

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 2 September 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection and children looked after and care leavers

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the new single inspection framework that is due to be launched from November 2013.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) Members note the contents of the report.
- ii) Members are supported through briefing and training events planned in preparation for the inspection.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Halton was last subject to a major Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services in February 2011. It was called the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection (SLAC). The outcome was 12 grades of Good and 10 of Outstanding.

All top level Councils are subject to such an Ofsted Inspection process at least every three years.

3.2 The Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection was subsequently replaced in 2012 and following initial replacement with a Council based Safeguarding Inspection with a view to introducing a multi-agency inspection framework from September 2013. This was aborted following a number of pilots, and at the express instruction of Sir Michael Wilshaw, Head of Ofsted.

3.3 Ofsted announced plans instead in April 2013 to inspect local authority arrangements for services for children in need of help and protection and children looked after and care leavers under a single combined framework that includes local authority fostering and adoption options.

- 3.4 Guidance on the new framework was released in June 2013 for consultation. This consultation ended in July and the final framework is due to be released in September and launched in November 2013.
- 3.5 The new framework will be rolled out over a three year period from November, with every local authority inspected within that time. Given that by November it will be nearly three years since the last inspection in Halton, planning is underway on the basis of expecting an Inspection by March 2014.
- 3.6 The methodology of the latest Inspection process is radically different from that experienced during the SLAC - in that Inspections are now almost exclusively focused on front line case practice and on children and young people's own experiences. The inspection will bring greater focus on outcomes and the needs of the child than any inspection Halton has had before. It will look at the early identification and help for children, young people and their families/carers and has greater emphasis on how effectively local agencies contribute to the protection of children and young people and to services for Looked After Children than seen in previous inspections.
- 3.7 At every stage of the child's journey, the inspection will evaluate the effectiveness of:
- The impact of the help given
 - The focus on the interests of the child
 - Inter-agency working
 - Meaningful, consistent and direct contact with the child and their family
 - The experiences of particularly vulnerable children (private fostering, those not in education, those in families with domestic violence, substance misuse, mental illness etc.);
 - how well all partners take account of children's wishes and feelings and the extent to which this informs their care; and
 - Whether services are accessible to everyone and that there is equality of opportunity and outcomes.
- 3.8 The scope will include children and young people who are:
- at risk of harm.
 - in need of protection and provided with a multi-agency child protection plan.
 - no longer needing a child protection plan but still require some help and support.
 - in need of Children's Social Care support but below the significant harm and looked after thresholds

- looked after
 - care leavers
- 3.9 The inspection will lead to 3 key judgements – protecting children; looked after children and achieving permanence; leadership, management and governance.
- 3.10 The inspection will also include 3 graded judgements – adoption, care leavers, and a judgement on the effectiveness of the Halton Safeguarding Children Board.
- 3.11 A new 4 point judgement scale will be introduced that removes the ‘adequate’ grading The new scale includes:
- inadequate
 - requires improvement (to be good but that children are safe).
 - good
 - outstanding
- 3.12 Until the new framework is implemented, Ofsted will carry out separate inspections of local authority arrangements to protect children, will re-introduce a small number of targeted inspections of services for looked after children, and will continue with regulatory inspections of local authority adoption and fostering functions. As part of this, Halton had an inspection of its Adoption Service in August 2013.
- 3.13 All this means that Halton must subject itself to a level of rigour in our assessment of current performance that we have never done before. Ultimately, this will improve the quality of service and therefore warrants the investment of time and resources. It also serves to reduce the threat to the reputation of the Council an adverse Ofsted judgement would result in.
- 3.14 In order to realistically test our state of preparedness for the new Inspection regime, we have undertaken as close an approximation to the Ofsted Inspection process as possible. This involved an unannounced visit of a multi-agency team from CWaC led by a respected independent Consultant in July 2013. Some 16 reviewers came to Halton over a four day period and assessed nearly 100 cases. The findings from this Review will inform planning for the Inspection.
- 3.15 In response to the recommendations from the Practice Review and in line with the expected requirements of the new framework there has been some reorganisation of the planning structures for the inspection. The new structures include:
- *Investing in Children & Young People Board (ICYPB)* – this new Board will be chaired by David Parr and is a streamlined high level strategic group of primarily HBC officers and key

leads of partner agencies. This will meet bi-weekly.

- *Multi-agency Operational Group* – this will involve wider representation from across partner agencies and focus on operational issues.
- *Logistical Inspection Support Team (LIST)* – this group is coordinating the organisational aspects to support the inspection.

3.16 Project plans are being developed to frame the work for each group.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Inspection and the outcomes from it would have a significant impact on services and service delivery in Halton if a negative judgement were received. In addition, Halton would be subject to high levels of scrutiny from Ofsted in the aftermath and further inspection. Therefore, planning and preparing for the Inspection is the overarching priority for the Children & Young People priority.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Although the implications of the inspection primarily focus on Children & Young People, there will be crossover into other priorities, in particular Health and Safer Halton in relation to agencies and services that will be involved in inspection planning and the Inspection itself, including GPs and Police.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The analysis of the risks associated with a negative inspection outcome is driving the level of focus on planning and preparation for the Inspection.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Halton Ofsted Safeguarding & Looked After Children Inspection Report - February 2011	2 nd Floor, Rutland House	Mark Grady
Consultation on guidance for	2 nd Floor, Rutland	Mark Grady

the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection and children looked after and care leavers – June 2013	House	
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