

Improvement support in local authority children's services judged as requires improvement

Inspectors' handbook

Guidance for social care HMI carrying out improvement support in local authorities where children's services have been judged as requires improvement.

This guidance is designed to assist Ofsted inspectors in their work. It describes the main activities that inspectors undertake to provide improvement support to local authority children's services. Those working in local authorities can use the guidance to see how inspectors will provide improvement support.

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Introduction

1. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) believes that all children who use children's social care services are entitled to a good or better quality of service. Where local authority children's services are judged as requires improvement or inadequate, Ofsted will consider offering a range of improvement support to enable standards to rise. Ofsted inspectors lead this improvement work.
2. This guidance is designed to assist Ofsted inspectors in their work. Local authorities and professionals working with children and young people and their families can use it to see how improvement support will be conducted. Ofsted is committed to ensuring that all guidance used by inspectors is published.
3. Ofsted will use its powers under schedule 13 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which enables Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to provide 'advice or assistance for other public authorities'. The purpose of this work is to support local authorities to achieve and sustain good or better standards of service for all children and young people who use them. Ofsted has no powers to enforce improvement work so local authorities who take up the offer of support do so voluntarily unless they are required to by the Secretary of State using powers of direction or an improvement notice.
4. The improvement support comprises two key strands. Strand 1 (set out in this document) is targeted at local authorities judged to require improvement. Strand 2 is aimed at those judged to be inadequate. Although each strand begins with a common element – the improvement planning seminar – the strands then diverge to better meet the needs of each type of authority. All inspectors should be familiar with both strands and apply them rigorously.
5. This strand has five core components:
 - notification of the inspection judgement and the improvement offer
 - the improvement planning seminar
 - the improvement plan
 - a series of 'getting to good' seminars
 - a review of the impact of the 'getting to good' seminars.

Notification of the inspection judgement and the improvement offer

6. At the end of the fieldwork phase of an inspection, if it is likely that the local authority will be judged to require improvement, the **lead inspector** should:
 - alert the **regional director and senior HMI** (SHMI) to the provisional judgement
 - remind the Director of Children's Services (DCS) that the **regional director** will formally write to invite the local authority to host an improvement planning seminar once the judgement is confirmed through the quality assurance, moderation and factual accuracy checking processes.

Improvement planning seminar

Background

7. Ofsted will offer all local authority children's services judged to require improvement an opportunity to host an improvement planning seminar. Local authorities are not compelled to accept this offer. However, if they decline, the responsible **regional director** will inform the Director of Children's Services (DCS) that this decision will become part of Ofsted's risk assessment process – an integral part of the inspection planning cycle. In cases where the local authority has been judged inadequate, Ofsted will formally notify the Department for Education's (DfE) inspections and interventions team so that it can decide on the content of any subsequent advice to ministers.
8. The improvement planning seminar is hosted by the local authority that has been inspected. It takes place between 25 and 35 days after publication of the inspection report, and is attended by:
 - the inspection's lead inspector
 - senior HMI (SHMI) based in the local authority's region
 - six to eight participants from the local authority, including:
 - senior managers of the local authority children's services
 - where appropriate, key partner organisations that the DCS chooses to invite.
9. As the seminar is concerned with the work of children's services professionals, elected councillors should not be invited to attend.

10. The purpose of the seminar is to give local authorities and their partners a comprehensive understanding of the inspection judgements. This enables the local authority to fulfil its statutory responsibility to develop a 'written statement of action' (commonly referred to as the inspection improvement plan), which it must submit to the Secretary of State and HMCI within 70 days of the publication of the inspection report. This responsibility is set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007, Paragraph 3.
11. Ofsted has produced an improvement planning seminars pack containing four key documents:
 - an advice note on the process to be followed
 - a draft letter to the DCS (see Annex A)
 - an outline programme for the improvement planning seminar (see Annex B)
 - a record template for the improvement planning seminar (see Annex C).

