



Executive
11 February 2013

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

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Outcome of Ofsted's Inspection of Brent's arrangements
for the protection of children and Action Plan**

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Brent's arrangements for the protection of children which took place between 22-31 October 2012. 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 inspection which is summarised in the report published by Ofsted on 30 November 2012 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 continue 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 in place for a number of years. In Brent, there was a Joint Area Review in 2006, two unannounced inspections of contact and referral points (2009 and 2010) and a Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in 2011. This is in addition to the adoption inspection in 2012 and a fostering inspection which is expected imminently.

3.2 In 2012, Ofsted split the inspection regime, such that children's safeguarding services and those for looked after children were inspected separately, on separate dates resulting in two independent judgements and reports. An

interim regime was introduced for one year (2012/13) which would concentrate solely on safeguarding services delivered by the local authority and would look primarily at those 90 authorities across the country that were judged to be either adequate or inadequate. This is seen as a precursor to the roll out of full (separate) multi agency inspections of safeguarding and looked after children's services which are scheduled to start in 2013. Brent was inspected under this interim (no-notice) regime in October 2102 and was judged "adequate".

- 3.3 The inspection regimes for children's social care are becoming progressively tougher and thresholds are rising. The judgement scale is Outstanding, Good, Adequate and Inadequate. At the time of Brent's recent inspection, there had been 7 inspections nationally, 4 were judged inadequate and 3 adequate. The current position is that 15 authorities have been inspected nationally, 1 has been rated good, 9 have been rated adequate with the remaining 5 judged inadequate.
- 3.4 The inspection judged that children were safe in Brent and it recognised that clear strategic leadership and vision had driven improvements in practice and service delivery since the last inspection. Thresholds for access to services and for child protection intervention were judged to be clear and understood by all partners. Where children were subject to child protection plans, agencies across the partnership were deemed to be working effectively together to ensure that children were protected. Performance management within children's social care was deemed to be well established and managers had a good understanding of the key issues as a result of robust analysis of that information. Service user views were being obtained and the results were informing the development of services, although this was judged to be at a relatively early stage.
- 3.5 The report commented on the high levels of domestic violence in the borough and noted that this had been recognised as an area where a wider range of support services needed to be developed.
- 3.6 However, the inspection identified a significant number of areas where improvements were required. Whilst children were deemed to be safe overall and the inspection team found examples of good quality practice and management oversight, it also found areas where this was not consistent and where there was poorer practice and inconsistent management oversight. There were a significant number of cases where they raised concerns and queries and it was the concerns around the quality of casework that formed the basis of the majority of the recommendations made in the report.
- 3.7 The recommendations are divided between those requiring immediate action and those to be completed within three months. They are as follows:

Immediately:

- Review all referrals in one of the locality teams identified by the inspectors that have resulted in no further action or a children in need plan to ensure

that children are safe and that any actions or plans have been implemented.

- The Brent Safeguarding Children's Board should ensure that the police public protection department promptly exchanges appropriate information with partner agencies and promptly participates in child protection strategy discussions or meetings.
- Ensure that child protection plans in relation to children with disabilities aged over 14 years are robust and are fully implemented.
- Ensure that strategy discussions are clearly recorded and contain actions agreed, individual responsibilities and timescales.
- Ensure that the outcome of referrals is routinely notified to referring agencies.
- Ensure that assessments contain sufficient analysis of information to inform risk and to understand the impact of the situation from the child's perspective, and that the outcome of assessments, plans and key documents are explained and given to parents.
- Ensure that all decisions to remove children from child protection plans are robustly risk assessed.

Within three months:

- Ensure that child protection conferences are consistently well managed and chaired.
- Ensure that children in need and child protection plans are of a consistently high quality, that they contain specific targeted outcomes and contain a case specific statement of risk and contingency plans.
- Ensure that all core groups rigorously monitor, review and develop the child protection plan and that the meetings are recorded.
- Ensure that risk management plans are developed as part of domestic violence risk assessments.
- Ensure that social work managers confirm that social workers have undertaken actions assigned to them within child protection plans and record this in case supervision.

3.8 Work started immediately on addressing all the actions identified in the report and the majority (especially of those for immediate action) have been completed. There are a few (such as improving the quality of analysis) where the solutions are more complex and difficult to embed and these are subject to on-going work which will be tightly monitored as set out later in the report.

- 3.9 The report recognised that the Council had robust plans in place to provide a range of early help services but noted that the required restructuring was still at an early stage. As a result, it was still too early on in the programme to be able to measure the impact of these changes. It also acknowledged that the Department had recognised and responded to concerns for the Brent Safeguarding Children Board by appointing a new chair, reviewing the Board's focus, revising the sub-groups and improving governance arrangements. Once again the report noted that it was too early to be able to measure the impact of these changes.
- 3.10 Overall, this as a fair report which identifies areas of strength as well as areas which require improvement and which mirrors much of our own analysis. A range of actions had already been put into place to address areas requiring improvement and these are captured in service specific actions plans which contain the full range of work being undertaken as part of our improvement work. Specifically, these additional plans are:
- the locality and disabled children's team service plan,
 - the safeguarding service plan
 - the Learning and Development Training Plan and
 - the Signs of Safety Implementation plan.
- 3.11 The department has a strong commitment to moving from an "adequate" to a "good" rating and we believe that the existing plans combined with the safeguarding action plan spells out clearly how we aim to achieve this goal.
- 3.12 The Signs and Safety implementation is one of the most significant and ambitious of these as it directly addresses improvements in social work training and development. This is an integrated programme that will assist social workers (and in due course all staff) to develop a more effective approach to assessing and intervening with families where there are concerns. It will focus on improving their assessment skills as well as their communication skills with children and their families. The intention is that this will lead onto more robust risk assessment and management and will improve the planning for all children where there are concerns.
- 3.13 It is clear from the report that there were a number of key areas where strong progress had been made since the last inspection but there had been insufficient time for the changes to have embedded and the impact to be evidenced. We anticipate that over the next 12 months there will be more evidence available on the impact of changes in some of those key areas, namely, early help services, the revitalised Safeguarding Children Board, the incorporation of user views into service developments and some of the developments around improving front line social work practice.
- 3.14 Equally, there are a number of areas where significant concerns were identified and the Council's response to these is set out in the Action Plan which is attached.
- 3.15 The arrangements for the monitoring of the plan are as follows:
- The Children's Social Care Management Team on a monthly basis.

- Children and Families Departmental Management team on a monthly basis.
- Corporate Management Team and Local Safeguarding Children Board on a bi-monthly basis
- Brent Children's Partnership on a quarterly basis
- Multi- agency child protection meeting on a quarterly basis
- Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting group.
- The Lead Member for Children and Families will have a key role in the monitoring of progress.

4.0 Finance

- 4.1 All actions identified within the Action Plan will be funded through existing resources within the Children and Families Department.

5.0 Legal

- 5.1 The council has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 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 The inspection report raised specific issues in relation to the prevalence of domestic violence in the Borough. The work around domestic violence is being progressed in conjunction with the newly appointed Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and their two key primary areas of focus will be risk assessment and working with children who are affected by violence within the home.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 There are no staffing or accommodation issues contained within this report.

Background Papers

- a) Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children, London Borough of Brent. Published by Ofsted 30 November 2012
- b) Brent Safeguarding Action Plan.

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