

Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

Salford City Council

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Lead inspector: Robert Hackeson HMI

Age group: All

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Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children

The inspection judgements and what they mean

1. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding	a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good	a service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate	a service that meets minimum requirements
Inadequate	a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

2. The overall effectiveness of the arrangements to protect children in Salford is judged to be **adequate**.

Areas for improvement

3. In order to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people in Salford, the local authority and its partners should take the following action.

Immediately:

- review front line management capacity and practice in the referral and initial assessment team (RIAT) to ensure that:
 - referrals are effectively risk assessed to include consideration of historical information and information held by relevant partner agencies
 - management decision making is consistently appropriate, timely and supported by a clear written explanation
 - assessments are tracked to ensure that agreed actions are carried out promptly and children are seen at an early stage
 - assessments are timely and accurately identify risk and need
- ensure that strategy discussions are timely and consider full information from all relevant agencies and that, where appropriate, this leads to effective plans for undertaking section 47 enquiries that are tracked by managers
- ensure that children's plans are formulated promptly, are specific, measurable and time bound, and are regularly reviewed and developed so that interventions are timely and based on current risk and need

- ensure that there is robust contingency planning so that both professionals and parents have a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved, by when, and what the consequences of not achieving this are
- ensure that case recording is up to date and is analytical, includes observations of interactions with, and the views of the child, enables the progress of the case to be understood, and supports purposeful intervention
- ensure that supervision is reflective and challenging and leads to improved practice
- conduct robust and regular qualitative auditing of child protection processes including through the thematic audits.

Within three months:

- investigate why referrals and re-referrals to the children's social care service remain high.

Within six months:

- ensure that the views of children and young people subject to child protection and safeguarding services are systematically sought and used to develop services
- ensure that systematic consideration of equality and diversity is established within the work of Salford Safeguarding Children Board.

About this inspection

4. This inspection was unannounced.
5. This inspection considered key aspects of a child's journey through the child protection system, focusing on the experiences of the child or young person, and the effectiveness of the help and protection that they are offered. Inspectors have scrutinised case files, observed practice and discussed the help and protection given to these children and young people with social workers, managers and other professionals including members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Wherever possible, they have talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have analysed performance data, reports and management information that the local authority holds to inform its work with children and young people.
6. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements for identifying children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect; and for the provision of early help where it is needed. It also considered the effectiveness of the local authority and its partners in protecting these children if the risk remains or intensifies.
7. The inspection team consisted of four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), one Additional Inspector and one inspector seconded from a local authority.
8. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Service information

9. The city of Salford is part of Greater Manchester, lying to the west of the conurbation. Salford's total population is 234,000 (Office for National Statistics [ONS] interim mid-year estimate 2011). There are 53,800 young people aged 0-18 living in Salford and this accounts for almost a quarter (22.94%) of the resident population. Salford is becoming increasingly diverse, with about 14% of the population estimated to be from an ethnic group other than White British (ONS experimental population estimate 2009) - a significant increase on the estimate of 7% in 2001. The largest ethnic groups are Black African. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is 11.3%, which is below the national figure.
10. Salford contains areas of significant deprivation. It is the 18th most deprived district in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010) and over 14,000 children live in poverty. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is 28.1%, considerably above the national average. Residents experience marked differences in quality of life linked to where they live within the city.

11. All contacts and referrals to children's social care are managed through the referral and initial assessment team (RIAT) which is centrally located in Swinton. The service has a dedicated screening team which oversees contacts that are referred from professionals and the public. In addition, three assessment teams, the missing from home service and staff from the early intervention and prevention service (EIP) and Greater Manchester Police are co-located with the team. This co-location enables multi-agency decisions to be made with quality information sharing between agencies. Longer term work is undertaken by six children in need/child protection teams which are centrally located. A quality assurance team in the safeguarding children and quality assurance unit allows for independent scrutiny and challenge.

