
REPORT OF THE LEAD MEMBER FOR
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

TO THE HEALTH & SOCIAL ISSUES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ON 3 APRIL 2002

TITLE: INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES BY SOCIAL
SERVICES INSPECTORATE

RECOMMENDATIONS : THAT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE NOTES AND
MONITORS THE ACTION PLAN.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY :

The Social Services Inspectorate has amongst its duties, the inspection of services provided by Local Authority Social Services Departments. In 2001 Salford was one of thirty authorities included in an Inspection of Children's Services.

The Inspection process included consideration of information submitted in advance (a Position Statement, Policies and Procedures, relevant reports, statistical information, submissions from other agencies), studying case records and two weeks of fieldwork in October 2001 with interviews with Elected Members, the Chief executive, staff, young people and parents and representatives of other services and visits to a range of services provided by the Directorate.

The report of that Inspection is now available and will be provided together with an Action Plan prepared by the Community & Social Services Directorate to respond to the recommendations of the Inspection.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS :

(Available for public inspection)

SSI Report on Inspection of Salford's Children's Services published March 2002.

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WARD(S) TO WHICH REPORT RELATE(S)

All

KEY COUNCIL POLICIES:

Children's personal social services are significantly relevant to three of the Council's Six Pledges

Better education for all (education of children looked after)

A Clean & Healthy City (health needs of children looked after and vulnerable children)

A Safer Salford (reducing offending by children and protecting children from harm)

Support for young people (maximising life chance opportunities for children looked after and children in need)

DETAILS

The executive summary of the Inspection is attached, together with appendices explaining how the Inspection was done. The recommendations are set out in the Action Plan.

Summary

1

Introduction

- 1.1 This inspection of Salford Social Care Services for Children took place between 18 October and 2 November 2001. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors.
- 1.2 The objective of the inspection was to evaluate:
 - Salford Social Service's implementation of national and local objectives relating to the needs of children and young people;
 - the quality of outcomes for service users and their carers.
- 1.3 We were also interested to see how well – so far as services for children and young people were concerned - Salford Social Services were positioned to respond to the new policy agenda summarised in the White Paper *Modernising Social Services*¹.