Planning

12. Responsibility for the seminar is shared between the inspection **lead inspector, the SHMI and regional director** in the region where the local authority is located. It is important that they communicate well throughout the process to ensure the best possible outcome. At the end of the fieldwork phase of an inspection, if it is likely that the local authority will be judged to require improvement, the **lead inspector** should:
 - alert the **regional director and SHMI** to the provisional judgement
 - remind the DCS that the **regional director** will formally write to invite the local authority to host an improvement planning seminar once the judgement is confirmed through the quality assurance, moderation and factual accuracy checking processes.
13. Immediately after publication of the inspection report, if the judgement of requires improvement is confirmed, the **regional director** should formally write to the DCS inviting him/her to host an improvement planning seminar. The seminar should take place between 25 and 35 days after the inspection report's publication date (the template for this letter is at Annex A). This letter should be copied to:
 - the lead inspector
 - the regional SHMI
 - the National Director, Social Care.

14. To help the local authority set a date for the seminar, the regional **SHMI and HMI should advise the regional director** of their availability within the 25- to 35-day window so that these dates can be included in the letter of invitation.
15. **Once the DCS has replied to the regional director agreeing to host a seminar**, the **regional director** should immediately confirm the date with the DCS and the copy recipients of the original letter of invitation. The **lead inspector** should immediately ask **scheduling colleagues** to set dates for preparing (one day) and presenting (one day) the seminar. At the same time the lead inspector should also notify the **inspection and management support team supervisor** of the date of the seminar. This will generate an amendment to the return date for the evidence notebook on the inspection tracking system to a date five days after the seminar.
16. **If the DCS declines the invitation to host a seminar**, the **regional director, SHMI and lead inspector** should agree a further approach to try to persuade the DCS to change this decision. They should consider who is best placed to hold the discussion and the 'lines to take'. This discussion will be sensitive and will need to strike a balance between:
 - persuading the DCS of the benefits of the seminar in helping to develop the improvement plan
 - informing the DCS that Ofsted will weigh the significance of the refusal when considering the timing of the next inspection.
17. Should the meeting achieve the desired effect and the DCS agrees to accept the invitation, the process described in paragraph 15 should go ahead without further delay. Where no agreement can be reached, the **regional director** should make an entry on the single inspection framework (SIF) SharePoint site for the relevant authority: <http://teams/sites/FH-IST/SLAC/Forms/Local%20authority.aspx>.

Preparation

18. The **SHMI and lead inspector** will agree the priorities and content of the inspection report that they wish to emphasise in the seminar. These may be areas of contention that arose during inspection, or areas where it was evident that the DCS and his/her team did not appear to fully understand or accept the relevance of the issue when it was fed back. It is important that the lead inspector and SHMI have a full grasp of the issues and the evidence that underpins them, and are fully prepared for the challenging debates that can arise. For this reason, it is recommended that lead inspectors and SHMI arrange the preparation time sufficiently in advance of the seminar date.
19. The lead inspector's presentations should not replicate inspection feedback. They should be concise, helpful and targeted at the key issues that need to be

discussed. They should inform debate with and between seminar participants so that participants can use the material to develop their improvement plan. The lead inspector should enter a summary record of the evidence presented to the seminar into the appropriate section of the record of the improvement planning seminar.

20. The **SHMI and lead inspector** should discuss the agenda and focus for the seminar with the DCS before the event. This gives the DCS an opportunity to state any areas that they want the seminar to focus on. It is important that the tone of these discussions affirms that the event is 'owned' by the local authority, notwithstanding that the lead inspector and SHMI will make major contributions. It is therefore important to reinforce this by agreeing that the DCS will introduce the event and set out its purpose, which is to enable the lead inspector and the senior HMI to:
 - present the priorities and key recommendations of the inspection report in more detail
 - enter into informed discussion with the participants so they can be fully aware of:
 - the evidence that supports the recommendations
 - the priorities for action
 - the detail that underpins any areas about which the local authority remains uncertain.

21. Some local authorities will have an early draft of their improvement plan (or parts of it) by the time this discussion takes place. It is helpful if this document is shared with the lead inspector before the seminar to assist planning. (It should be noted that early drafts of improvement plans are accepted as 'work in progress' and are not to be responded to formally in accordance with the statutory requirement set out in paragraph 10.) Following discussions with the DCS, **the lead inspector and SHMI** should compile and distribute the final agenda for the seminar (where possible five working days before the seminar), suitably adapted to match local need. A draft agenda is at Annex B.

