

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – CHILDREN & FAMILIES

1. This is a supplementary note to the report from Internal Audit submitted to the Final Accounts & Audit Committee 27 September 2007, to confirm the actions taken by the Department for Children & Education in the light of the audit findings.
2. The Internal Audit of Child Protection arrangements identified a number of areas for action relating to the case recording of child protection activity by the social care locality teams. An examination of a number of paper case files reflected a lack of clarity and precision in the manner in which particular activities were recorded.
3. Immediate and urgent action was taken to redress this situation and to seek to re-establish an embedded self audit process within the service to ensure consistency of practice and ongoing monitoring in this area of work within a performance management framework.
4. Whilst the audit findings were fully accepted and attended to as a priority by the service, there are a number of contextual factors which should be highlighted.
 - The audit took place at a point of major transition insofar as social work staff were being trained to input all future case recording onto a new electronic system. The new system presented a number of challenges and teething problems which required significant practitioner time in understanding the requirements on them of electronic recording. This system is now in operation and paper files will gradually cease to be as significant. It is expected that the electronic system will, over time, improve the quality and focus on case recording. An improved specification of the software will be implemented in April 2008. This will require further training for all social work staff and will incorporate all child protection safeguarding processes.
 - Some aspects of practice/procedural guidance were unclear and guidance needed to be reviewed and re-issued to ensure clarity and consistency of practice.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS TAKEN

1. As a result of the audit findings the Assistant Director wrote to all Team Managers highlighting the issues and immediate action required.
2. The Head of Area Services undertook a review of all of the cases examined by Internal Audit. This was undertaken in conjunction with the Team Manager and the social worker managing the case. Remedial

actions were identified and the action necessary to correct matters agreed within a clearly defined timeframe.

3. All teams have received 'team specific' child protection training on the revised procedures, standards, compliance and data entry linked to the electronic recording system.
4. A requirement was placed on all Team Managers to regularly audit and monitor case files was reinforced and a new requirement to maintain an audit record put in place. Checking compliance is a permanent agenda item for supervision from practitioner to Head of Area Services.
5. Area Service Managers are required to review Team Manager audit records on a regular basis (monthly) and to provide confirmation of this to the Head of Area Services through the monthly supervision process.
6. The Assistant Director and Head of Area Services are undertaking periodic random audits on an unannounced basis. The random audits include both case file monitoring requirements as well as checking that any actions identified have been completed.
7. Revised guidance has been issued in respect of those areas where it was judged that there was a lack of clarity.
8. The findings of audits undertaken within the department have been shared with the Internal Audit Team along with the evidence of action taken where there were recording, practice or compliance issues.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the concerns highlighted by this Internal Audit, the resulting work to address the issues is viewed as a positive exercise which has helped to ensure improvements in the quality of child protection recording. In addition practice issues are being addressed and all workers and managers are clear in respect of procedural time compliance and expected recording standards. This ensures a process which supports continual improvement within an embedded performance management framework.