12. Early help for children and young people in Salford is provided by the local authority through the EIP service. Services are provided in a number of ways and through a range of settings, including eight main children's centres supported by a further nine satellite centres, which serve communities across the city. Locality teams are now based on site with children's centres to ensure that those families most in need of support receive early help in a coordinated way. The centres facilitate family assessments, family group conferences, supervised contact and parenting programmes. These are in addition to the health services, education, housing, skills and learning services which are available.

Overall effectiveness

Adequate

13. The overall effectiveness of local authority arrangements for the protection of children is adequate. At the time of this inspection Salford City Council was subject to an improvement notice issued by the Secretary of State for Education in 2010. Previous inspections and serious case reviews had identified significant weaknesses in practice and service delivery which presented major challenges for the council and its partners to overcome. Overseen by the Safeguarding Improvement Board, an extensive programme of work has been undertaken over the past two years to ensure that child protection services are no longer inadequate. While progress was initially slow the pace of improvement has increased during 2012. Progress is now being made in all areas and the foundations are in place for further improvement.
14. The council has prioritised support for children's social care services in a continuing climate of financial austerity with a significant and sustained increase in funding. The social care service has been restructured with additional social workers and managers appointed ensuring sufficient staff to meet local need. The workforce strategy has improved recruitment and retention, and staffing at the front line in the social care service is now stable with few agency staff employed.
15. Senior managers, key elected members and partners have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in children's services. The senior management team is effective and capable of sustaining the improvements in child protection and early intervention services. There is now good partnership working at the strategic level. Careful integrated planning is now driving sustained improvement in systems and management arrangements. Partner agencies report confidence in front line child protection services over the past six months.
16. The Salford Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) is meeting its statutory responsibilities adequately. It has an appropriate business plan with suitable priorities and its subgroups are operating effectively. Under the leadership of the current independent chair, a good level of challenge is offered and the activity of the SSCB is now focused on work that is beginning to make a difference, such as the audit of safeguarding compliance across agencies.
17. The quality of practice in the EIP service is consistently good with children, young people and families reporting positively on the effectiveness of help. Assessments using the common assessment framework (CAF) are of high quality and include good assessment of risks. Children missing from education are protected well while effective partnership working has led to a significant reduction in children missing from home. Thresholds for

access to social care services are clear, although referral rates remain high despite an overall downward trend since April 2011.

18. In social work teams the quality of practice is improving but remains variable. In the long term children in need/child protection teams practice is adequate overall with some examples of good work leading to improved outcomes for children and families. Caseloads are manageable, supervision is regular and service managers exercise strong oversight. Use of legal meetings at an early stage and close monitoring of all child protection plans in place for more than one year are helping to avoid drift. The introduction of independent chairs for child in need reviews has strengthened the oversight of this work and has supported the reduction in the number of children on child protection plans. However there are still cases where children have been on child protection plans for too long and case planning is an area for development in both child protection and child in need cases. The quality of practice within the RIAT is improving significantly from a very low base, but remains inconsistent. This part of the service is the main priority for improvement. No children were identified by inspectors as at immediate risk of harm during the inspection.

The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers

Adequate

19. The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people and their families and carers is adequate. Good EIP services provide timely and effective help to children, young people and families. Services are comprehensive in range, responsive to the needs of localities, reflect good commissioning and link very strongly with children's centres and schools. This leads to service provision being effectively matched to need with improving outcomes for families who access these services. Co-located teams comprise a range of accessible and skilled professionals who achieve good outcomes for children, young people and families. Children's centres provide outreach work which engages vulnerable families well. Good profiling of need successfully informs and improves the effectiveness of early intervention. Children's centres are improving the well-being of families through strong partnerships, in particular with health and EIP teams, and in the delivery of culturally sensitive services. Schools have taken greater responsibility for early intervention and prevention which is improving the timeliness of access to early help for families, although some schools still refer to the social care service too readily.
20. Children and young people missing from education are protected well through effective partnership work applying clear policies and procedures.

