

JOINT AREA REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2008

Executive Summary

The Children's Act 2004 requires a Joint Area Review (JAR) to be conducted at the request of the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in accordance with arrangements made by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. This system-wide inspection covers all publicly-funded services for children and young people, including those that are directly managed or commissioned by the council, as well as services provided by health and youth justice services. The JAR also covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that services work together to improve outcomes.

Ofsted inspected children's services in Wiltshire during June and July 2008. Two additional service areas identified as "high risk" were chosen by the inspectors to be inspected. These were:

- the impact of the partners' strategy on reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training
- the impact of partners' strategy in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate.

An Enhanced Youth Work inspection took place at the same time.

Results: The JAR report published on 18 November 2008 gives the following judgements:

- Safeguarding – adequate
- Looked After Children and Young People – adequate
- Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – adequate
- The impact of the partners' strategy on reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training - good.
- The impact of partners' strategy in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate - good.
- The management of services for children and young people - adequate.
- Capacity to improve further - adequate.

In response, Local Authority is required to produce an action plan within 70 working days of publication of the JAR report.

Proposal

Members are asked to note the contents of the report and consider its findings.

Reason for Proposal

This is a key judgement for children's services and its findings will set a baseline for future inspections within the County.

Carolyn Godfrey, Director for Children and Education

JOINT AREA REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2008

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides members with information regarding the outcome of the Wiltshire Joint Area Review and Enhanced Youth Service Inspection.

Background

2. The Children Act 2004 requires a Joint Area Review (JAR) to be conducted at the request of the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in accordance with arrangements made by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. This system-wide inspection covers all publicly-funded services for children and young people, including those that are directly managed or commissioned by the council, as well as services provided by health and youth justice services. The JAR also covers the leadership and management of services for children and young people and, in particular, the way that services work together to improve outcomes.
3. Ofsted inspected children's services in Wiltshire during June and July 2008. In parallel, an Enhanced Youth Service inspection took place.
4. Inspectors examined what life was like for the children and young people who live in Wiltshire and what needs to change to make it better. Particular attention was given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes, including Looked after Children, children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children from Black Minority Ethnic groups and children in need of safeguarding.
5. Inspectors chose an additional two key lines of enquiry to investigate during the review. These were:
 - the impact of the partners' strategy on reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training
 - the impact of partners' strategy in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate.
6. Inspectors tracked the experiences of a number of individual children and young people. They met with lead Council Members and members of bodies such as the police authority, the primary care trust, community and voluntary sector representatives, service users and senior managers. They also held group discussions with front-line staff, including those based in schools.
7. The report containing the findings of the review was published on 18 November 2008.
8. The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2005 set out action to be taken by the LA on receiving a report. The report will be placed on Ofsted's and other relevant inspectorates' and commissions' websites. It is the responsibility of the LA to circulate the report locally. Within 30 working

days of receiving it the authority is required to send a copy to its relevant partners, its Local Safeguarding Children Board partners, at least one local newspaper and at least one local radio station. It is also required to make a copy available for inspection, free of charge, at its offices, and to supply a copy on demand, for which it may make a reasonable charge.

9. Consulting with its partners, the local authority is required to make a written statement of proposed action, or action plan, in light of the report. It has 70 working days from receipt to do this. It is required to send the action plan to those groups in receipt of the report; to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted, and the Secretary of State; to make it available for inspection, free of charge, at its offices; and to supply a copy on demand, for which it may make a reasonable charge.
10. The Local Authority, with its partners, will monitor implementation of the action plan.

Main Considerations for the Council

11. The Ofsted JAR report is attached as appendix A. The Enhanced Youth Inspection is attached as appendix B. They detail the inspection findings and gives grades for the areas investigated. The JAR report judgements are:

Safeguarding	adequate
Looked After Children and Young People	adequate
Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	adequate
The impact of the partners' strategy on reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training	good
The impact of partners' strategy in reducing the teenage pregnancy rate	good
The management of services for children and young people	adequate
Capacity to improve further	adequate

Findings

12. **Safeguarding** - Safeguarding arrangements were judged as adequate. Children and young people say they feel safe and receive good quality information to inform them of potential dangers. There is insufficient use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to ensure that children and young people benefit from early intervention. There is too much variability between teams in the timely identification and completion of initial and core assessments. Good work is undertaken to prevent or divert children and young people from offending. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is judged to be effective and the arrangements for agencies to collaborate in safeguarding are good. All children with child protection plans have reviews that are carried out within required timescales and are allocated to qualified social workers who are well trained and supported to understand and meet their needs. Core group meetings are held regularly to review and monitor child protection plans. Quality assurance arrangements are effective; cases are regularly monitored through good supervision and the rigorous independent chairing of child protection conferences. There is good multi-agency action in response to domestic violence incidents and strong multi-agency action to identify targets and reduce anti-social behaviour. There are low levels of offending and re-offending through an effective Youth Offending Team.
13. **Services for looked after children** - Services for looked after children were judged as adequate. Good quality advice is offered to looked after children from the Children's Rights Service. There are good levels of placement stability and the fostering and adoption services are good. There is a lack of placement choice for children and young people who become looked after and too many are in residential care. Whilst effective work with foster carers and adopters has improved the stability of placements, some children are waiting too long to be adopted because of delays in the courts.
14. **Services for children and young people with learning difficulties** - Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate. Some services, such as those for early years and schools, are inclusive, impacting well and improving outcomes, in others, undeveloped local provision for some children and young people with the highest levels of need, inhibits the impact of the service as a whole. Management action has however galvanised services and improved the pace of change. There is a highly valued parent partnership service and parents forum. The quality of special schools is good and in some cases outstanding. This is a strength of the Council's provision.
15. **NEETS** - The impact of local services in reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is good. Effective early intervention work and projects aimed at re-engaging young people at risk of exclusion have assisted the partnership in achieving a significant reduction in the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. The range of post-16 vocational provision, although improving, is currently insufficient to meet the needs of all young people. Partnership work between schools and education welfare officers is having a significant impact on improving the attendance of persistent absentees. Different curriculum

pathways in schools ensure that students have good access to a wide range of provision.

