

## REPORT TO OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY



<b>Title:</b>	<b>LGA SAFEGUARDING DIAGNOSTIC AND OFSTED UPDATE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2014</b>
<b>Project Lead Officer:</b>	<b>JACKIE GOWER, AD (CSC &amp; SAFEGUARDING)</b>
<b>Project Sponsor:</b>	<b>MARK CARRILINE, EoDCS</b>

### 1.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In September 2013 Children's Services provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a draft action plan against the then draft Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (SIF).

- 1.1 The Ofsted SIF was first published in October 2013, implemented from 19 November 2013 and published in its final form on 3 December 2013.
- 1.2 The SIF covers children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers and includes inspection of Local Authority fostering and adoption services and 'review' of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 1.3 The SIF regime is a rigorous, virtually unannounced (24 hour notice), inspection programme which takes place over four working weeks involving the submission of a number of key strategic documents and sophisticated datasets; in depth case file study and analysis; examination of the quality of decision making throughout the child's 'journey'; shadowing and interviewing case practitioners and interviewing children, young people, parents and carers.
- 1.4 Judgements are made against a four point scale of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate'. The use of the phase 'requires improvement' is a change from previous inspection frameworks.
- 1.5 The intention of the SIF is to improve the standard of social work and social care services to the most vulnerable children and families in our society - in order to improve the outcomes for this most vulnerable client group.
- 1.6 It goes without saying that any measures which support and engender improvements in the standard of social work and social care services has the support of Bury Children's Services.
- 1.7 The first tranche of Local Authorities inspected (Derbyshire, Hartlepool, Slough, Sheffield and Hillingdon) under the SIF framework were inspected week commencing 19 November 2013. The second tranche of SIF commenced week beginning 13 January 2014 (Bolton, East Sussex, Essex, Hounslow, Staffordshire and Coventry). Two further Authorities have followed (Bradford

and Hampshire) and further tranches will be announced on 11 March, 18 March and then approximately monthly over the three year period in which all Authorities will be inspected.

- 1.8 The inspection reports for the first tranche of Local Authorities have been published. Two LA's were adjudged 'Good', two adjudged to 'require improvement', one adjudged 'inadequate'. At the time of writing the reports of the second tranche of Authorities have yet to be published.
- 1.9 The advice from those LA's who have been subject of a SIF (whether or not their reports are published) is that the SIF is both more demanding and more rigorous than previous Ofsted inspection regimes and that nothing should be assumed from judgments of previous Ofsted inspections.
- 1.10 During January and February 2014 Bury Children's Services have been subject at short notice of an Ofsted Early Help (EH) Thematic Inspection and also a planned LGA Safeguarding Diagnostic (SD). The outcomes of this external and objective scrutiny indicate:

'Striking improvements' in safeguarding services since the SLAC (May 2012)

Improved quality of assessment of child need and risk

Outcomes for children improved by involvement of CSC and Early Help

Thresholds for CSC involvement appropriate, understood and consistently applied

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub – 'second to none'

Strong operational and strategic leadership

Exceptional frontline – managers, social workers and social care staff

Outward looking, self aware and honest – we know ourselves 'warts and all' and actively seek solutions to improve outcomes for children and families.

- 1.11 The EH Thematic and the SD also indicate the areas for improvement and the LGA provide recommendations for action. The Early Help feedback is part of a national report which will be published in the Summer but will not include any published judgments on Bury. Significant recommendations and areas for improvement are in respect of CSC capacity, Early Help capacity and the infrastructure supporting CSC (administrative, IT, WFD and HR). Improvement in challenge and scrutiny is also recommended.
- 1.12 In preparation for a SIF inspection, Children's Social Care is in a constant state of 'self evaluation' against new information and improved understanding. Progress against the SIF Draft Action Plan presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2013 is attached.

## 2.0 **ISSUES**

- 2.1 Ofsted judgments have been highly significant in terms of the reputations of Local Authorities and have a major impact in terms of ability to recruit and retain an appropriately qualified and experienced social work workforce. An unstable workforce contributes to poor service delivery and thus poor outcomes

for children and families. Bury Council is beginning to experience difficulty in recruiting to social work management posts.

- 2.2 The Secretary of State for Education has the power to intervene if s/he considers that a Local Authority is failing in its safeguarding duties toward children - such intervention is potentially costly to a Local Authority reputationally and financially. Although the exact form of intervention has varied between Authorities, all those who have been judged inadequate by Ofsted have experienced some form of intervention. Where a Local Authority is judged by Ofsted to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, a full inspection will take place within 12 to 18 months (unless otherwise directed by the Secretary of State).
- 2.3 There is a need to review the capacity and skill set in business support services in order that they can develop and provide 'real time' performance monitoring data for the social care management team and maintain the complex dataset required by the SIF inspection team within 24 hours of notification of inspection.
- 2.4 The demands of the SIF are such that there is significant challenge to middle/senior management capacity within Children's Services and, in particular, within social care to manage both the demands of a four week Ofsted SIF Inspection at the same time as ensuring a safe child protection and safeguarding service for children and families.
- 2.5 The SIF requires Local Authorities to evidence good practice in this area. For all children and young people the expectation is that help, care and protection are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.
- 2.6. Children's Social Care quality assurance framework ensures that all audit activity includes a focus on ensuring that the service performs consistently well in the area of equalities and diversity.

### 3.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 Objective assessment by Ofsted (EH Thematic) and the LGA (SD) supports that significant progress has been made against the draft SIF action plan presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2013. This progress should be commended. It should, however, be acknowledged that the current inspection regime incorporates a very high level of challenge compared to previous regimes.
- 3.2 SIF action planning (Council wide) will be ongoing and responsive to emerging knowledge and understanding of the requirements and implications.

### **Contact Details:-**

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