



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET
16 MARCH 2004

Report of the Director of Social Services

The Victoria Climbié Inquiry – Performance Report

RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the progress made following the Victoria Climbié Inquiry self audit report and external evaluation, presented to Council Cabinet in August 2003.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Social Services Department undertook an Audit of Services to Children in Need in response to the practical recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry this audit was subject to external evaluation by the Social Services Inspectorate.
- 2.2 The Social Services Department's services to Children in Need are subject to ongoing monitoring. In addition to this, an action plan was drawn up to respond to the outcome of the self audit. The aim of the action plan is to further improve the quality of services to children in need in Derby.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The report of the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié was jointly published by the Department of Health and the Home Office on the 28 January 2003. The Inquiry had been chaired by Lord Laming, formerly Chief Inspector of Social Services.
- 3.2 Victoria Climbié had died on the 25 February 2000 at the age of eight, she had 128 separate injuries. She had arrived in England less than a year earlier and during her time in England had come into contact with three housing departments, four social services departments, two police child protection teams, a specialist unit run by the NSPCC and was admitted to two hospitals.
- 3.3 Lord Laming concluded that the "principle failure to protect Victoria was the result of widespread organisational malaise". The report contained 108 recommendations, many of which were for immediate implementation to address organisational failure. The conclusion was that organisations had got the basics wrong.

- 3.4 The self audit undertaken in the early part of 2003 identified that Derby Social Services and the range of agencies involved in services to vulnerable children in Derby have not got the basics wrong. The external audit concluded that the Social Services Department was serving most children well with promising capacity to improve. The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) concluded that Derby provides a safe service with effective management and governance.
- 3.5 The audit tool established seven standards for services to children in need:
- referral
 - assessment
 - allocation, service provision and closure
 - guidance
 - training and development
 - organisation and management
 - governance.

Current performance in each of these areas is presented below.

3.6 Standard One – Referral

This standard requires that *referral and initial response, including those provided outside office hours, safeguard and promote the welfare of children and are convenient and user friendly.*

The social services department has procedures in place for managing initial referrals regarding children at risk of significant harm and these are systematically monitored and reviewed. There are effective team workload management and information systems in place and the department is able to collect quantitative data on the work of the initial assessment teams. The activity of the teams is regularly scrutinised through the performance management system.

The reception teams have carried a significant number of vacancies over the last six months, the service is not fully staffed although the position has improved. The service is staffed by ten social workers and two community care workers and there are currently two temporary workers covering three vacancies.

The Derby Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) has a common referral form that applies to all agencies. This enables the communication of timely written information to confirm a referral relating to children about whom there are child welfare concerns. The reception service has recently developed a reminder letter to promote the use of this referral, which is automatically triggered by the electronic caseload management system. The police have been asked to revise the form they use to record strategy meetings to improve the ability to track actions across agencies where child protection investigations are undertaken.

Standard Two – Assessment

This safeguarding standard requires that *assessment of children in need, focus on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child by addressing their*

development needs and the capacity of the primary carers to meet those needs. The department's case allocation processes make sure that the purpose of intervention and expectations of the worker are clear. There continues to be a good system of supervision in place in the department and audits of supervision are undertaken. Work with children in need is supported both by a policy framework and practical guidance. Training in supervision on child protection work has been provided. Assessments routinely record information, conclusions and decisions. Progress is being made in the recording of purpose of visits and the outcomes achieved.

An assessment format has specifically been designed to test the suitability of temporary accommodation. A protocol has been established with Housing services to report concerns about unacceptable temporary accommodation.

Assessments are thorough but often take longer to complete than the recommended seven-day timescale. Performance in this area has improved by 5% since August 2003. Records and the child protection register are routinely checked following each referral of a child for whom there are welfare concerns and checks are recorded.

Standard Three – Allocation, service provision and closure

This standard requires that where a child is identified as being in need councils provide a service appropriate to their level of assessed need. Closure is only considered following a full analysis of need and such action is deemed to be in the child's best interest.

