

## Comprehensive area assessment: proposals for assessing local authority services for children and young people

### Background

1. Currently Ofsted, with other inspectorates, assess how services work together to improve outcomes for children and young people through Annual Performance Assessments (APA) and Joint Area Reviews (JARs). APAs and JARs of local children's services come to an end in December 2008 and are replaced by elements of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which begins on 1 April 2009.
2. Full details on the CAA can be found at (<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/consultation.asp>) and the proposals within this document need to be read alongside this consultation. In summary the CAA will focus on people and places, with inspectorates jointly assessing how well local services work together to improve outcomes for local people, and the effectiveness of individual organisations in delivering those outcomes. Assessments will draw on new national indicators (the National Indicator Set), findings from inspection and regulation, and evidence of progress against targets in local and multi-area agreements. There are two main elements to the proposed new performance framework:
  - **Area assessment (ungraded):** looking at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people and how likely they are to improve in the future.
  - **Organisational assessment (graded):** looking at the overall effectiveness of individual public bodies such as councils, in managing performance and using resources.
3. The first CAA reports will be published in November 2009.
4. The CAA consultation proposes that Ofsted will undertake a three-year rolling programme of inspection of services for looked after children and of safeguarding children and young people. Other inspection will be triggered only where the annual assessments or contributory evidence identify weakness and where effective countermeasures are not in place. The Ofsted performance profile for each council's children's services, which they are consulting on, will provide a basis for Ofsted's engagement in triggered inspection.
5. This consultation considers in more detail the Children and Young People's part of the CAA. The consultation is in two parts. The first part sets out how Ofsted propose to provide an 'annual performance rating' for each council's children's services by introducing a 'performance profile' for each local authority area. The second part sets out Ofsted's proposals for inspecting services for looked after children and for safeguarding.

### Part 1: Ofsted's assessment of children's services

1. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted are required to provide an annual performance rating for each council's children's services. This is currently undertaken through the APA process. This part of the consultation outlines what Ofsted are proposing will replace the APA.
2. To support the CAA, Ofsted proposes to develop an annually updated 'performance profile' for each local authority area, which will set out its assessment of strengths and weaknesses in outcomes and services for children and young people. It is proposed that this profile will be updated four times a year (September, December, March and June) with the first being produced in September 2009.
3. This profile will bring together judgements on the quality of inspected settings, institutions and services with an assessment of performance against a wide range of Every Child Matters indicators for children and young people. It will contain three parts:
  - **Inspected services** – this section will summarise the results of Ofsted's inspection and regulation activity within the area by looking at key judgements from the inspection and regulation of services for children and young people, such as Early Years Foundation Stage settings, fostering and adoption services, maintained schools and children's homes and colleges. Where an inspection of looked after children and safeguarding has taken place, these judgements will be included in the profile.

- **Every Child Matters indicators** – the profile will also provide a summary assessment against each of the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes, using indicators from the National Indicator Set and a small number of nationally available additional indicators as required to ensure depth and balance. Additional indicators will be drawn from existing national data, primarily collected by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Although the focus of this section is on outcomes for children and young people, service or process indicators from the National Indicator Set and elsewhere will also provide important data. These indicators not only provide a strong platform for robust judgements but will also highlight potential risks to the delivery of good outcomes in the future.
  - **Direction of travel** – a summary of benchmarked performance and trends against targets.
4. Ofsted proposes that the indicators, where appropriate, within the profile will be analysed by creating performance bands and are currently working with the DCSF to determine these bandings. To ensure that local circumstances are taken into account the profile will consider trends in local performance, make comparison with performance against local targets, averages for similar areas and the national context.
  5. These bandings will be used to identify where there are specific concerns about the well-being of children and young people. If concerns are identified this may lead to consideration of triggered inspection through one or more:
    - Targeted Ofsted inspections or other partner inspectorates
    - Specific survey's by Ofsted, such as those focusing on children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities
    - A particular focus in Ofsted institutional or other service inspections
  6. The overall annual rating will derive from the three sections of the performance profile. The rating will be subject to thresholds and the example given is that where ECM indicators for either staying safe or enjoying and achieving are in the inadequate band than this must be reflected in the overall rate. The following may also be taken into account in the overall rating: improvement over time, comparison with similar areas and performance against local area agreement (LAA) targets. The annual rating will be reported by letter to each council in November each year.
  7. The Quarterly profile will also be the backbone of Ofsted's contribution to the CAA organisational and area assessment, and as such the annual rating will be included within the CAA organisational assessment, published in November each year.
  8. As part of the process Ofsted proposes that each local authority and their partners undertakes an annual area self-evaluation for children's services, that includes a commentary on the effectiveness of Children's Trusts, or equivalent, in promoting and improving the well-being of children and young people, including those in care and are in particular need of safeguarding. Ofsted will not prescribe any particular model but will provide guidance to ensure self-evaluation is rigorous. It must include information on how effectively Children's Trusts (or their equivalent) are tackling poor performance and improving well-being, raising standards of attainment, increasing efficiency and responding to users' needs. It is also proposed that this self-evaluation will be used in the three-yearly inspection cycle (see section B) and therefore it needs to contain sufficient information regarding safeguarding and looked after children so it can be used in this manner.
  9. Views of CYP that are undertaken through Ofsted institutional and service inspection and regulation takes account of service user' views will be taken into account when making overall effectiveness judgements
  10. When demonstrably robust and based on verifiable evidence, Ofsted will consider views from other agencies such as the Youth Justice Board and regional government Office Children's Services Advisers when contributing to the CAA area and organisational assessments.

