

Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities

2 June 2003



Audit of Services to Children In Need in Durham in Response to the Practice Recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Enquiry

Report of Peter Kemp, Director of Social Services

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present in outline, the outcome of the audit of services to Children in Need in response to the Victoria Climbié enquiry following the publication of Lord Laming's Report at the end of January 2003.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Laming enquiry was commissioned following the death in February 2000 of 8-year-old Victoria Climbié, at the hands of her carers. The Report of the enquiry was published in January 2003. 48 of the 108 Social Care recommendations were directed towards Social Services.
- 2.2 Reports have been submitted to CMT on the 4th February and the 8th April outlining the recommendations of the Laming Report and the specific implications for the Social Work staff who work with vulnerable Children in Need.
- 2.3 The Government's immediate response to the Laming Enquiry was to audit child protection practice nationally. A comprehensive audit framework was devised to enable Councils with Social Services responsibilities to audit their position in relation to the practice recommendations of the Victoria Climbié enquiry report. Performance criteria are provided which are directly linked to statutory requirements and guidance.
- 2.4 The Council is expected to address areas of weakness taking account of Lord Laming's timescales where relevant in order to determine the requisite improvement activities. The timescales are three months (effective 30.04.03) and six months (effective 30.07.03). The Final Report was submitted to the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) on the 30th April. This report highlights Durham's proposed Summary Response.

2.5 The SSI will evaluate the completed audit framework alongside evidence already available from performance information, the Children's Inspection in 2001, the Joint Review in 2002 and the Position Statements and Quality Protects MAP 02/03. The analysis of the audit return will be shared with the Council and then performance managed through the SSI. The evaluation of the audit will be used as evidence in the Star Rating process later this year.

2.6 The audit is structured within seven standards relating to:

1. **Referral**
2. **Assessments**
3. **Allocation, service provision and closure**
4. **Guidance**
5. **Training and development**
6. **Organisation and management**
7. **Governance**

Local Authorities are asked to make judgements taking account of the robustness of the systems and procedures in place and where appropriate the adequacy of resources. The summary judgement in terms of overall effectiveness as outlined below in relation to each standard is graded as follows:

1. **Serious Concerns**
2. **Mainly satisfactory, but with some concerns**
3. **Satisfactory**
4. **Very effective.**

3. **The Position in Durham**

3.1 A Comprehensive Child Protection Audit was carried out in Durham during March and April of this year. This was preceded by two previous audits in 1998 and 2000. The 2003 Audit was scheduled prior to the publication of the Laming Report and the Government's decision to audit Child Protection Services nationally. The methodology used in Durham's Audit was therefore a combination of issues arising from the 'Safeguarding Children Inspection' (a joint Inspectorate Report published in October 2002) and those arising from the practice recommendations of the Victoria Climbié enquiry.

3.2 The audit involved the scrutiny of 87 children's cases across the County and covered cases from within:

- The Children in Need Teams
- The Emergency Duty Service
- The Disabled Children's Team

- 3.3 A summary of Durham's performance together with the key actions points is listed below.
- 3.4 A comparison with previous Child Protection Audits is attached and highlights the significant positive changes in performance that have occurred over the last four years.

4. Durham's Response to the Climbié Self-Audit Framework

- 4.1 This audit has been compiled through discussions within the ACPC, respective fieldwork teams and through the Children's Services Management Team. In addition a complimentary audit is being completed by Health Partners and the Police. The outcome of all three Audits will be presented to the ACPC.

STANDARD 1 - REFERRAL

Durham's assessment of our overall effectiveness of referral and initial response system is 2 - Mainly Satisfactory, but with some concerns.

The recent Child Protection Audit indicates that procedures, systems and compliance are robust and improving. However the following concerns were identified with planned remedial action in place:

- The effectiveness of Social Care Direct (The Social Services Call Centre established 17.02.03). As the first point of contact for all services this requires an Interim Review to address some critical teething problems in respect of the service provided to Children's Services, although the systems and procedures are robust in themselves. Work is underway to address these issues.
- The current reliance on manual tracking systems to verify how the Department responds to referrals from first point of contact together with the collation of unmet need requires amendments to the existing IT systems.
- The significant vacancy picture within the Children in Need Teams directly impacts on the capacity of the Children's Branch to allocate work that is **not** deemed to be of 'serious concern'. This is being actively addressed by the Department's HR strategy and the specific actions taken to improve our market position. Early signs are promising in relation to the changes that have been made to the salary structure for front line practitioners.

STANDARD 2 - ASSESSMENT

Durham's Assessment of our overall effectiveness of Assessment Systems and Practice for Children in Need is 2 – Mainly Satisfactory, but with some concerns.

This standard covers our assessment systems, allocation, supervision processes and communication with users and between professionals.

The recent Child Protection Audit indicates that the Assessment systems are robust and compliance good especially in relation to Child Protection and that compliance has improved over the last two years. However the following concerns were identified with remedial action in place.