Attendance

22. Attendance should be limited to a small number of senior managers from the local authority and, where appropriate, partner agencies, together with senior officers of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. However, based on the experience of the inspection, it is important that the lead inspector and SHMI have a clear view of who should be present. The lead inspector should probe for reasons if there is an indication that an invitation is not likely to be extended to key professionals who on the basis of the inspection would appear to have an important role to play. The absence of key participants without good reason can affect the quality of the final improvement plan.

23. The seminar is aimed at professionals working in children's services; therefore councillors are not to be invited. If necessary, the DCS can brief them separately on the outcome of discussions. The **lead inspector/SHMI** should encourage the DCS to apply the following 'rules' when inviting people to the seminar:
- all participants should be senior managers **and** have the ability and authority to commit their agencies/organisations to the action in the final improvement plan
 - they should have a specific contribution to make to one or more of the inspection report's recommendations and priorities.

Process

24. As the event is largely based around discussion, information-sharing and debate, it is important that it follows the structured agenda sent to the local authority in advance. It is important to recognise that the seminar is an integral part of Ofsted's improvement offer to local authorities that are not yet good. As such, a record of the event should be formally recorded by the **SHMI and signed by the SHMI and HMI** using the document 'Record of improvement planning seminar' (Annex C). The SHMI should upload a copy of this record to the SIF SharePoint site for the relevant authority: <http://teams/sites/FH-IST/SLAC/Forms/Local%20authority.aspx>. The SHMI should also send it to the DCS, **copied to the National Director, Social Care.**

Improvement plan

Background

25. Local authorities have a maximum of 70 working days from the date they receive their inspection report (the effective date of publication) to submit a 'written statement of action' (the local authority improvement plan) to the Secretary of State and HMCI. This action is required irrespective of the inspection judgement. The requirement is set out in legislation in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Inspection of Local Authorities) Regulations 2007, Paragraph 3. Complaints about the conduct or findings of the inspection do not affect the date for submitting the improvement plan. However, HMI and SHMI will be sensitive to the circumstances.

The post-inspection process

26. At the inspection feedback meeting, the SHMI present should remind local authorities that they are responsible for producing a post-inspection action plan when setting out the detail of the stages leading to publication of the inspection report. The inspector should draw their attention to the relevant section(s) of the SIF where this requirement is set out.

27. At pre-publication reporting stage, the letter from Ofsted's inspection management support (IMS) team that accompanies the pre-publication copy of the inspection report will include the legal requirement to submit an improvement report. It will also give the submission date and set out the address for reply. A copy of this letter will be sent to the lead inspector and the responsible regional SHMI.
28. The details will be entered on the 'inspection tracker' maintained by IMS. They will send a further email to the local authority after 50 days if the improvement plan has not been received by that date, following confirmation by the lead inspector and SHMI that they have not received copies by another route.
29. It is advised that the lead inspector and the regional SHMI maintain their own record of key dates to enable them to manage their time appropriately.
30. **Once IMS have received the post-inspection improvement plan** they should upload it to the SharePoint library for the single inspection and notify the lead inspector, regional SHMI and the National Director, Social Care accordingly.
31. The lead inspector will review the post-inspection improvement plan as soon as possible after receipt to check that it properly and sufficiently reflects the detail of the recommendations contained in the inspection report. Ofsted is not responsible for 'signing off' the improvement plan, as this is the responsibility of the DCS. Ofsted should not imply that it approves any areas of the improvement plan not contained within the scope of the inspection.
32. If the lead inspector is satisfied that the content of the improvement plan reflects the inspection, they should send a letter to the DCS confirming this (see Annex D).
33. If the improvement plan fails to properly reflect or address the priority areas for action or the areas for improvement set out in the inspection report, the lead inspector and/or the SHMI should set out in writing the areas of difference (see Annex E). They should discuss the areas of disagreement with the DCS in order to achieve a satisfactory resolution, involving the regional director and the National Director, Social Care if necessary. If they achieve a resolution, they should send a letter confirming this (see Annex F).
34. If they are unable to resolve the differences, the SHMI and lead inspector will respond in writing to the DCS setting out the area(s) of difference and the evidence-based reasons for their concern (see Annex G). In the same letter they will inform the DCS that the regional director and the National Director, Social Care will be fully appraised in writing of the concerns and the associated evidence.