There is tenacious tracking of children's whereabouts and good support upon their return to school. Effective inter-agency communication and joint interventions have led to a significant reduction in children going missing from home. Awareness of child sexual exploitation is increasing and robust plans are in place to improve identification and response. Significant work is being undertaken to improve awareness of private fostering arrangements, though the number of notifications remains low.

21. The RIAT is improving significantly from a low base but there remains some concerning variation in the effectiveness of help that families receive from this service. Prompt screening of referrals leads to timely decisions and where children are at immediate risk of harm this is recognised and action is undertaken to ensure that children are appropriately protected.
22. In several RIAT cases examined by inspectors the assessment process lacked robust management oversight and, for example, some families have been subjected to repeated assessments without being provided with the help they need. On occasions, delay in undertaking visits to children, holding strategy discussions or completing assessments leads to drift in assessing risk and meeting needs. In some cases the absence of clear plans leads to a lack of purposeful intervention. In other cases delays in transfer to the long term teams impede the progress of plans.
23. Substantial improvement in the recruitment and retention of social workers has resulted in children and families now experiencing greater stability of support. A well-established group of independent chairs of child protection conferences provides further consistency. However, past practice still impacts on capacity in that many families have previously experienced a poor service from children's social care which has made them less willing to engage with services, and historic failure to meet the needs of children and their families has resulted in the need for more intensive intervention.
24. Children in need meetings, child protection meetings and core groups are mostly well attended by partner agencies, and communication is adequate overall. However, in some cases the effectiveness of coordination between agencies to provide help and protection is undermined by variability in the quality of planning. Some plans are not sufficiently specific and measurable, resulting in less timely and effective interventions.
25. Some good and effective work with children on child protection plans has led to significant reductions in the risk of harm to them, leading to cases being stepped down to children in need or non-statutory services. This has already led to a substantial reduction in the number of children with a child protection plan. However, the number remains high compared with similar local authorities and, although very few, inspectors identified examples of children subject to plans where the threshold was not met.

Legal advice is sought promptly resulting in timely legal intervention to protect children when appropriate.

26. Parents accessing early help services are enthusiastic about the support they have received and the positive difference that this has made to their lives. Views about the help from children's social care services are more variable. Some parents talked about the improvements in their family situations, but others were less positive. Not all families understand why their children are subject to a child protection plan or what they have to do to ensure this is no longer needed.
27. In the majority of cases seen consideration of equality and diversity within the assessment informs planning and intervention although this is not yet consistent. There is good access to interpreters for families where English is not their first language.

The quality of practice

Adequate

28. The quality of practice is adequate. The quality of practice within early help is good. It is adequate overall within the long term children in need/child protection teams, with some good work seen. The quality of practice within the RIAT is improving significantly from a very low base, but remains inconsistent.
29. Thresholds for access to services are clear and applied well by agencies such as children's centres and most schools. RIAT generally provides good advice to agencies and the co-location of the children with disabilities team enables the duty disability social worker to advise referrers on cases of disability. Almost all referrals seen by inspectors were appropriate. However, the number of referrals and re-referrals to children's social care remains high.
30. The co-location of police officers with health and social workers in the RIAT facilitates good partnership working. Domestic abuse and other concerns receive a very timely response through daily meetings in the newly established screening team. Managers' decisions regarding the outcomes of referrals are routinely recorded but the rationale for the decision is not always clear. Although improving, some initial assessments are closed without reference to non-statutory services when this would have been appropriate. When referrals are passed to the EIP service, the quality of assessment and planning is consistently good enabling inter-agency support to be well co-ordinated.
31. All section 47 enquiries are carried out by qualified social workers. Where children are at immediate risk of harm appropriate action is taken. However, strategy discussions are not always timely and do not consistently consider historical information or information held by other

relevant agencies. Records of strategy discussions often do not evidence effective planning of section 47 enquiries.

