified workforce and increased capacity within the service. Staff morale is now good and staff report that they are well supported by managers.”
- 2.3 The service was considered to meet the requirements of statutory guidance in a number of areas which are detailed in Appendix 1 and in summary include
 - Clear thresholds with all child protection work allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers
 - Good partnership working particularly with the police
 - Views of children routinely sought

- Supervision is regular and newly qualified staff feel well supported
 - Managers are accessible and there is robust leadership
 - Serious case review findings have been widely disseminated and lessons learnt
- 2.4 In addition the inspectors concluded that the areas for priority action identified by the 2009 inspection had all been addressed.
- 2.5 The areas for improvement identified by the inspectors are listed in the Action Plan in Appendix 2 and include
- Further work needed on clear systems and protocols for transfer of work from the Integrated Access Team to the Area Teams
 - Variability of quality of assessments and child protection plans not being sufficiently specific or measurable
 - Too many changes of social worker in the child protection process
 - Unqualified staff undertaking initial and core assessments
 - Performance data being inaccessible and Integrated Children's service (ICS) being cumbersome
- 2.6 All of these areas were ones which had previously been identified and the proposals for the new model for delivery of Social Work -Working for Families (currently out to formal consultation) addresses all of the above bullet points. For example, the service will be a fully qualified service and reduce the number of transfer points a child and family has to experience. The focus is on improving the quality of practice in both assessment work and social work interventions in order to improve outcomes for children and families.
- 2.7 In summary the report demonstrates that:-
- There has been significant improvement since the previous inspections
 - Staff morale and management supervision is a key strength
 - Managers and staff are self aware and are actively engaged in working on the areas for improvement
- 2.8 Each of the areas for development is detailed within the Action Plan and the Children's Social Care Performance Board will monitor the implementation and progress.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING

- 3.1 The "Social Work - Working For Families" formal consultation runs until June 2011. This sets out the plans to improve practice through the establishment of "social work units" which focus on providing better support to families in caring for their children. This development is in line with Professor Eileen Munro's report on national child protection arrangements published in May 2011. Cambridgeshire is ahead in its development and well on the way to deliver better outcomes for children and as part of the drive towards the provision of outstanding services.

3.2 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most

Children's Social Care plays an absolutely vital role in supporting and protecting the most vulnerable children and young people in Cambridgeshire. This report is about an external inspection of a core part of this role and the actions arising.

3.3 Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities

Strong intake and assessment functions will mean that the right children and families will receive the right service at the right time. The inspectors have noted the good progress that is being made to achieve this objective. A core reason for changes in Children's Social Care and wider changes across Children and Young People's Services is to ensure that interventions are made in order to prevent the escalation of need and ultimately children becoming looked after by the County Council.

3.4 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

Improving the outcomes for the most vulnerable families and ensuring that children are maintained within their family home and community where it is safe to do so, will ultimately be of benefit for the local economy.

3.5 Ways of Working

The inspection report identifies that approaches to improving the recruitment and retention of Children's Social Care staff have been successful with a comparatively stable staffing situation and a low level of vacancies. The report also notes that morale amongst staff is good. Whilst it is good that this strength has been recognised it is believed that more fundamental change as to Children's Social Care is structured and undertakes its task is required in order to better protect children and young people. The "Social Work - Working for Families" change programme will deliver this.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource and Performance Implications

This inspection did not identify any areas for priority action in terms of performance. The actions listed in the action plan will be delivered through existing resources.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The Council has statutory responsibilities in respect of the safeguarding children. The inspection did not identify any priority areas for action in respect of these responsibilities. The actions set out in the accompanying action plan and the wider change programme will leave the Council better placed to discharge its responsibilities.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.0 Recommendation

5.1 Cabinet is asked to note the outcome of the Inspection and agree the action plan arising.

Source Documents	Location
Ofsted annual unannounced inspection	Appendix 1
Social Work – Working With Families	http://camweb.ccc.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cyps/csoccare/workinforfamilies/
Munro Review	http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/

Appendix 1 – Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Cambridgeshire County Council children’s services

Appendix 2 – Action Plan