'Getting to good' seminars

35. Four seminars will run at least once and usually twice annually in each Ofsted region. When it is practical and efficient to do so, regional directors will take the opportunity to combine seminars and run them for two regions at once. Detailed advice for SHMI and HMI on arranging and presenting 'getting to good' seminars is in Annex H.
36. Each seminar looks at an area of practice that has contributed significantly to the 'requires improvement' judgement across many inspection reports. The content of the seminar brings together contemporary research, inspection and survey findings. It is developed by HMI and approved by the National Director, Social Care. Specialist HMI update the content each year, or more often when legislation or guidance changes or is introduced. The National Director, Social Care also evaluates the findings of inspection reports each year. This review usually takes place in December and as a result the National Director will commission extra seminars for the next financial year when required and decommission any that are no longer needed.
37. Ofsted organises and pays for the seminars (see Annex H, seminar preparation, for details). Its regional children's services departments (or equivalent) host each event for a maximum of five (and exceptionally six) local authority areas that have been judged to require improvement. Where space permits, Ofsted will invite other local authorities in the region when it can be shown that they will benefit. It will give priority to local authorities judged to be inadequate; thereafter, those that are good or better can be invited to participate. Seminar attendees should be at senior management level, with responsibility for overseeing implementation of the improvement plan and sufficient authority to change its content in light of what is learned at the seminar. Local authorities will be able to invite suitably senior representatives of partner organisations to join the seminars.

Evaluation of the 'getting to good' seminars

38. Each seminar will follow a three-stage process designed to establish the impact of 'getting to good' seminars on the local authority's approach to securing improvements in its services.
 - Stage 1 – participants are asked to evaluate the seminar immediately afterwards, using Ofsted's standard evaluation form (see Annex I).
 - Stage 2 – the regional SHMI has a formal and structured conversation with the DCS approximately six months after the seminar. This conversation, using standard questions, will establish the extent of the seminar's impact on improvement planning and delivery. The SHMI will formally record the responses and key points from the discussion on the related form (see

Annex J). The SHMI will send a copy of the completed form, as a formal record of the meeting, to the DCS within seven days of the conversation.

- Stage 3 – after the next full inspection report is published, the National Director, Social Care scrutinises the improvement plan and the findings, judgements and recommendations of the report to identify any evidence of the impact of seminars on the quality of service that children and young people receive.
39. Data from seminar evaluation exercises will be aggregated and used to inform an annual report to HMCI about the effectiveness of the social care improvement offer to local authorities that require improvement. It will also be used to identify areas where improvements can be made to the content and process of individual seminars.

Quality assurance

40. Quality assurance of a seminar is the individual responsibility of the SHMI and HMI who contribute to it. Each seminar makes a significant contribution to local authorities who are working to achieve and sustain good standards. As a consequence, it is vital that all HMI and SHMI are knowledgeable about their subject, fully conversant with the seminar pack and appropriately prepared to lead the seminar. Similarly, regional staff responsible for organising seminars will be fully prepared and efficient.

Complaints

41. Ofsted anticipates that the great majority of seminars will be conducted without any concerns. If concerns do arise during a seminar, the presenting inspector will consider the concern and do everything possible to remedy the problem at the earliest opportunity. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the inspector's response, the presenting inspector should ensure that the complainant is fully informed of the procedures for making complaints and take steps to refer the matter appropriately. The complainant will be made aware of Ofsted's complaints procedure, which is available at:
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure.

Annex A. Draft letter to the DCS: improvement planning seminar

The regional director should send this letter to the DCS and copy it to the National Director, Social Care as soon as the inspection report is published. Please cut and paste the letter on to the regional letter template.