32. The timeliness of assessments has improved, though performance is still below that of similar local authorities. The timeliness of initial child protection conferences is good with the majority undertaken within 15 working days. The quality of assessments is improving but still variable and some assessments in the RIAT were of poor quality. Assessments do not always effectively analyse all information and robustly identify risk and need. For example in several cases there was insufficient assessment of significant adult males within the child's life. Although children are routinely seen during assessments, their views and experiences are not consistently captured. Some good assessments were seen, particularly in the long term teams.
33. CAFs and reviews sampled are of good quality, take good account of child and family needs and assess and manage risk well. There is strong consideration of ethnicity, culture, language and disability needs. Good use of a scoring tool enables families to assess their own progress and informs further interventions well. Although recording of the views of children and families is a relative weakness, much work takes place to involve them fully in decisions that affect their lives. CAFs are subject to rigorous audit and review that secure consistent quality and co-authoring with partners has helped to improve the quality of assessment. Schools generally use the CAF well to secure timely access to multi-agency support. While schools overall champion the use of CAF, a few remain reluctant to adopt this approach. Team around the child (TAC) meetings work well to secure planned outcomes and are subject to systematic review by practice managers. These are attended well by partner agencies. A clear protocol and procedures that include weekly transfer meetings support the transfer of cases from social care to EIP services. However, transfer procedures are not always followed by children's social care.
34. Continuity of social workers is improving. The establishment of the joint children in need/child protection teams has reduced the number of case transfers. Children also benefit from a more stable workforce at practitioner and manager level. Social workers visit children regularly and generally know the children and families well, but recording does not always reflect the quality of the work undertaken. Recording is not consistently up to date in the RIAT and in some cases is of poor quality. Recording is generally better in the long term teams. Chronologies are now being routinely undertaken and their quality is improving.
35. Legal advice is promptly sought and legal planning takes place at an early stage. In cases where the threshold for legal intervention is not met clear contingency arrangements are put in place. Children in need and child protection plans are not consistently specific and measurable and do not

always include clear contingency planning. The management of review conferences and core groups is variable although good examples were seen, such as where conference chairs prompted other agencies to provide information on children's views.

36. There is good collaborative partnership working with a wide range of services involved with families. In many cases agencies work well together and offer effective support. Multi-agency meetings such as core groups take place regularly and are well attended by partner agencies but the quality of the reports submitted remains variable.
37. The council recognises that the participation of children within the child protection process is underdeveloped. Children's views are not always effectively reported at child protection conferences. No advocacy service is in place to facilitate children and young people's participation in child protection conferences. Work on evaluating children's experiences of the child protection process is now being undertaken.
38. Supervision is regular and valued by staff who have good access to managers and advanced practitioners. Social workers who spoke to inspectors said that increased stability of managers had led to improvements in morale due to better and more consistent management support. Staff report good challenge and reflection in supervision, but this is not reflected in recording, which does not demonstrate a focus on quality and performance. In the RIAT clear guidance is given to social workers about action to be followed but there are often no timescales for completion and some assessments of insufficient quality are signed off. Management oversight is good within early help and adequate within the long term teams.

Leadership and governance

Adequate

39. Leadership and governance arrangements are adequate. Senior managers, key elected members of Salford Council and leaders of partner agencies now demonstrate an effective understanding of the business of child protection. They have made good use of support such as the peer review in September 2011 and the separate peer challenge in May 2012. Clear strategies and appropriate business plans are in place to improve multi-agency commissioning and the delivery of child protection and early help services.
40. Formal reporting arrangements and accountabilities at senior levels within the council and between partner organisations are clear. Information sharing between key partners in the Children's Trust Board (CTB) and SSCB is effective. The SSCB is meeting its statutory responsibilities adequately and progress is being made. The independent chair who took up post in September 2011 has started the process of accelerating

improvement and there is now a clearer board structure. Business arrangements are now more efficient, with a culture of challenge among partners and a focus on board activity that makes a difference, such as the work with partner agencies to improve the understanding of roles and responsibilities for safeguarding.

