

FINAL ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
30th September 2008

INTERNAL AUDIT OF CHILD PROTECTION ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the Final Accounts and Audit Committee with an update on the current position regarding the issues arising from recent audits of child protection arrangements.

Background

2. During 2006-07, Internal Audit carried out an audit of child protection arrangements, in which it was looking to determine whether controls and procedures in connection with social worker visits to children on the Child Protection Register were adequate.
3. We 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 (DCE).
4. Members discussed the findings of the initial audit at the Committee meeting in June 2007, and we then undertook a follow-up audit which we reported to the September meeting, outlining progress made in relation to the various recommendations.
5. At that time it was clear that senior management had made significant efforts to bring about the necessary improvements. The Assistant Director (Children and Families) had 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 was 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. The Head of Area Services then set up a review procedure to be followed in all area teams, and specified the records to be kept in support of this. Team Managers were required to undertake regular reviews of all cases to ensure

compliance with procedures and record keeping. These were supplemented by sample reviews carried out by Area Service Managers and the Head of Area Services.

8. Overall, we concluded that senior management had taken appropriate action in strengthening procedures to ensure that adequate internal control mechanisms were in place. Good progress was being made, although time was needed for the new processes to become fully embedded. It was therefore agreed that Internal Audit would therefore carry out a further follow-up audit during 2008 and report back to the Committee.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. The follow-up audit has now been completed. It was concerned with ensuring that the previous guidance is still appropriate and is being followed, and that adequate records are being maintained. A number of cases were selected for detailed review.
10. From this work we are able to conclude that the controls introduced by senior management are now working effectively, and that evidence and record keeping have continued to improve as a result, and are now of a good overall standard.
11. CareFirst is now being used as the primary record and duplication with manual records has decreased significantly (the paper records that are still kept are usually those related to external correspondence).
12. Senior management recognises that close monitoring is regularly required to ensure the completion and return of the required documentary evidence in a timely manner, and will work to ensure this continues. In addition, Internal Audit will regularly review the operation of these arrangements, in view of their importance.
13. We are also aware that DCE has recently undergone a detailed Joint Area Review of services for children and young people, and that child protection arrangements were included within the scope of the review. We understand the results of the review will be reported to the Department in November.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

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

Financial Implications

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

Reasons for the Proposal

16. To present the Final Accounts and Audit Committee with an update on the current position regarding the issues arising from the audit of child protection arrangements.

Proposal

17. The Final Accounts and Audit Committee is asked to note:

- That controls introduced by senior management are now working effectively, and that evidence and record keeping for child protection cases have continued to improve as a result, and are now of a good overall standard.
- That Internal Audit will continue to carry out regular reviews of the operation of Child Protection arrangements, in view of their importance.

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Unpublished documents relied upon in the preparation of this Report:

None