Dear (director)

Inspection of (name of local authority): improvement planning seminar

You will be aware that as part of Ofsted's support to local authorities judged to **(require improvement/be inadequate)**, we now offer an improvement planning seminar. We would like to invite your authority to participate in this offer. The seminar is targeted at you and your senior leaders, together with **(in inadequate authorities only** the improvement board chair and your link person from the DfE's inspections and intervention team) colleagues from partner agencies and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

We normally expect the seminar to take place between 25 and 35 working days after publication of the report. In your case this means between **(enter dates)**. **(If the lead HMI/SHMI has preferred dates enter them here.)** Although as host of the event the attendance list is for you to decide, our experience suggests that it should be limited to those who will have a direct contribution to make to improvement in your authority and who have the authority to do so (approximately six to eight attendees). As this event is targeted at senior managers, councillors should not be invited, although they can be briefed by you on the outcome of the seminar at a later stage.

The purpose of the seminar is to enable the lead inspector and senior HMI to present the key priorities of the inspection report in more detail before entering into informed discussion with you and your delegates to:

- ensure you are fully aware of the evidence that supports our recommendations and the recommendations we see as priorities to address
- clarify any areas about which you are still not certain.

The seminar will take approximately three hours and will focus on discussion. We are confident that it will be helpful and directly relevant to the work that you are undertaking to finalise your improvement plan.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that you agree to your authority participating in this improvement offer activity, the options for dates that you can accommodate and your proposed list of attendees. I shall look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

(name of regional director)

cc SHMI, HMI and National Director, Social Care

Annex B. Draft programme for improvement planning seminar

Session 1: 9.30–9.45 – Welcome and introductions

(Activity: Input by DCS)

Purpose:

- set out the content and objectives of the seminar
- establish the basis for future improvement activity, the importance of an improvement plan which is prioritised with clear arrangements for delivery and evaluating its effectiveness
- clarify the respective roles, responsibilities and activities of Ofsted and the DfE.

Session 2: 9.45–10.30 – Understanding the inspection findings and final judgements

(Activity: Input by lead HMI and group discussion)

Purpose:

- set out the evidence underpinning the final judgements, including the findings in respect of 'front-line' practice, management oversight, leadership (political and professional) and the experiences of children, young people and families
- explain the purpose and significance of recommendations in the context of the three key judgements
- set out the implications for statutory partners, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Session 3: 10.30–11.00 – What does 'good' look like?

(Activity: Input from SHMI/HMI and discussion about what this means in this particular local authority)

Purpose:

- set out Ofsted's evidence and criteria for 'good' in each key judgement area and share good practice and evidence from stronger authorities
- describe whether and how children, young people and families benefit from good services in the authority and draw on evidence to identify where there is a shortfall in service quality and the extent of that shortfall

- begin to consider the skills, experience and qualities of leaders, managers and practitioners needed to develop good services and use discussion to relate this to the local area
- set out the contributions of statutory partners and other professionals in good local authorities.

11.00–11.15 – Break

Session 4: 11.15–12.00 – Understanding the performance challenges

Purpose:

- understand the complexity of the judgement and identify barriers to change
- agree the findings and accept the challenges of improvement
- begin to articulate the priorities for change and the capacity needed to make it happen.

Session 5: 12.00–12.30 – Identifying improvement priorities, evidence measures for change and leadership responsibilities

Purpose:

- agree three to five core improvement priorities and associated performance measures, using both quantitative and qualitative data
- set out management oversight, accountable leads and sampling to test improvement (including changed front-line practice)
- agree initial timescales, improvement strategy (including relationship with Ofsted HMI/SHMI and (in inadequate authorities only) improvement board work).

12.30–12.45 – Summary of improvement planning and next steps

Purpose:

- review the expectations in respect of next steps, the preparation of the written response to the inspection in the form of an improvement plan and timescales for submission.

Close of seminar.

Annex C. Record of improvement planning seminar

> INSERT NAME OF LA <

1. List of attendees:

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2. Evidence presented to support explanation of recommendations and priorities:

(The presentation is prepared by the lead HMI. The evidence can be set out as bullet points but must draw on specific evidence for the Summary of Evidence and Analysis (SEA) and the inspection report to illustrate and reinforce the points being made.)

3. Details of discussion:

(Should be compiled contemporaneously by the SHMI. Areas of continuing disagreement between the inspection findings and recommendations should be particularly noted.)

