

Division(s):

## CABINET – 15 MARCH 2011

### OFSTED UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF OXFORDSHIRE CHILDREN'S CONTACT REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT SERVICE AND ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSESSMENT (CSA) 2010

Report by the Director for Children, Young People & Families

#### Introduction

1. The council was subject to its annual Ofsted unannounced inspection of its contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children and young people on 23 and 24 November. This was the second inspection of its kind since the requirement was introduced.
2. The inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and sampled the quality and effectiveness of services and their impact in minimising child abuse and neglect.
3. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, supervision files and notes, observations of practitioners and other information provided by managers.
4. All unitary authority and "top tier" councils children's services are subject to a children's services assessment (CSA). This is the second assessment of this kind and replaced the Annual Performance Assessment (APA).
5. Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).
6. In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted takes account of:
  - All inspected and regulated services for children and young people,
  - arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and
  - performance against national measures.
7. The assessment is made against a four point scale
  - 4 Performs excellently An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
  - 3 Performs well An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements

2 Performs adequately An organisation that meets only minimum requirements

1 Performs poorly An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

### **Findings of the Unannounced Inspection**

8. The inspection identified areas of strength and many areas of practice meeting statutory requirements, with some areas for development (see Annex 1)
9. Ofsted identified no priority areas for action. A priority area of action is a significant concern identified by Ofsted needing immediate action. In addition it will have a significant impact on the children's services assessment. If the concerns are not resolved by a subsequent inspection the overall rating of the local authority's children's services is unlikely to be better than "performing poorly".
10. Key strengths:
  - Engagement and direct work with children is highly effective with many examples of excellent work in seeing children on their own.
  - Links between the range of interventions, including common assessment framework, team around the child and child in need, are clear and effectively coordinated. Inspectors saw examples of seamless, effective transfers between the responses to changing need. A particular strength is the 'step down' arrangement from child in need to a less intensive level of intervention.
  - Inter-agency relationships are very effective, in particular between social care and the police in the prompt identification and planning of child protection enquiries. Housing specialists, many schools and numerous other agency practitioners are also engaged in the delivery of coordinated plans and services.
11. The service met the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas:
  - (a) Appropriate, agreed multi-agency thresholds are effectively implemented by key partner agencies.
  - (b) Front line managers oversee and direct Section 47 assessments and planning in a timely, purposeful way demonstrating appropriate and clearly evidenced decision making.
  - (c) The majority of assessments contain substantial contextual information and adequate analysis which evaluates risks, strengths and needs. Recommendation and plans focus appropriately on addressing identified needs.
  - (d) Manageable workloads are in place for almost all staff, enabling them to produce timely assessments and interventions with children and families.

- (e) Workforce capacity is sufficient to address demand, notably in relation to qualified social workers. This makes possible the timely allocation and completion of child protection enquiries by suitably experienced staff.
  - (f) Staff value the training they receive and this learning is consistently shared in team settings. The area has implemented a newly qualified social work support scheme. Lessons from serious case reviews have been widely shared through briefings and training events.
  - (g) Senior manager have recently introduced quality assurance systems to complement key performance indicators, and themed audits are now conducted in conjunction with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (OSCB).
12. Inspectors identified five areas for further development, all of which we were already aware of through our own internal quality assurance and performance management processes.
- Formal supervision had not been sufficiently maintained recently in one of the three resources.
  - A number of examples where the out-of-hours service did not ensure a timely response in addressing concerns for children.
  - Assessments and plans to protect children do not always sufficiently take into account background circumstances.
  - Timing of the provision of copies of assessments to parents.
  - Evidence of implications of ethnicity, culture and religion are not always in assessments and plans.

### **Findings of the Children's Services Assessment**

13. Ofsted assessed **Children's services in Oxfordshire County Council to be "continuing to perform well"**. They also recognised our capacity to improve is moving in the right direction. (See Annex 2)
14. Key strengths:
- The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding and few are inadequate.
  - Childminders and childcare were judged to be mostly good.
  - Provision for learning after the age of 16 is mostly good as is the pupil referral unit.
  - National measures of performance show the very large majority of outcomes are at least in line with those for similar areas or nationally.
  - Standards are improving.
15. Areas for development:
- Improve childminders and childcare, primary and secondary schools and children's homes so that more are good or better.

- Accelerate the rate of improvement in standards for 16-year-olds and qualifications at the age of 19 and close attainment gaps.
- Reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

## **Outcomes for Children and Young People**

16. The CSA also focuses on the five Every children matters outcomes

Be healthy  
Stay Safe  
Enjoy and Achieve  
Make a positive contribution  
Achieve Economic Wellbeing

17. And found that in Oxfordshire:

- Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are generally very successful in Oxfordshire but more needs to be done by our pupil referral unit
- Action for keeping children and young people safe in services and settings is almost always very successful.
- Inspected services and settings are very successful in helping children and young people to learn and achieve, and all statements of special educational needs are completed on time.
- Inspected services and settings strongly support children and young people to be active in their communities and England's Deputy Children's Commissioner has considered their views on this issue.
- Out support was having a good impact on learning and development, together with good involvement of young people in shaping decisions in schools.
- Vulnerable young people involved in or at risk of crime and anti-social behaviour are identified early.
- Very good partnerships with the police, good use of data and better sharing of information, result in far fewer young people now breaking the law for the first time, although more now re-offend and more are sentenced to custody.
- More young offenders are now in education, work or training and an average number have a suitable place to live.
- Average numbers remain in education or training at the age of 17 but more are not in education, training or work by the age of 18 than in similar local authorities. More young people are gaining qualifications at the age of 19, although still not as many as in similar areas.

## **Next Steps**

18. Ofsted identified no priority areas for action in the unannounced inspection this year. This demonstrates that our safeguarding practices are generally sound. We have already developed an action plan to address the five areas

for further development and are confident that we can continue to make rapid improvements to our current practices by building on our strong partnership arrangements.

19. Our own assessment of our performance and outcomes had already recognised those areas for development identified by Ofsted in the CSA. Plans are already in place as part of the delivery plans for our Children and Young People's Plan to address these issues.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

20. There are no financial or staffing implications to be considered.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

21. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to note the positive outcome of the authority's latest inspection of services to safeguard children and the 2010 Children's Services Assessment.**

MEERA SPILLETT  
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Annexes:

Annex 1: Unannounced inspection letter from Ofsted

Annex 2: Children's Services Assessment

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