41. The Salford safeguarding strategy sets out the context clearly and lists 21 priorities, all of which are appropriate. The 2011/12 Annual Report has not yet been signed off although the draft describes well the activity, achievements and key priorities for 2012/13. The performance management sub group has completed a thorough section 11 audit, a specific multi-agency audit of safeguarding, and has developed a detailed integrated performance report framework. There is good commitment by all partners to the work of the Board and the capacity of partners is sufficient to meet the work plan of the sub groups.
42. The SSCB recognises that inclusion of the voice of the child is an important area for development. Young people are currently being asked how they can best contribute their views and best practice models are being examined. Systematic consideration of equality and diversity including disability is not yet established within the work of the Board.
43. SSCB training is good, incorporating learning from serious case reviews, the Child Death Overview Panel and multi-agency audits. Improvements in the accuracy of data and the reliability of management information have supported improved performance. Detailed performance management reporting is well established at different levels within children's social care operationally and strategically using a score card approach and regular monthly monitoring meetings. In a number of areas performance shows improvement. However, some core child protection indicators, such as repeat referrals and the number of children subject to child protection plans, remain high against regional and national figures.
44. As part of quality assurance development there is a significant level of file audit activity undertaken by a large pool of auditors including senior managers. The focus of this activity has been on improvement of compliance with basic practice standards, and there have been notable improvements in recording, in particular in the completion of chronologies. However, audits are not yet routinely evaluating the quality of work or the outcome and effectiveness of intervention on the child's journey. Focused thematic auditing is not yet embedded.
45. The local authority and its partners understand areas of strength and areas needing further improvement. There is strong evidence of confidence in the council, particularly in the children's services senior management group. The view of partners is that they have the capacity to sustain and build further on the progress they have made in making services safe for children in Salford. This confidence is based on a number of examples where patient and detailed work has improved the reliability

of management systems and practice performance at the front line. Representatives of partner agencies now express confidence in the improving contact, referral and assessment arrangements and describe a more consistent application of agreed thresholds.

46. Senior and middle managers generally exercise thorough management oversight of practice. However, current inconsistencies in the management oversight of cases in the RIAT are leading to some insecure decision making and drift in interventions. This is not apparent in the children in need/child protection teams. Senior management and the Lead Member are actively promoting a culture of challenge, support and improvement and a move away from a blame culture. Robust action has been taken in the past two years to address poor performance and where necessary to use capability and other procedures decisively. Staff responding to the children and young people's service wellbeing survey reported that senior managers were not visible within the service. As a result, a number of initiatives have been put in place to successfully raise the profile of the leadership team.
47. Complaints and compliments are analysed effectively and findings are aggregated thematically to enable learning and development and to provide and inform annual reporting. The views of children, young people and parents are generally sought in individual casework. There is evidence that children are being seen regularly and, where appropriate, seen alone. Children and young people's attendance at child protection conferences is too low and this is acknowledged as an area for development. The collective views of children and young people engaged with child protection and safeguarding services are not consistently or systematically sought and used to develop services. However the SSCB has started to develop a response to this shortfall.
48. Training and development opportunities are good and newly qualified staff in particular are positive about the support they receive. Most social workers interviewed show good morale, positive regard for their line managers and describe consistent and appropriate support and challenge. Some examples were provided of reflective and challenging supervision although this is not yet consistent. Recording of formal supervision is taking place although there is too much inconsistency in its content, quality, and evidence of direction and guidance.
49. The council has gone through a long and difficult process to develop and implement its workforce strategy, affected by recruitment processes. Establishing a permanent and stable workforce with good staff morale has been a high priority. This has now largely been achieved although in some teams permanent appointments to key posts were only made earlier this year. A conscious 'grow our own' approach carries additional pressure to support high numbers of newly qualified or relatively inexperienced staff. Managers recognise that a range of supportive training and development

approaches are still needed to build consistent standards of practice and professional confidence among this group of staff.

Record of main findings

Local authority arrangements for the protection of children	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
The effectiveness of the help and protection provided to children, young people, families and carers	Adequate
The quality of practice	Adequate
Leadership and governance	Adequate