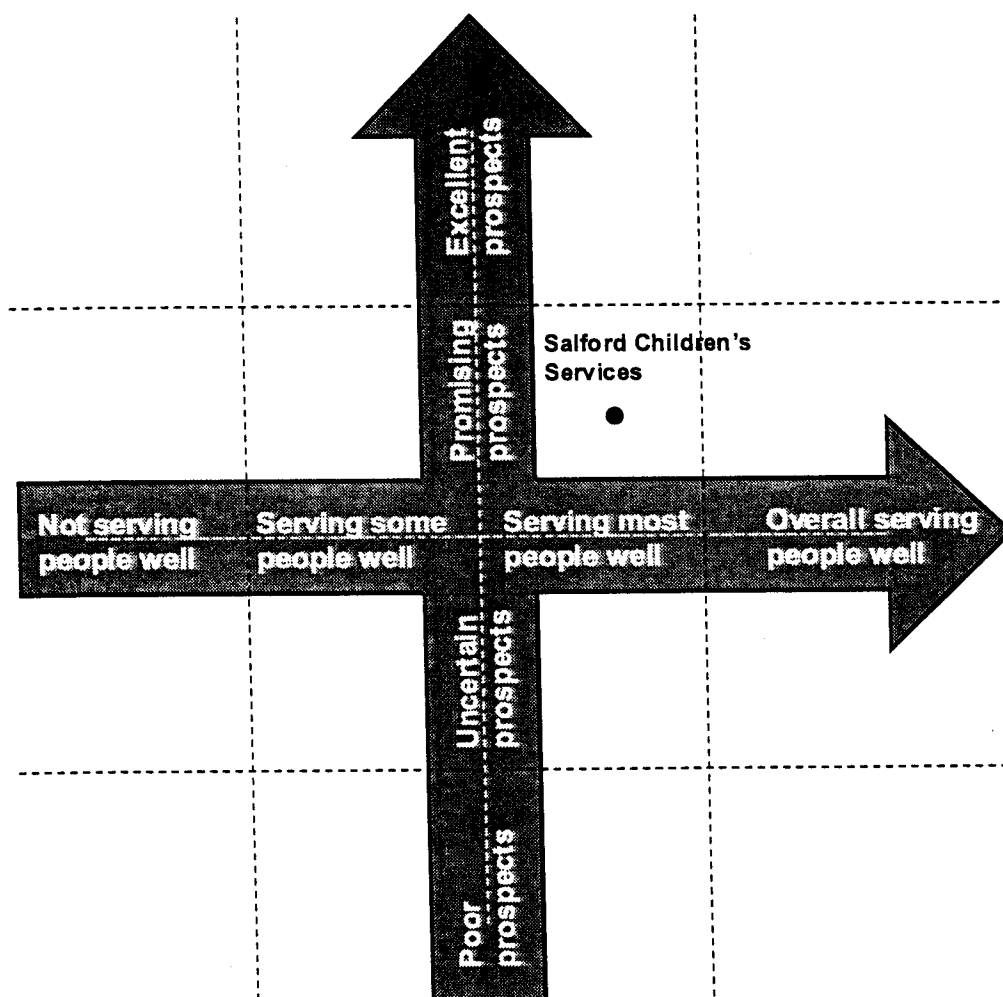
Overall Assessment

- 1.4 Children's services were planned and well managed within very strict financial constraints.
- 1.5 Workloads were high and cases active and complex. Front line staff, managers and foster carers were all working under immense pressure but with commitment and enthusiasm.
- 1.6 Limited placement choice in foster care and residential care led to a heavy dependence on external placements which was being addressed.
- 1.7 Access to minority ethnic and cultural communities needed to be further developed.
- 1.8 We concluded that the council was serving most of the community well and was aware of and actively responding to the gaps in provision, and was specifically planning to respond to these with the induction of the Preventative Strategy.

¹ Department of Health Modernising Social Services: Promoting independence, Improving housing standards. London: The Stationery Office, 1998 (CM4169)

- 1.9 We recognised a drive and capacity to improve services and judged that the council's prospects were promising.

Inspection Performance Matrix



National Priorities and Strategic Objectives

- 1.10 There had been an increase in the number of children looked after and this was particularly sharp between 1999/2000. Through Quality Protects funding services to improve the quality of care for children looked after had been successfully developed in collaboration with other directorates within the council. There were strong partnerships with other agencies and effective joint planning systems were in place.
- 1.11 Services had been restructured in response to the National Assessment Framework but this was not yet fully embedded in practice. Although there was good performance in child protection work improvements in the timeliness of reviews of children looked after had slipped. There had been

an increase in the number of children placed for adoption. Education attainments for children looked after had improved.

1.12 There were strong links with Salford University to facilitate the recruitment and retention of staff.

1.13 The corporate parent role was being developed further.

Effectiveness of Service Delivery and Outcomes

1.14 Thresholds for access to services had been set at a high level affecting the timeliness of responses. Initial response was not always equitable between different areas of the City. Workloads were high and extremely complex. Front line staff, managers and foster carers were working effectively, although under severe pressure.

1.15 A preventative strategy was being developed corporately by the council and in partnership with other agencies.

1.16 There was a good range and quality of services to support children in placement and prevent family breakdown and school exclusion.

1.17 Not all service users were satisfied with the services they received.

1.18 Services for young people had improved but recording of their views and work undertaken with them needed further attention.

1.19 Young people were involved in service planning and development and the training of staff and councillors.

1.20 Placements for children in residential and foster care were limited leading to lack of placement choice and the heavy and costly use of external placements with consequent pressure on already limited resources.

Quality of Services for Users and Carers

1.21 Information about services was available in a variety of formats. There was good and up to date information for users of specific services.

1.22 There was a comprehensive range of systems to monitor quality although the effectiveness of some of these should be reviewed, including those to monitor recording on case files.

1.23 Assessment in child protection cases and in court proceedings were of a high standard.

1.24 Systems to enable children and young people to raise concerns about services were well developed and publicised.

Fair Access

- 1.25 There was a need to improve access to all minority cultural and ethnic communities and particularly the Orthodox Jewish Community.
- 1.26 The partnership with Barnardos provided clear access to a range of good quality services for disabled children. Systems to involve them in planning their services were being further developed.
- 1.27 The integration of services with education and health for disabled children was in need of improvement.