- Compliance in respect of recording decisions on files in relation to Children in Need. Although there is evidence of communication between manager and social worker this is not always recorded on the files.
- Staff receive regular supervision however these sessions are not always recorded on SSID - The Management information Database.
- All assessments are informed by the Department of Health Assessment Framework for Children in Need. However our performance figures are undermined by data entry difficulties as well as workload capacity issues. Both these issues are being tackled by a range of initiatives. The Child Protection Audit indicates the quality of assessments is sound.

STANDARD 3 - ALLOCATION, SERVICES PROVISION AND CLOSURES

Durham's Assessment of the Overall Effectiveness of our Allocation, Service Provision and Closure Systems is 2 – Mainly Satisfactory, but with some concerns.

Durham has well-established Allocation and Children in Need procedures and the recent Audit demonstrates the generally high level of compliance within the teams. The systems are complemented by the Child Care Co-ordinators who have for some years now provided the independent reviewing and quality assurance arm of the Children's branch. However although we are able to report that all Child Protection and Children Looked After cases are allocated there are unallocated Children in Need cases. Undoubtedly the vacancy factor within the Children in Need Teams impacts on our effectiveness, which will also be undermined by high workloads.

STANDARD 4

Durham's Assessment of the Overall Effectiveness of our Policies and Procedures of Children in Need is 2 – Mainly Satisfactory, but with some concerns.

Durham has clear Policies, Procedures and an Accountability Framework that was recognised by the Joint Review Team. However although we have protocols in relation to vulnerable children from overseas, more work is needed to ensure that these are refined and fully implemented.

STANDARD 5 - TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Durham's Assessment of the Overall Effectiveness of our Training and Development Systems is 2 - Mainly Satisfactory but with some concerns.

Although Durham is able to ensure that Child Protection work is only handled by suitably trained and qualified staff and that a robust Recruitment and Retention strategy is in place; the vacancy picture inevitably impacts on the team capacity to address all Children in Need work and to release staff for training opportunities and to meet compliance with Post Qualifying (PQ) requirements. These shortfalls are being addressed by the development of a model of casework and task responsibility within the Children in Need Teams that best employs the range of skills available. This is also complimented by our 'grow your own' strategy and will lead to a cascade system of case responsibility and commissioning tasks which enables the safest use of Social Work Assistants.

STANDARD 6 - ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Durham's Assessment of our overall effectiveness in relation to the Performance Management arrangements is 2 – Mainly Satisfactory, but with some concerns.

Durham has some highly competent and experienced managers on the front line. Although our Performance Management systems are robust, inevitably compliance is compromised by the vacancy profile, the use of temporary and agency staff and the implementation of new systems within Social Care Direct. However all these issues are being addressed as highlighted above. In addition the requirement to audit case files on supervision will be reinforced along side the re-launch of the Aiming for Excellence framework.

STANDARD 7 - GOVERNANCE

Chief Executives have clear accountabilities for the provision of Children in Need including arrangements for the review of policy and practice and strong scrutiny arrangements.

Durham's assessment of the overall effectiveness of our Governance arrangements is 3 – Satisfactory

In the last two years there has been significant investment in Children's Services in recognition of long standing service deficits. This investment is reflected within the Children's Invest To Save strategy. Within the Department there is a clear accountability framework in place with regular reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny. The proposed extension to the role and function of the Corporate Parenting Panel to include Children in Need will meet the requirements of the Laming Recommendations in relation to Governance. There are a number of well established systems in place to facilitate communication between senior managers and front line staff through the establishment of Managing the Future Seminars, an unannounced programme of visits by the Director of Social Services and Head of Service to Teams and bi-monthly Branch Management meetings. The Front Door duty system is subject to review and work will take place to further develop the capacity within the branch to move towards a 24/7 model of service.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The overall position as reflected in Durham's Audit is sound in spite of workload pressures and the vacancy picture.
- 5.2 The SSI will evaluate the audit alongside evidence that has already been submitted by the Department and the outcome of this evaluation will be reported to CMT in due course.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Scrutiny Sub-Committee is asked to consider the outcome of the Audit of Services.

7. Background Papers

The Laming Enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié – CMT
4 February 2003.

The Laming Enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié - workload
implications for Durham – CMT 8 April 2003.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance	There may be financial implications associated with meeting the practice standards, and the infrastructure proposals of the report. Not yet assessed.
Staffing	The impact of new guidelines on caseload size and the responsibility of front line staff and managers are being assessed.
Equal Opportunities	Access by the public in referring child protection cases 24/7 and the capacity of the department to respond will need to be addressed.
Accommodation	None.
Crime and Disorder	Relationships with police and crime and disorder agencies will need to be reviewed.
Environment	None.
Human Rights	Findings will impact on the rights of the child to protection and to safeguard from harm.
Localities	None.
Young People	The safeguarding of children and young people from harm is a key priority in implementing the Climbié report.
Consultation	Extensive consultation will be required once the Minister of State has responded to the recommendations of the report.