



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD MEETING

10th February 2010

agenda item number 7

Title of item

Safeguarding and Looked after Inspection Preparation

Purpose of item

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update in relation to preparation for the Safeguarding and Looked After Inspection and to highlight some of the issues that inspectors will consider when evaluating the performance of the Trust.

Information and advice

Background

2. At the Board meeting on 23rd November 2009 three related papers were presented. These set out
 - The findings of the Unannounced Inspection of Contact and Referral Arrangements undertaken in October 2009
 - Information about the anticipated full inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Services
 - The project initiation document for the Safeguarding and Looked After Services Improvement Programme
3. Specific operational issues have been addressed in a wide ranging programme with a portfolio of projects. A detailed monitoring schedule has been developed to enable progress to be monitored through the Trust Executive, Safeguarding Children Forum and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board.
4. It was anticipated initially that a full inspection of safeguarding and looked after services would be imminent because the results of unannounced inspections had apparently triggered full inspections in other local authority areas. As yet no announcement has been received but the maximum notice period for an inspection is 10 working days.
5. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring children and young people are properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for looked after children and care leavers.

6. A small team has been established within the county council to lead on preparation for the inspection supported by external consultants, who have led on a review of documentation and supported the delivery of a series of briefings. The team have
 - Compiled the documents which will be required by inspectors on the day the inspection is announced
 - Developed a draft fieldwork schedule
 - Developed process maps for delivering key activities, e.g. surveys of children and young people, file audits
 - Published an inspection newsletter
 - Arranged and delivered a range of briefings for partner organisations.
7. Self-assessments against the inspection grade descriptors are in the process of being completed. These have been developed with input from partners and have formed the basis of briefings.

Inspection requirements – Implications for the Trust.

8. One focus for the inspection is the effectiveness of leadership and management by the Children's Trust. This is an issue that will be explored in the context of work to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and the effectiveness of services for looked after children. The Leadership and Management judgement considers:
 - Ambition and prioritisation
 - Evaluation, including performance management, quality assurance and workforce development
 - User engagement
 - Partnerships
 - Equality and diversity
 - User engagement
 - Value for money
9. The grade descriptors that will inform inspection judgements repeatedly stress the importance of the partnership providing active, visible and effective leadership in relation to universal, targeted and specialist services. Inspectors will look for evidence about the level of influence the Trust has. This will include the extent to which the Trust sets ambitious targets, monitors service delivery and promotes opportunities for children, young people and their families to participate in planning and evaluating services. The inspection will also consider how active the Trust is in setting and monitoring service standards, strategic planning and working in partnership to deliver high quality services that offer good value for money.

Early Intervention

10. Effective early intervention stops problems before they become serious. This is better for families and allows specialist services such as Children's Social Care to focus on those children with the greatest level of need. As such is an essential part of our safeguarding arrangements. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a tool for evaluating what support a child, young person or family needs when presenting problems emerge. In Nottinghamshire we have developed Joint Access Teams (JATs) as a tool to coordinate early intervention. There are now joint access teams in all areas of Nottinghamshire, organised around families of schools. JATs provide an opportunity for agencies to work together to offer coordinated support to families without the need for specialist services.

11. The number of CAFs completed in Nottinghamshire is now showing a significant increase from historically low levels although referrals from some services remain a concern. The role of the CAF and the remit of JATs is currently being reviewed with a view to developing a systematic “Pathway to Provision” that sets out when a CAF should be completed and what kind of issues should be considered by JATs.

Looked After Children

12. The inspection will consider the role the Trust plays in the provision of services to children looked after by the local authority and those on the verge of becoming so. There is an evaluation judgement for each of the Every Child matters outcome areas. In order to reach their judgement inspectors will consider a range of issues relevant to the Trust. These include:
 - the extent to which there is multi-agency targeting, planning, reviewing and monitoring of health services, both physical and emotional for all looked after children.
 - whether all relevant agencies are actively engaged in care planning
 - if partners have high aspirations for looked after children and care leavers
 - whether multi-agency action to prevent offending and re-offending is well embedded, and has led to significant reductions and improved life chances for those at risk
 - if all care leavers have access to a range of high-quality permanent and affordable accommodation that meets their needs
13. Although looked after children are in the care of the County Council their needs can only be effectively met through the partnership arrangements led by the Trust.

Suggested approach or way forward

14. Further activity is planned, including a briefing for managers across the partnership, which is due to take place on 11th February 2010. The timing of preparatory is complicated by the lack of clarity about when the inspection will take place. If no announcement is received by the end of March 2010 a “simmer” plan will be developed setting out how the preparation work completed by that point would be maintained over the period.

RECOMMENDATION

15. The Board notes the content of this report

Les Cowling
Acting Service Director for Strategic Services
Nottinghamshire County Council

Clive Chambers
Lead Officer for Strategic Planning and Commissioning
Nottinghamshire County Council