4. Details of agreed interpretation of recommendations or priorities:

Improvement planning seminar discussions may lead to agreements about how recommendations and priorities are to be addressed in the improvement plan and subsequent improvement work, but Ofsted should not prescribe how this is to be done. It is important that any agreed variation from the report's recommendations and priorities are recorded together with the reasons.)

Agreed and signed by Ofsted HMI and SHMI:

Date of record:

Annex D. Letter to DCS after receiving a satisfactory post-inspection improvement plan

(This letter will be required in all cases irrespective of inspection judgement. It will be sent by the regional director and copied to the National Director, Social Care and in inadequate authorities only to the link person in the DfE's inspections and intervention team.)

Dear (name of DCS)

Inspection of (name of local authority): improvement plan

Thank you for sending me a copy of your local authority's improvement plan dated (enter date). I can confirm that the plan satisfactorily reflects the recommendations and priorities of the inspection report (to be included in letters to LAs judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate only) and incorporates the outcome of discussions at the improvement challenge seminar that took place on (enter date).

(for good and outstanding local authorities only) I shall look forward in due course to hearing about the impact of the improvement plan on the quality of services that children and young people receive.

(or for local authorities that require improvement or are inadequate and have accepted the improvement offer) As you know Ofsted will track the progress of your improvement plan as we proceed through the improvement offer and we shall discuss its impact on children and young people at key stages throughout the process.

Yours sincerely

(name of regional director)

cc SHMI, HMI and National Director, Social Care and in inadequate authorities only the link person in the DfE's inspections and intervention team

Annex E. Letter to DCS after receiving an unsatisfactory post-inspection improvement plan

(This letter will be required in all cases irrespective of inspection judgement. It will be sent by the regional director and copied to the National Director, Social Care and **for inadequate local authorities only** to the DfE inspections and interventions team.)

Dear **(name of DCS)**

Inspection of **(name of local authority)**: improvement plan

Thank you for sending me a copy of your local authority's improvement plan dated **(enter date)**. I write to advise you that the plan does not satisfactorily reflect the recommendations and priorities of the inspection report **(to be included in letters to LAs judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate only)** and in the following respects fails to incorporate the outcome of discussions at the improvement challenge seminar that took place on **(enter date)**.

(Draft paragraph to clearly but succinctly set out the areas of disagreement and the potential impact if they are not addressed)

I have asked the lead inspector **(enter name)** to have a further discussion with you as soon as possible to establish whether it is possible to achieve a reconciliation of our divergent views. I shall look forward in due course to hearing about the outcome of this discussion. I will be grateful to receive a copy of the improvement plan if any amendment is made following this discussion. Upon receipt I will make arrangements to write to you again.

Yours sincerely

(name of regional director)

cc SHMI, HMI and National Director, Social Care and **(for inadequate authorities only)** DfE inspections and interventions team

Annex F. Letter to DCS after receiving a satisfactorily updated post-inspection improvement plan

(This letter will be sent by the regional director and copied to the National Director, Social Care and **for inadequate local authorities only** to the DfE inspections and interventions team.)

Dear **(name of DCS)**

Inspection of **(name of local authority)**: improvement plan

Further to my letter of **(enter date of letter following receipt of unsatisfactory improvement plan)** I am pleased that your discussion with **(enter name of HMI who had further discussion with DCS)** enabled us to reconcile our divergent views about particular aspects of your improvement plan.

Following receipt of the updated plan, I can now confirm that it satisfactorily reflects the recommendations and priorities of the inspection report **(to be included in letters to LAs judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate only)** and incorporates the outcome of discussions at the improvement challenge seminar that took place on **(enter date)**.

(for good and outstanding local authorities only) I shall look forward in due course to hearing about the impact of the improvement plan on the quality of services that children and young people receive.

(or for local authorities that require improvement or are inadequate only) As you know Ofsted will track the progress of your improvement plan as we proceed through the improvement offer and we shall discuss its impact on children and young people at key stages throughout the process.

