



Executive
12 March 2012

**Report from the Director of
Children and Families**

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection -
outcome and action plan**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the outcome of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) inspection which took place between 3-14 October 2011. The detail is contained within the attached full inspection report and the associated Action Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the outcome of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection report for Brent. The report was published by Ofsted in November 2011 and is attached as Appendix A.
- 2.2 That Members approve the Action Plan contained in Appendix B which addresses the recommendations identified in the inspection report and articulates the department's ambitions to make significant and far reaching improvements to the service.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 There has been a nationally established programme of inspection for children's social care departments over a number of years, which recently has been divided between annual "no-notice" inspections of contact and referral services and 3 yearly "full" inspections of safeguarding and looked after children's services. Brent has had two successful "no-notice" inspections over the last two years but, prior to this inspection, had not had a full inspection since the Joint Area Review in 2006. The current Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection (SLAC) was under a different regime to the Joint Area Review, but is also the last in the current format. A new inspection regime (based on some of the recommendations of the Munro review) is currently being piloted with a view to being rolled out from April 2012. This new regime introduces a no-notice approach for the first time.

- 3.2 It is clear that the inspection regimes for children's social care are getting progressively tougher and thresholds are rising. The recent inspection was tougher than the Joint Area Review in 2006 and the next one will be tougher still. The other key differences are that the notice given to authorities has progressively reduced (from several months in 2006, two weeks under the current regime, through to no notice in the future) and that the level of detail on individual cases being examined is increasing.
- 3.3 The inspection provides two separate judgements, one for safeguarding and one for services to looked after children. The judgement scale is Outstanding, Good, Adequate and Inadequate. Brent was judged to be adequate for both which is the grade for 48% of Local Authorities for Safeguarding and 53% of authorities for looked after children.
- 3.4 Children were judged to be safe in Brent and thresholds for child protection intervention were judged to be appropriate. There were however concerns in relation to the health of looked after children which resulted in health being given an "inadequate" rating in that area. NHS Brent are currently addressing these concerns and reporting to both the Care Quality Commission (their inspection body) and ourselves on progress.
- 3.5 The Inspection commended aspects of Early Intervention, Locality Services and in Care Planning, some of which are noted below. Parents who received services as part of a CAF had achieved some positive outcomes and valued the services provided, children's social care services positively engage with and listen to children and young people evidenced through assessments and care plans and the established fora to consult such as the Care in Action group and Brent Youth Parliament. Access to front door social work services was clear and well understood and relationships with partner agencies were good. Many children saw positive outcomes as a result of their child protection plan and services were seen to be highly effective in closing the gap educationally for those children subject to economic deprivation with achievement being particularly pronounced for children who are seeking asylum. Morale and staff motivation were reported to be high and strategic arrangements to improve services to looked after children were commended. The inspectors also praised the commitment of elected members as champions of the needs of all children and young people through engagement with Brent Youth Parliament as members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the decision to provide permanent accommodation for the Youth Parliament in the new Civic Centre,
- 3.6 The plan covers recommendations which are the responsibility of the local authority, as well as those which need to be followed up by the local authority together with its partners. In order to make a comprehensive response to the inspection and further improve outcomes for children and young people, this plan additionally picks up comments made by Ofsted within the text of the final report, which were not highlighted as recommendations. These additional areas for development follow the recommendations for Safeguarding, or for Looked after Children, respectively. As the plan follows the format of the Ofsted inspections, the recommendations and actions required cover all aspects of the work, from management and leadership to front-line practice.
- 3.7 This plan has been prepared in conjunction with the Health Action Plan which has been developed by Brent Primary Care Trust and is reported (and monitored) on a monthly basis by the Care Quality Commission. The Children and Families Plan complements the actions within that plan.
- 3.8 The plan has benefitted from input and quality assurance from London Safeguarding Advisors and the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency (LGIDA). The department has already secured £20,000 improvement monies from LGIDA to start a range of initiatives aimed at making significant improvements to the supervision of front line staff. It will be implemented alongside individual service improvement plans already in

development, representing the ambition of the council and its partners to make a positive difference for children in need of safeguarding or who are in the care of Brent Council.

3.9 The monitoring arrangements for the plan are as follows:

- 1 The Director of Children's Services will chair a monthly monitoring of the action plan involving Health and Social Care colleagues. .
- 2 Local Safeguarding Board on a bi-monthly basis.
- 3 Brent Children's Partnership on a quarterly basis
- 4 Multi- agency child protection meeting on a quarterly basis
- 5 Children and Families Departmental Management team on a monthly basis.
- 6 Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding group.
- 7 The Lead Member for Children and Families will have a key role in the monitoring of progress.

3.10 Finally, the Department will seek external challenge of the progress against the plan in June 2012 through the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency and the intention is to arrange a process of peer challenge or review in December 2012 to assess progress against the findings of the SLAC Inspection report

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 Currently the funding to cover the proposed £152,000 of growth required for the plan identified in this report has not been identified but the department is confident that it will be able to find the money from within existing resources through restructuring.

4.2 Three additional posts are needed. Two of the posts are Child Protection Advisors to assist with the planning, monitoring and auditing of work on child protection across the department. They would join the existing three postholders whose role is to chair child protection conferences but also to provide professional child protection advice on complex cases to a range of professionals as well as to monitor plans and audit the quality of child protection work across the Borough.

4.3 The other post is within the looked after children service to provide additional resource to work with children and young people who were looked after, but who have now turned 18years and for whom the Council has a responsibility up until the age of 24years. The Service view is that the posts are necessary to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory responsibilities to that age group but also to allow improvements to be made to the quality of the work that is delivered.

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to appoint a personal adviser for young people who have left care or are preparing to do so. The personal adviser acts as an intermediary between the young person and the social services department, until the young person turns 21, or 24 if they are still receiving help with education, training or employment.

5.2 The council has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need, in addition to a duty to protect children in its area from foreseeable risks of significant harm. The Children Act 2004 also introduced a duty for the Council to work together with its Safeguarding Partners, such as Primary Care Trusts and the Police to promote the welfare of children.

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 There are no diversity implications contained within this report.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 There are no accommodation issues contained within this report.

Background Papers

- a) Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services, London Borough of Brent. Published by Ofsted 18 November 2011
- b) Brent safeguarding and looked after children action plan.

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