**Part 2: Inspection of looked after children and safeguarding**

11. Under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004, Ofsted is statutorily required to inspect services for looked after children and for safeguarding children and young people. Currently to fulfil this obligation, Ofsted, with other inspectorates, undertake an in-depth assessment of how services work together to improve outcomes for children and young people (JAR). This part of the consultation outlines Ofsted’s proposals for the new three-yearly inspection cycle of these services.

12. In summary the proposals are:

<p>To make the approach proportionate, a short unannounced safeguarding visit to children and young people’s social care services will be carried out annually to look at thresholds, referral and assessment processes. Where this visit identifies concerns about safeguarding, the three-yearly inspection may be brought forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unlikely to be longer than a day</li> <li>▪ ‘No notice’</li> <li>▪ Typically, the visit may include speaking to the ‘duty’ manager, sampling files to consider the quality of assessments, application of thresholds, appropriateness of interventions and management oversight. In addition, through sampling a number of assessments carried out under the Common Assessment Framework, inspectors will examine how well the delivery of front line services is coordinated and integrated. In areas where there are more than five contact or referral points, inspectors will visit two or more of them.</li> <li>▪ This visit will be followed by a meeting with the Director of Children’s Services to consider the outcome of the visit.</li> <li>▪ These will be reviewed after the first year with a view to introducing an even more proportionate approach, once a baseline has been established</li> </ul>
<p>A three-yearly programme of inspection of looked after children and of safeguarding will focus directly on the experiences of children and young people and will be undertaken as a single inspection event.</p>	<p>The notice period for the inspection will be set at four weeks in the first instance but Ofsted will look at ways of reducing this further to reduce any unnecessary preparation.</p> <p>This inspection will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case tracking a sample of CYP</li> <li>▪ Meeting with some CYP to listen to their views on living in and receiving care, in issues relating to safeguarding and the extent to which their views are taken into account by the independent reviewing officer</li> <li>▪ A consideration of the annual self-evaluation outlined in Part A as part of the three-year inspection. Therefore, this must contain sufficient detail on safeguarding and looked after children to support</li> <li>▪ A consideration of the evidence of outcomes for children and young people who are receiving commissioned services to judge whether the LA has commissioned services effectively and is providing value for money</li> <li>▪ Ofsted propose to involve senior managers more directly in the inspection process and as part of the consultation are requesting particular ways in which LAs believe Ofsted should involve managers in the inspection process</li> <li>▪ Ofsted currently send out an annual questionnaire to children and young people in some regulated settings such as children’s homes, and their parents and carers, asking them about their experiences of the services they have receive. They propose to continue to develop this and results will be analysed and used to assist in inspection planning and making judgements.</li> <li>▪ Additional fieldwork will only be undertaken if:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are gaps in evidence to make robust judgements</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence is not available from another source</li> <li>▪ It is the most efficient way of gaining additional evidence</li> </ul>
Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Whilst results of the annual visit will be made available, it is not proposed that judgements made during the annual fieldwork are graded.</li> <li>▪ For the three-yearly inspection, a report will be written that contains graded judgements and recommendations for improvement. There will be two grades – one for safeguarding and one for looked after children. The grades will be based on a four point scale (outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate)</li> </ul>

13. Ofsted have also outlined the areas in which they intend to report on in relation to these areas. These are as follows:

Overall Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the overall effectiveness of the services in improving outcomes?</li> <li>▪ What is the capacity of the services to improve?</li> <li>▪ What do services need to do to improve? Recommendations will be targeted at services, partnerships and the local authority.</li> <li>▪ Are leadership and management effective in improving services and outcomes?</li> <li>▪ Is the well-being of the children and young people promoted sufficiently and are their views valued? Particular attention will be paid to whether children and young people are safe and feel safe.</li> </ul>
Looked after children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the overall effectiveness of the services in improving outcomes?</li> <li>▪ What is the capacity of the services to improve?</li> <li>▪ What do services need to do to improve? Recommendations will be targeted at services, partnerships and the local authority.</li> <li>▪ Are leadership and management effective in improving services and outcomes?</li> <li>▪ Is the well-being of the children and young people promoted sufficiently and are their views valued? Particular attention will be paid to whether children and young people are safe and feel safe.</li> </ul>
Safeguarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ children are safeguarded and protected</li> <li>▪ child welfare concerns are identified and responded to appropriately</li> <li>▪ safeguarding children is prioritised</li> <li>▪ agencies and professionals work together to safeguard children</li> </ul>

14. Ofsted is working with the other inspectorates to determine their involvement in this inspection programme.

15. Findings of the three-yearly inspections of looked after children and safeguarding will provide significant evidence for CAA. Similarly, findings from the annual CAA will in turn guide the scoped and extent of three-yearly proportionate inspection of looked after children and safeguarding ie. proportionality means variation in the breadth and scope of inspection fieldwork according to the needs to the local area.

**Next Steps**

16. This consultation remains open until 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008. A report on the responses to the consultation will be published on the Ofsted website during January 2009

17. Ofsted will develop these proposals in more detail over the coming months and undertake pilot inspections from January 2009.