16. **Teenage pregnancies** - The impact of the partners' strategy to reduce teenage conceptions is good. A strong commitment across the partnership and effective joint working has ensured that services are well targeted upon specific geographical areas and vulnerable young people. This has resulted in year-on-year reductions, although the 50% reduction in teenage pregnancy by 2010 remains a challenging target based on current trends.
17. **Service management** - Service management and the capacity to improve further are adequate. The council, the Children's Trust and its partners have strong and well-founded ambitions for children's services and have been effective in engaging with parents and children and other stakeholders to help shape services. Current management capacity, although developing, is insufficient to ensure successful delivery of an ambitious agenda. Some strategies are not supported by delivery plans and planning is not consistently applied at service level. There is good partnership working including the work with the voluntary sector. Engagement and consultation with parents, children and young people in shaping services and the partnership strategy is good. The Council has made significant and rapid progress in its development of Children's Centres and Extended Schools/Services.
18. **Report overview** – "The capacity to improve is currently adequate, with clear evidence that recent management action is galvanising services and increasing the pace of change. The Children and Young People's Partnership has made significant and rapid progress over the last 18 months and is working effectively with a clear commitment from all partners to deliver improvement for children and young people".
19. **Youth Development Services** - Inspectors praised many sections of youth services especially young people's involvement in decision making, and also highlighted areas for improvement. Their findings noted:
 - Opportunities for young people to engage in decision-making are outstanding.
 - Provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.
 - The good range of curriculum opportunities.
 - Good partnership working contributes to improving opportunities for young people.
 - Service planning is linked well to corporate priorities.
 - Local leadership and management.

Areas identified for development were:

- Improve standards of achievement and quality of practice.
- Enable full-time workers to more effectively mentor and support front-line workers.
- Apply needs analysis more effectively in planning provision and in allocating resources.
- Put in place strategies to manage competing priorities in respect of short and long-term planning.

20. Recommendations:

For immediate action the local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- secure value for money in services for children with special educational needs and for looked after children.

The council should:

- improve variations between area social care teams in relation to the volume and timeliness of initial and core assessments
- liaise with the courts managers to secure a speedy resolution to delayed adoption proceedings
- ensure all agencies are fully implementing the CAF to achieve better early intervention outcomes for children and their families.

For action over the next six months

The local partnership should:

- finalise and implement the transition strategy and embed person-centred planning for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the partnership
- strengthen performance management arrangements by ensuring that all service plans have specific, measurable and timely objectives and are consistent with the priorities of the CYPP
- take action to improve understanding and use of special guardianship
- ensure all statutory reviews for looked after children are held on time and children and young people contribute to them.

For action in the longer term

The local partnership should:

- map, plan and extend the range of provision from Key Stage 4 to post-16, to meet the needs of all young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

21. None

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

22. The report states:

- Effective action is being taken to improve the life changes of hard to reach groups such as traveller children and their families by affording them easier access to a range of culturally sensitive and flexible services.
- Systematic action is being taken to ensure equality of access to services so that those living in rural and isolated areas are not disadvantaged.

23. Closing the “attainment gap” for Children Looked After by the Council, children and young people with LDD and those in receipt of free school meals is both a national and local priority.

Risk Assessment

24. The report does not highlight any immediate action in relation to risks to children and young people. Arrangements for safeguarding are considered to be good, the report states “The arrangements for agencies to collaborate in safeguarding children are good. The LSCB works well to ensure that actions are in place to safeguard children and young people and the accountabilities and responsibilities of partner agencies are well understood.”

25. Risk assessment will be an integral part of the action plan.

Financial Implications

26. The report highlights the lack of management capacity to secure the appropriately ambitious change agenda. This is being addressed through the restructuring of the Department for Children and Education and the financial implications have been factored into the 2009/10 budget proposals.

27. In the report, social care and special education needs placements have been acknowledged as too costly. This had previously been identified and is part of the commissioning plans of the Children and Young People’s Trust Board.

Legal Implications

28. The Local Authority will need to produce an action plan as detailed above in response to the Review

Options Considered

29. None.

Conclusions

30. The JAR was conducted in a professional and balanced manner. The findings confirmed the priorities of the Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP). The judgements are felt to be balanced and fair. The action plan is well underway drawing from previously identified actions. Two recommendations – the timeliness of reviews for Children Looked After by the Council and court delays in relation to adoptions have already been achieved. The Council, and

all partners, are committed to achieving the goals and aspirations set out in the CYPP and the JAR report in order to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Wiltshire.

Proposal

31. Members are asked to note the contents of the report and consider its findings.

Reason for Proposal

32. This is a key judgement for children's services and its findings will set a baseline for future inspections within the County.

Carolyn Godfrey, Director for Children and Education

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Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix A - Wiltshire Joint Area Review report