Yours sincerely

(name of regional director)

cc SHMI, HMI and National Director, Social Care and **(for inadequate authorities only)** DfE inspections and interventions team

Annex G. Letter to DCS following a failure to reconcile differences of view over post-inspection improvement plan

(This letter will be sent by the regional director and copied to the National Director, Social Care and **for inadequate local authorities only** to the DfE inspections and interventions team)

Dear **(name of DCS)**

Inspection of **(name of local authority)**: improvement plan

Further to my letter of **(enter date of letter following receipt of unsatisfactory improvement plan)** I am disappointed that your discussion with **(enter name of HMI who had further discussion with DCS)** did not enable us to fully reconcile our divergent views about particular aspects of your improvement plan **(to be included in letters to LAs judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate only)** and in the some respects fails to incorporate the outcome of discussions that took place at the improvement challenge seminar held on **(enter date)**.

I would wish to take this opportunity to set out the areas where we have failed to reconcile our divergent views. **(Set out clearly but succinctly the areas of continuing disagreement and the potential impact if they are not addressed.)**

Ofsted is concerned about this situation and I have asked my colleague **(enter name)**, the National Director, Social Care, to make contact with you to discuss these issues further. I shall also take steps to ensure that the areas of disagreement are the subject of discussion between us when we meet at our regular Ofsted/local authority liaison meetings. I am sure you will agree that it will be important to monitor the impact of the course of action you are embarking on through our normal discussions and inspection to ensure that it does not adversely affect the quality of services that are received.

(For local authorities judged to be inadequate only) I am copying this letter to **(enter name of link in DfE inspections and interventions team)** so that **(he/she)** will be able to consider whether this matter should be included in the advice provided to the minister as part of the improvement notice process.

Yours sincerely

(name of regional director)

cc SHMI, HMI and National Director, Social Care and **(for inadequate authorities only)** DfE inspections and interventions team

Annex H. Advice note to regional directors and SHMI

Managing regional 'getting to good' seminars for local authority children's social care

All local authorities judged to be 'requiring improvement' (to get to good) in their SIF inspection judgement will be invited to participate in up to four 'getting to good' seminars. These will usually be run twice annually in the region where the local authority is located. This advice note sets out the process to enable the regional SHMI to effectively manage and oversee the process.

Annual activity for SHMI

Each regional director (RD) and SHMI should include an item relating to the proposed programme of 'getting to good' seminars on the agenda of a suitably scheduled liaison meeting with regional directors of children's services. This should become a standing agenda item to be discussed at the meeting for the following year. It is proposed that the meeting should take place at least three months before the first seminar to allow sufficient time for arrangements to be made.

At the regional meeting, RDs and SHMI should ask local authorities to volunteer to host a seminar, which includes providing a venue and a named contact with whom regional Ofsted colleagues responsible for organising the seminars can liaise. Ofsted will arrange the seminars, provide the materials and meet the costs of the seminar (see also the seminar preparation section below).

To prepare for the regional meetings, the SHMI should develop a draft timetable of the national seminar programme. This should take into account inspection findings and recommendations to enable informed discussion between SHMIs, regional directors and the National Director, Social Care about priority ordering of seminars. A short paper setting out the incidence and significance of findings that led to the 'requires improvement' judgement could be prepared and circulated before the meeting to participant DCSs. It is possible that the children's services sector will also be offering similar support to local authorities. The SHMI will take that information into account when planning and timetabling the seminars to avoid subject duplication and scheduling clashes.

The annual programme of regional seminars should be confirmed in writing and circulated to all regional DCSs, indicating the seminars to which they will be invited. The HMI lead for individual seminars, who will be the main presenter, should be identified by regional SHMIs at the earliest opportunity to allow adequate preparation time. Scheduling colleagues should also be notified at the first opportunity to enable work programming to proceed with minimal disruption.

SHMI will use their regional knowledge of the reasons why authorities require improvement or are inadequate to help the National Director, Social Care to

commission new seminars or decommission existing ones. National lead inspectors will be responsible for updating seminars with changes in legislation, new research material and learning from inspections, including thematic inspections, once per year or more frequently if required.