Cost and Efficiency

- 1.28 Social services had experienced serious budget difficulties that had been exacerbated by the rise in the number of children looked after.
- 1.29 There was a high level of budget awareness among the staff and tightly restricted resources were being managed effectively.
- 1.30 Contracts and partnerships with other agencies existed to provide a range of service with other agencies and the council was strengthening its role as a commissioner of services and anticipating more joint provision with health.

Management and Resources

- 1.31 The recent restructuring to meet the requirements of the National Assessment Framework had been well managed.
- 1.32 Consultation and communication with staff was effective. Managers at all levels were approachable and supervision was valued and considered by staff to be of good quality.
- 1.33 Children and young people, including disabled children, were involved in service development although there was further work to do and parent involvement was limited.
- 1.34 Achieving a qualified workforce had taken priority over the personal development needs of more experienced staff who also had limited opportunities to participate in service planning.

Reading the remainder of this report

- 1.35 This report is set out in a way to enable the reader to have an understanding about every aspect of the inspection:
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- Chapter 1 is a summary of the key themes which have emerged from the inspection;
- Chapter 2 provides a list of the recommendations we have made;
- Chapter 3 sets out the context in which social services is operating;
- Chapter 4 and each subsequent chapter detail the evidence which led us to our conclusions and recommendations.

1.36 In addition, the appendices give fuller information about:

- the standards and criteria against which our judgements have been made (Appendix A);
- the method used in the inspection (Appendix B);
- who we interviewed as part of the inspection (Appendix C);
- the results of the parents' questionnaires (Appendix D);
- an organisational structure chart (Appendix E);
- a map of areas of deprivation (Appendix F).

Inspection Background and Method

B

- B.1 This inspection of local authority children's services took place between 19 October and the 2 November 2001. The inspection was part of a national programme of inspections agreed by the Joint Steering Group and was carried out by two inspectors from SSI.
- B.2 The inspection used standards and criteria drawn from legislation, guidance, research and understanding of good practice. The inspection standards are reproduced at Appendix A.
- B.3 Evidence for this inspection was collected in various ways. The inspection focused on children's services with an emphasis on service user views, the views of other agencies and SSD mainstream staff.
- B.4 A questionnaire was completed by the SSD to provide basic data about the service in relation to SSI standards and criteria. A range of documents was also supplied.
- B.5 Over 20 agencies were asked to comment on the local authority's performance in collaborative working.

Case Sampling Data

- B.6 For this inspection we chose a random stratified sample of 50 children's cases from two of the area teams that worked with families in the City. The sample was drawn from the total caseloads of these teams. Of the 50 cases sampled 26 were children looked after, 20 were child protection cases and 22 were cases where family support services were provided. Some children were counted in more than one category. For each of these groups we included families who had been in touch with social services for more than six months and families whose contact had been more recent. Children of different ages were represented in the sample as were children from minority ethnic backgrounds and a small number of disabled children. There were issues of domestic violence for 44 per cent of the sample families and in 48 per cent of the cases substance misuse was a factor. Parents with mental health issues accounted for 44 per cent of those in the sample.

Postal Survey of Parents

- B.7** We invited 53 parents to complete our postal questionnaire about their views of the services they had received and the outcomes achieved. Eleven replied, giving a response rate of 21 per cent. Three parents subsequently requested interviews during the inspection and we were able to meet with them. The views expressed by parents in the questionnaire are reflected in the report and summarised at Appendix D.
- B.8** Twelve files were read in detail for the case study. Key workers for these cases completed a case profile which outlined their work and the progress achieved so far. Interviews were held with 10 families and with the keyworkers and relevant team managers of all 12 of the case study case.
- B.9** During the course of this inspection we:
- examined four personnel files; and
 - examined six foster carers files.
- B.10** Some SSD officers and representatives from other agencies were contacted by telephone.
- B.11** Face to face interviews were conducted with the Director, Assistant Director, senior SSD managers and other staff involved in providing and managing children's services. Some group interviews were conducted with first line and middle managers.
- B.12** Inspectors visited day and residential services in the authority including some services which were regarded as examples of good practice.

Inspection Activity

C

C.1 During the course of the inspection we interviewed the following:

- Chair of Social Services and seven other councillors;
- Chief Executive;
- Director of social Services;
- Assistant Director of Children's and Families Services;
- Three Principal Community Managers;
- Two Principal Resource Managers;
- Principal Manager Child Protection and Review;
- Senior Manager Development;
- Service Manager Children - Commissioning;
- Project Leader for Salford Families Project;
- Team Leaders;
- Manager and staff from a Children's Home, the Brief Intervention Team, Contact Centre and a Family Centre;
- Specialist Worker for the health, education and leisure activities of Looked After Children;
- Parents of nine children receiving services;
- 12 Social Workers;
- Eight Foster Carers;
- Training Officer;
- Complaints Officer;
- Manager of the advocacy project;

C

- Independent Visitors;
- Four young care leavers and 13 other children receiving services; and
- Representatives of health, education and police.

C.2 We observed two Advice and Assessment Teams.

City of Salford Community & Social Services

Children's Services Inspection October 2001 – Action Plan

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
Effectiveness of Service Delivery and Outcomes				
1	Parents should be kept informed about plans for their children and should routinely receive information in writing (4.4, 4.5).	Accepted. The Directorate does strive to achieve this, but the volume of work falling on small administrative teams does impair performance.	To set targets for parents to receive copies of Care Plan and written confirmation of any change to that care plan. Review general information available to parents of children looked after.	July 2002.
2	Information about the complaints procedure and access to records should be given to parents and children routinely and this action should be recorded in the written records (4.4,6.27).	Accepted We do seek to give information about the complaints procedure and access to records should routinely be given out to parents. We will begin to monitor this.	Checkboxes will be used on file front sheets to confirm that information has been given. We will review explanatory information to parents	April 2002 March 2003

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
3	In accordance with the requirements set out in Regulation 4 of the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991 the approval of all foster carers must be reviewed annually and this must include foster carers initially approved under Regulation 11 of these regulations. (4.34)	Accepted We acknowledge the importance of reviews of all carers taking place annually but continuing difficulties in filling vacant posts in the Family Placement Team are an obstacle to achieving 100% compliance.	Process of having additional sittings of Fostering Panel to deal with reviews will continue. We are developing simpler ways to deal with some routine reviews. Quality Protects Grant will further strengthen Family Placement service in 2002/3. Reconfiguration of Family Placement Service will help with efficiency of tasks	Sept 2002 June 2002 March 2003
4	The Preventative Strategy should be introduced without delay once funding has been confirmed (4.9,4.10,4.11).	Accepted The Preventative Strategy is a cross-agency initiative led by the Children's Services Planning Forum. Children's Fund funded Coordinator is now in post	Implement Family Action Model Develop Family Support Services through Children's Fund	Sept 2002 Ongoing 2002-4
5	Consideration should be given to including family placement services in the joint referral arrangement currently in place for residential and family support services (4.14).	Accepted We will seek to establish a simple "one stop" referral system for all children's resources which takes accounts of the requirements of the separate current arrangements.	Working party established to develop arrangements. Complete:	October 2002

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
Quality of Services for Users and Carers				
6	Written procedures for meeting the requirements of the National Assessment Framework should be introduced and there should be further staff training, particularly in relation to core assessments (5.16).	Accepted There are procedures but practice has moved on considerably since these were devised before National Assessment Framework was implemented.	Written procedures and guidance are in the process of being produced. Briefings will be delivered in 2002/2003.	September 2002
7	One model for the Advice and Assessment Service should be adopted and introduced across the City (5.11,5.14).	Accepted	A task group has been established to draw up proposals for a single model of service delivery to be introduced as soon as possible.	September 2002
8	Review minutes should be recorded and circulated promptly and a system to monitor this activity should be introduced (5.26).	Accepted. Relates particularly to when sessional staff were being used to assist with reviews. The Directorate does have to undertake over 1200 looked after reviews each year.	This issue has now been addressed & monitoring arrangements to ensure compliance are being put in place.	Monitoring arrangements by April 2002

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
9	The practice of conducting paper reviews should be discontinued (5.27).	Accepted This practice only ever occurred in a very small number of cases at a time of staff shortages in the Child Protection & Reviewing Unit and unallocated cases on the teams. It was never intended to be anything other than a short term expedient. .	The Team of Reviewing Officers will be further increased by 1 post in April 2002. Transfer of some looked after children cases to the Children Leaving Care (Next Steps) service will reduce some pressure on social workers.	April 2002 April - December 2002
10	A review of recording practices should take place and particular attention should be given to recording the wishes and feelings of young people and should routinely include the use of the Looking after Children review consultation documents (5.21).	Accepted Good quality recording is important but can be difficult to achieve when social workers are carrying high case loads. LAC Consultation documents are routinely sent out to young people but are not well-used.	A working group will look at recording, using "Recording with Care" to provide staff with guidance on brief but appropriate recording including the views of young people Format for consultation forms for young people being revised following consultation with service-users, including possible use of IT.	October 2002 (report) October 2002 (report)

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
Fair Access				
11	The council with its partners should develop a more integrated provision for disabled children (6.19).	We think services are coordinated but, to benefit parents and children we think services should be more integrated	The Directorate is working with the Primary Care Trust on the development of services for children across Salford including improving integration of a number of services including Children with Disabilities We aim to produce specific proposals for children with disabilities, involving all relevant agencies, within a year	March 2003

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
12	The council should improve its knowledge of ethnic and cultural minority communities and ensure that staff feel confident and are working effectively with and have access to these communities (6.8).	Accepted	The Chief Executive of the Jewish Federation has recently agreed to become a member of the ACPC. (and the Children's Services Planning Forum). The Bibini Centre has been commissioned to undertake some work with looked after children from ethnic minorities. The Directorate also intends to review the support it gives to asylum seeking families	April 2002 August 2002 July 2002 September 2002
Cost and Efficiency				
13	The current system of reviewing the appropriateness of outside placements should continue alongside the strategy to increase local provision of residential, foster care and short-term break placements (7.17,7.24,7.25).	Accepted There are no plans to discontinue the current system of reviewing the appropriateness of outside placements.	Increased foster carer payments and payment for skills for foster carers are being developed New partnership home being developed	May 2002 April 2003 Autumn 2002

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
14	The effectiveness of all quality assurance systems should be reviewed and they should be further developed to encompass all children's services work (7.17).	Accepted There are quality control systems in place such as Quality Reviews and the Regulation 22 Visits Panel, but the supply of information to Managers has been affected during implementation of CareFirst. Reports on looked after numbers and referrals are now available for CareFirst. Three staff in the Division now have responsibility for planning and development which will include quality control.	Implementation of CareFirst will continue during 2002-03 including introduction of direct data entry by social workers. A system of annual reports/performance plans for teams is to be introduced, with local performance targets.	End 2002 June 2002
15	Plans to develop pooled budgets should be progressed (7.20, 7.22).	Accepted The City Council has accepted in principle a pooled budget for agency placements. (Also relevant to recommendation 11)	Working party to develop a proposal for pooled agency placements budget.	December 2002
16	Future service reviews should be carried out using the principles of Best Value (7.13).	Accepted. (A Review of the Adoption Service was undertaken in 2000-01 but this was not conducted as a Best Value review).	A Best Value review of Residential Services is to be carried out during 2002.	March 2003

	Recommendation	Response	Action	Timescale
Management and Resources				
17	In accordance with the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1997 and the Care Standards Act 2000 councillors carrying out visits under Regulation 22 of the Children's Homes Regulations 1991 must be subject to police check.(8.39)	Accepted	Arrangements are currently in hand for Members undertaking Regulation 22 visits to be police-checked	May 2002
18	In accordance with the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1997, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the recommendations of the Waterhouse Report comprehensive pre-employment checks must be undertaken on all staff working with children.(8.36)	Accepted We are revising arrangements following the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau.	Recruitment procedures will include as standards for all staff working with children the requirements set out in schedules to Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and Fostering Service Regulations 2002	April 2002
19	In accordance with the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1997 proof of identity should be verified prior to commencement of employment. (8.36)	Accepted Procedures have already been amended in preparation for the criminal Records Bureau	Applicants for posts working with children will be asked to provide confirmation of identity at interview or otherwise prior to employment.	April 2002