There were 2254 open cases at 31 January 2004. No cases were unallocated. It continues to be the case that cases are only closed following a full review of the child's circumstances. Decisions are routinely recorded and counter-signed by managers. In some cases the child's views were not recorded. The use of chronologies in children's cases is improving but it remains the case that not all children have a chronology on their case file. A programme of senior management case file auditing has been put in place to support the existing line management auditing of case files. This provides an additional quality assurance mechanism.

All child protection cases are allocated to suitably skilled and qualified staff. This means that all staff working with children whose name is on the child protection register have a social work qualification and have completed additional, in-house Safeguarding Children training. Systems are in place to ensure that appropriate professionals from the full range of agencies are involved in planning and review meetings. Interpreters are available locally in most situations.

The protocol for children moving between councils needs to be agreed on a regional basis. Work is being undertaken between Derby and Derbyshire to achieve this. In all cases Derby retains full responsibility for children who move until suitable alternative arrangements are made. Additionally, the Social Services Department will take action to safeguard children who have recently moved to reside within Derby where the previous authority has not effectively transferred the case but is not responding to a child protection concern.

Standard Four – Guidance

This standard requires that social services has effective policies and procedures in respect of children in need consistent with local ACPC arrangements and monitors the implementation of them.

The accountability arrangements for staff working with children in need continue to be clear and understood. Up to date procedures and guidance in line with ACPC are in place. ACPC has a procedures and standards committee which reviews and updates procedures on a regular basis. Issues recently considered have been fabricated or induced illness, complex investigations, and surrogacy. The department's children in need policy and guidance has been revised following the Climbie Inquiry and re-issued to all staff.

The compliance of staff with procedural requirements is routinely monitored through supervision, child protection conferences, reports to ACPC and file audit. Additionally, ACPC now undertake multi-agency file audits. Formal ACPC arrangements for protecting children who move into the council area from overseas have not been developed. National guidance in this area has been requested. The local regional child protection manager's forum is working to develop procedures in order to improve local practice.

Standard Five – Training and Development

This standard requires that social services ensure that all staff working with children in need are suitably skilled and qualified to undertake appropriate continuing professional development.

It continues to be the case that suitably skilled and qualified staff undertake all child protection enquiries and all child protection cases are allocated to suitably skilled and qualified staff. A significant number of children in need cases (not in need of protection) are allocated to social care workers who are closely supervised. Social care workers have a range of qualifications. Managers of social care workers all have a social work qualification with one exception. This manager is now undertaking social work training.

The department has well-established system for individual personal development planning. Supervision provides a forum for the review of the learning outcomes of training and development activities. The ACPC sub-committee for education and training meets quarterly. Training opportunities and resources are now in place, although demand outstrips supply. ACPC does now have a policy and training officer in post after having been unable to fill the vacancy for two years. Derby ACPC needs more resources in order to meet the increasing demands for training and development. It is hoped that the new Safeguarding Boards that are due to replace ACPC's will have a stronger financial foundation.

All new employees receive induction. In the event that it occurs, poor performance is addressed through supervision, the Achievement and Development scheme or the Improving Employee Performance scheme. The majority of experienced staff are confident in their practice and able to express their professional views. Where staff are less confident, management support is

consistently provided.

The service has experienced retention and recruitment difficulties since the last report. The vacancy rate for the service as a whole is 23% and in many areas of the service this is improving. However, the assessment and care planning service is now carrying an unacceptably high vacancy level of 40%. This service works to meet the needs of children looked after and children on the child protection register. The numbers of children in the latter category have significantly reduced and this has impacted on the number of cases open within the service. Although the number of social workers working within the service is considerably less caseloads are at the same level as six months ago. Nevertheless, this service is under considerable pressure. A new public law protocol was introduced in November 2003 and this has significantly added to the workload requirements of social workers where cases are in the Court arena.