Post-inspection activity

The SHMI should ensure that lead inspectors inform them of all proposed SIF inspection judgements of 'requires improvement' for overall effectiveness that relate to local authorities in their region. The SHMI should liaise with the lead inspector and agree which seminars should be offered to the DCS of the inspected local authority. Blanket invitations to all regional seminars should be avoided. Instead, invitations should be extended according to need identified in the inspection report.

Seminar preparation: advice for conference and seminars team

The RD and SHMI are responsible for finalising the programme of seminars, and regional colleagues will support the organisation and logistics for the seminars .

As soon as the seminar programme and locations are agreed, the SHMI should notify the nominated regional support team member, providing details of the local authorities to be invited to each seminar (usually five and exceptionally six local authorities to each). Notifications should be at least three months in advance.

The nominated support team member will write to the DCS using a standard letter format inviting up to five nominations from each local authority area. A delegate list will be compiled and the seminar support team member will check back with the SHMI if there is a doubt about eligibility of individual attendees. Nominees should be senior managers with responsibility for, or a close connection with, the subject matter of the seminar. Council members should not attend seminars.

Once the delegate list is agreed, the support team member should notify delegates of the date and venue of the seminar and give notice that a formal invitation with conference details will be issued no later than 15 working days before the seminar.

The support team member will contact the nominated local authority liaison person at the earliest opportunity to discuss the venue details (for example, size of room, layout, PowerPoint facilities, reception arrangements for delegates) and to agree the arrangements for providing materials and refreshments at Ofsted's cost.

Once conference details are confirmed, a formal invitation to delegates, together with the seminar timetable, participant evaluation forms and joining instructions, will be agreed by SHMI and issued by the support team member at the first available opportunity, but at least 15 working days before the seminar.

Individual seminars: SHMI management responsibility

Regional SHMI are accountable, with HMI, for the effective delivery of each 'getting to good' seminar. In order to conduct effectively targeted seminars, SHMI will ensure that HMI have enough preparation time and are sufficiently knowledgeable about the subject matter. SHMI should be familiar with all aspects of the seminar content, which will be available to them in full. They will have ensured that the final content best meets the particular improvement objectives of participants.

Each seminar will have a contribution from a DCS or appropriate senior manager with direct experience of either leading an authority to good or expert subject knowledge relevant to the seminar topic. RDs and SHMI will together identify the local authority senior manager concerned and agree briefing and liaison arrangements.

Regional SHMI will normally support the presentation of 'getting to good' seminars (delivered by HMI) by contributing to discussion, group exercises and feedback. Apart from the introductory session, it will not be usual for SHMI to be required to make formal inputs to the seminar.

Following the improvement seminar the SHMI will implement Ofsted's seminar evaluation process to establish the effectiveness and impact of seminars.

Annex I. 'Getting to good' seminars: participant evaluation form

1. Date and location of the event that you attended
.....
2. What is your organisation name and local authority if applicable?
.....
3. What is your position/job title?
.....
4. How useful was the event in developing your understanding of common factors in organisations that don't improve and those that do?
 Very useful Quite useful Not useful
5. How useful was the event in helping you to identify priorities for improving your own organisation or those that you work with?
 Very useful Quite useful Not useful
6. Overall, how useful do you think the event will be in helping your organisation, or those that you work with, to improve?
 Very useful Quite useful Not useful
7. What key actions will you take as a result of attending this event?
8. How well presented and delivered was the event?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor
9. Was the tone of the event appropriately challenging, given the needs of your organisation or those that you work with?
 Too challenging Appropriately challenging
 Not challenging enough Not challenging at all
10. How good was the administration/organisation of the event?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor
11. Are there any comments you would like to make about any aspect of the event?

As part of the longer-term evaluation Ofsted's improvement events, we may invite you to provide further feedback following attendance at this event. If you are happy to be included in a post-event survey, please provide your email address:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

Annex J. Record of discussion between DCS and SHMI: impact of 'getting to good' seminars

Name of local authority:

Title of seminar: Date of seminar:

Record of discussion between DCS and SHMI:

- key learning points from the seminar
- actions taken in response
- detail of amendments to improvement plan
- evidence of impacts
- outstanding issues.

Name of SHMI:

Name of DCS:

Signature of SHMI:

Signature of DCS:

Date:

Date: