

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 November 2007

FINAL ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

27th September 2007

INTERNAL AUDIT OF CHILD PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members of the report presented to the Final Accounts & Audit Committee in September 2007 on the current position regarding the issues arising from the 2006/07 audit of child protection arrangements (the corresponding minute from the Final Accounts & Audit Committee's September meeting is copied at appendix 1). Appendix 2 provides a comment from the Assistant Director, Children & Families confirming the department's response and specific actions to these internal audit findings.

Background

2. During 2006-07 Internal Audit carried out an audit of child protection arrangements, in which we were looking to determine whether controls and procedures in connection with social worker visits to children on the Child Protection Register were adequate. This included reviewing a sample of client records relating to 24 children currently on the Child Protection Register.
3. Internal Audit made a number of recommendations to strengthen the management arrangements for child protection, and these were fully agreed by senior management within the Department for Children and Education.
4. At the 28th June 2007 meeting of the Final Accounts & Audit Committee, members discussed the findings of the audit, and asked for an update report to be brought to the September meeting, outlining progress made in relation to the various recommendations.

Main Considerations for the Committee

5. Following the original audit, it is clear that senior management has made significant efforts to bring about the necessary improvements. The Assistant Director (Children and Families) has issued guidance to all managers covering the following aspects of child protection practice:
 - frequency of key worker visits to children at risk
 - requirements for seeing a child alone
 - frequency of Core Group meetings
 - circumstances for reconvening Child Protection Conferences.

6. This has been supplemented by training for all social workers and managers, in relation to the proper recording of information, including the use of the Care First system.
7. Furthermore, the Head of Area Services has set up a review procedure to be followed in all area teams, and has specified the records which must be kept in support of this. Team Managers are required to undertake regular reviews of all cases to ensure compliance with procedures and record keeping. These are in turn supplemented by sample reviews carried out by Area Service Managers and the Head of Area Services.
8. With regard to the 24 cases examined as part of the original audit, these have all been reviewed by senior management within the department, and issues requiring action have been drawn to the attention of Area Service Managers. Six of these cases have been identified as priorities, and management is in the process of following these up to ensure improvements have been put in place.
9. In addition, the Assistant Director (Children and Families) and the Head of Area Services are currently undertaking a programme of random checks of their own on cases on the Child Protection Register.
10. Internal Audit has also recently reviewed a further sample of seven case files, the results of which confirm, in the main, that the standards of evidence and record-keeping have improved.
11. Overall, the Department for Children and Education has responded positively to the recommendations of the original audit report (see Appendix 2). Senior management has taken the lead in strengthening procedures to ensure that adequate internal control mechanisms are in place. Good progress is therefore being made, although time is needed for the new processes to become fully embedded. Internal Audit therefore intends to carry out a further follow-up audit early next year.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

12. No environmental impact arises from issues raised in this report.

Financial Implications

13. There are no additional costs arising from this proposal.

Reasons for the Proposal

14. To present members with an update on the current position regarding the issues arising from the audit of child protection arrangements.

Proposal

15. The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Note the current position regarding the issues arising from the audit of child protection arrangements, specifically that the Department for Children and Education has responded positively to the recommendations of the original audit report, and that senior management have taken the lead in strengthening procedures to ensure that adequate internal control mechanisms are in place.
- (ii) Note that Internal Audit intend to carry out a further follow-up audit early next year.

Sandra Schofield
Chief Financial Officer

Report author: Steve Memmott, Chief Auditor

Unpublished documents relied upon in the preparation of this Report:

None

MINUTE FROM FINAL ACCOUNTS & AUDIT COMMITTEE (27/9/07)

35. **Internal Audit of Child Protection Arrangements**

In accordance with the Committee's instructions at the last meeting, the Chief Internal Auditor presented a report which gave further clarification on the issues arising from the audit of child protection arrangements.

As a result of the audit, Internal Audit had made a number of recommendations to strengthen the management arrangements for child protection. The report presented outlined the progress made to date on the recommendations.

Details were given of the measures being taken to comply with the recommendations and make further improvements to the service. It was noted that senior management had taken the lead in strengthening procedures to ensure adequate internal control mechanisms were in place. Although good progress was being made, it was acknowledged that it would take time for new processes to become fully embedded. Internal Audit therefore intended to carry out a further follow up audit early next year and this was supported by the Committee. In the discussion which ensued, reference was made to the computer system being used in this area and possible improvements which could be made in the future.

Resolved:

That the Final Accounts and Audit Committee:

- (iii) **note the current position regarding the issues arising from the audit of child protection arrangements, specifically that the Department for Children and Education has responded positively to the recommendations of the original audit report, and that senior management have taken the lead in strengthening procedures to ensure that adequate internal control mechanisms are in place.**
- (iv) **note that Internal Audit intend to carry out a further follow-up audit early next year and that a further report be presented to this Committee following such an audit.**