The aim is to reduce the number of cases per worker in order to improve the quality of the service to children. The higher rate of staff turnover creates additional demands on training and development and requires additional management time. A recruitment and retention strategy has been developed to address the staffing difficulties experienced in children's services.

Standard Six – Organisation and Management

This standard requires that social services has performance management arrangements in place within which all staff understand their responsibilities for delivering the services supported by regular supervision and appraisal.

The department was has clear written protocols for the scrutiny of case records. Supervisors consistently record their decisions following their review of the case file. This practice is required by the supervision policy and is also supported by activity reporting and audit. Arrangements are in place for senior managers to audit professional practice and supervision on a routine basis. The department has undertaken an extensive range of quality audits. For 2003/04 these included audits of children de-registered following the first review, cases presented to initial case conference over a six-month period, and a further audit of the timing of initial case conferences. A further audit of investigations where there is a specific child protection concern for a child (section 47 investigations), is planned for 2004/05.

Systems are in place to ensure that where staff are absent from work, post, emails and telephone contacts are appropriately checked and actioned where necessary. These systems are subject to regular checks. Senior managers receive monthly reports on performance, organisation and management. Additionally, a programme of senior management auditing of case files selected on a random basis has been put in place. The department has arrangements in place to monitor the impact upon service delivery of filling vacancies on a temporary basis.

Standard Seven – Governance

This standard requires that Councillors and Chief Executives have clear accountabilities for social services for children in need including arrangements for the review of policy and practice and strong scrutiny arrangements.

Children's services priorities and improvements are explicitly stated in the Council's statements of priority and operational plans for 2003/04, and plans are being drawn up for 2004/05. Resources for children in need are inadequate in some respects. Derby's budget provision for children's services has been consistently above the standard SSA and the revised FSS, Formula Spending Share. Derby has, like many authorities, suffered from the high cost of children looked after services relative to government allocation and the pressures generated by the National Care Standards Commission and independent sector foster care services.

Elements of a workforce strategy are in place in Derby, further work needs to be undertaken in the context of ever changing service demands and an increasingly complex and fluid employment market. A strategic group has been established within the department led by the Assistant Director to address recruitment and retention of social work staff. An action plan has been developed to improve the ability of the department to recruit and retain staff. A project management approach has been adopted for this work, and staff from operations, the workforce development and learning section and personnel makeup the project team.

It is current practice that where a professional from another agency expresses concern to the social services department about their handling of a particular case, the file is read and reviewed. Additionally, ACPC has introduced a procedure for resolving professional disagreements where there are child protection concerns. This has been implemented within all the agencies involved in safeguarding children within Derby.

The role of the Director of Social Services is fully compliant with Department of Health guidance and there are clear and effective lines of accountability between front line staff, service providers and the Director. The Assistant Director is making regular visits to front line staff. A quality assurance system is in place, and a quality assurance policy specifically for this area of work is being developed. This will combine the existing quality assurance measures in one document and will develop new approaches as well as refine existing ones. Performance reports are routinely made to senior managers and the Director of Social Services and regular performance reports are made to the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Commission. An area for development over the next six months is member visiting to front line reception services.

Services to children in need are an area of high priority for the Council and the department and positive performance is achieved. However staff and managers within the department along with those in other professions are not complacent and work is being continually undertaken to improve services and outcomes for children in need. This has been supported over the last six months by the development and review of the Climbie Audit Action Plan. The Social Services Department continues to strive to improve practice in the area of services to children in need by learning from research and best practice. The department has a very committed staff team who work hard, often in difficult circumstances and their efforts are to be supported and commended.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4. No other options were considered.

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Background papers:	None
Appendix one	Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. None.

Legal

2. Service to children in need are provided under the Children Act 1989.

Personnel

3. The current shortage of social work staff within the service is negatively impacting upon the department's ability to provide quality services to children in need in Derby. There is a national shortage of social work staff. Fewer people are entering the profession and a higher number are leaving.

Corporate Objectives and Priorities for Change

4. This accords with the Council's objective of **protecting and supporting people**.