



Every child matters:  
inspecting services for  
children and young people

Discussion with stakeholders:  
summary of responses

September 2004

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# Proposals for inspection of children's services: summary of responses to the May 2004 discussion document

## Introduction

1. Proposals for discussion on an integrated approach to the inspection of children's services were published in May 2004. At this time, the work on developing an integrated approach was still at an early stage. It was important, however, to open up the debate so the views of stakeholders could be taken into account in shaping the proposals further.
2. The discussion document has been widely circulated and placed on internet websites. Four conferences for stakeholders were held in May and were attended by about 550 senior officers from local areas. A questionnaire was devised to capture responses on particular issues on which the steering group wanted responses.
3. This report summarises the discussions at the four stakeholder conferences which were attended by some 550 senior managers from a variety of local services and the 130 written responses which have subsequently been received. About half the local authorities in England provided written responses. 140 local authorities made either a written response or sent at least one representative to one of the conferences.
4. The responses have been discussed by the steering group for the inspection of children's services. A summary of the main actions to be taken in the light of the responses is included at the end of this paper.
5. Further stages of consultation with stakeholders, including events for children and young people, are taking place in autumn 2004.
6. Subject to the passage of the Children Bill, the formal consultation on the framework for inspection of children's services will begin in November. Associated with this will be consultation on arrangements for joint area reviews and annual performance assessments of council education and social care functions.

## **Part A: responses at the stakeholder conferences**

7. Generally, the proposals were welcomed as a good start. Participants identified the potential represented by a move towards a coherent and efficient system of inspection and assessment. The collaborative approach of the inspectorates was widely noted. The fact that the consultation was taking place at an early stage and on a large scale was itself appreciated.
8. However, a number of concerns about the proposed arrangements emerged in all the conferences. In some cases it was hard to distinguish whether these were focused on the proposals for inspection themselves or on the implementation of policy arising from *Every child matters* which inspection would be testing.
9. The main issues raised are grouped under 12 headings.

### ***Working together***

10. There was some scepticism over how effectively inspectorates would work together in practice. It was felt that there was a good deal to be done in terms of harmonising working practices between the inspectorates involved. Differences in terminology, grading systems, quality and quantity of performance indicators, interpretation of criteria and general approach were cited as potential barriers to collaboration. Stakeholders feared finding themselves on the receiving end of problems resulting from these, such as duplication of information requests and potentially conflicting judgements. There was a feeling that the collaborative approach should be enshrined in a formal principle.

### ***Profile of health***

11. It was generally thought that health services needed to be given a higher profile, equal to that of education and social services. The number of health-related outcomes needed to be increased and more robust performance indicators needed to be found. The roles and responsibilities of Primary Care Trusts needed to be clarified and integrated better into the arrangements.

### ***Focus on outcomes***

12. The need to focus on outcomes was understood and welcomed, but the approach was seen as problematic in various respects:
  - the outcomes defined in Appendix 2 of the document were often viewed as overly aspirational
  - reliable performance indicators which could provide a clear measurement of progress on an annual basis were seen as thin on the ground
  - tension was perceived between the wide range of the outcomes and accountability: would it really be possible for inspectors to apportion responsibility for the current outcomes to local services? It was regularly pointed out that much of the responsibility for them lies with people and organisations over whom authorities have little or no control – including,

for example, parents and carers, schools and general practitioners, and the voluntary and private sector. Many participants wished to see a clearer role for the voluntary sector (including independent schools) embedded in the process.

### ***Vulnerable groups***

13. There was some difference of view about how the coverage of vulnerable groups should be organised. Many felt that these should be selected by the local authorities in relation to the local context. The selection of two groups to be covered in every authority was felt by some to contradict the principle of differentiation. A number of other possible categories of vulnerable children were mentioned, such as children in transition.

### ***Focus on weaknesses***

14. The current proposals appeared likely to focus too much on weaknesses. Stakeholders wished to see evidence that good practice would still be highlighted. It was felt that the dissemination of good practice was an important role of inspection.

### ***Local context***

15. It was felt that local context and circumstances needed to be taken more into account in the proposals. Factors such as the size of the local authority, the nature of its population, local politics and issues could influence aspects of the inspection, such as the number of members of the inspection team, the expertise represented within it and the decision to focus on particular vulnerable groups.

### ***Timescales***

16. The proposed timescales for joint area reviews were seen by some as too optimistic. Stakeholders felt that the time and resources they would need in order to prepare themselves and their data adequately for the process would be difficult to find. Some senior managers worried that this could lead to excessive pressure on front-line staff which would have the potential to exacerbate existing staffing difficulties.

### ***Inter-relationship between joint area reviews and other inspections and assessments***

17. There was felt to be a lack of clarity over which inspections were to be subsumed by the joint area review and how it would relate to other processes such as the National Service Framework for children's health and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). In this and other respects, there was some doubt about whether the intention to rationalise and reduce inspection, assessment and audit would be delivered in practice.
18. Opinions about how corporate assessments and joint area reviews should be sequenced varied, with each option being preferred or rejected by different groups. Options 1 or 2 were the most favoured by a narrow margin.

### **Boundaries**

19. Participants at each conference raised the issue of boundaries, pointing out that service boundaries are often not coterminous with council boundaries. They expressed concern that children who used services across such boundaries could be overlooked in the proposed system.
20. While participants thought that the 'neighbourhood studies' approach was potentially worthwhile, a clearer definition of 'neighbourhood' was called for.

### **Consulting with children and young people**

21. It was felt that more use could be made of the local authorities' own existing methods of consulting with children and young people and that the involvement of the voluntary sector would be valuable in reaching traditionally hard-to-reach groups. Some were concerned about the relative weighting that could be given to the views of individuals, given the case-tracking approach, and emphasised the care needed to ensure a balanced view.

### **Self-assessment**

22. While participants welcomed the idea of self-assessment, there were serious concerns about resourcing this and about the approach that would be taken. Some favoured a fairly prescriptive model with clear criteria set up by the inspectorates while others preferred a more individualistic approach which the local authority and its partners could control more.

### **Action planning**

23. More clarity was needed in terms of the accountability of managers for follow up after inspection, such as in the design and monitoring of action plans.

## **Part B: summary of responses to the questionnaire**

### **Question 1**

#### ***Do the principles provide a good basis for integrated inspection?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
1	26	23	57	17	5	128

24. It was felt that the principles were laudable but that it was the way in which they would be interpreted and implemented that would count. The focus on the five outcomes for children and listening to their views was welcomed though there were doubts as to how effectively these could be measured.
25. The following suggestions were made:

- the principles should in some way acknowledge the differences in local context
- the role of parents and carers needed to be emphasised more, and the role of the voluntary sector defined
- a commitment to minimising the burden of inspection through the use wherever possible of existing documentation should be included
- the principles should include a commitment to present a balanced picture of the strengths and weaknesses of services
- there should be further emphasis on promoting equality in general rather than focusing particularly on racial equality
- there needs to be a clear indication of how complaints will be evaluated as part of the review
- the principles should be set alongside a single overarching set of national standards for children.

### Question 2

***Are the steps proposed on the approach to the inspection of education and care settings likely to contribute to better coverage of their role in the local network of services?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
2	30	15	40	30	13	128

26. The following suggestions were made:

- the settings for looked-after, adopted and fostered children needed more coverage
- further clarification was needed on how to evaluate the contribution of independent settings
- inspections should evaluate the impact the settings have on the wider community.

### Question 3

***Annual performance assessment of council education and social care functions will both monitor improvement and provide the basis for differentiating the coverage through fieldwork in the next joint area review. Is this appropriate?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
3	32	14	38	35	7	126

27. The following suggestions were made:

- fieldwork should investigate the strengths of services as well as the weaknesses
- the services provided by organisations outside of the local authority's jurisdiction, e.g. health services, would also need to be involved and provide self-assessments in order to get the full picture for a local area
- performance assessment of services must include the views of service users
- the performance indicators and weighting given to the various pieces of evidence used to form the performance assessment need to be clarified
- local context needs to be taken into account more, with a way of benchmarking similar authorities needing to be found.

#### **Question 4**

***We propose four options in Appendix 3 for the sequencing of joint area reviews and corporate assessment. Which do you prefer?***

28. There was some confusion over whether or not the grades here referred to the good/unsatisfactory scale or to the options 1–4. This was reflected in some mismatches between the grade ticked and the subsequent comment. The comments indicated a diversity of opinions on this subject. Each of the options had its supporters and its opponents.
29. At the conferences, opinions about how corporate assessments and joint area reviews should be sequenced varied, with each option being preferred or rejected by different groups. Options 1 or 2 were the most favoured by a narrow margin.

#### **Question 5**

***Does the proposed scope of joint area reviews, as illustrated in Appendix 2 cover adequately the key services for children and young people in local areas and the way they link with one another?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
5	33	11	30	39	15	128

30. The contributions of services to outcomes defined in Appendix 2 of the document were often viewed as too ambitious. Participants felt there were not enough reliable performance indicators that could provide a clear measurement of progress on an annual basis. A concern was also expressed that the measurement of outcomes could create additional targets unless there is some rationalisation.



31. It was generally thought that health services needed to be given a higher profile, equal to that of education and social services. The number of health-related outcomes needed to be increased and more robust performance indicators needed to be found.
32. There was felt to be a lack of clarity over which inspections were to be subsumed by the joint area review and how it would relate to other processes such as the National Service Framework for children's health and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). In this and other respects, there was some doubt about whether the intention to rationalise and reduce inspection, assessment and audit would be delivered in practice. In addition, the links between these proposals and Ofsted's recently published proposals for school inspections were not clear.
33. The following suggestions were made:
  - the importance of the Children's Services Plan should be acknowledged
  - the role of the school as a potential hub of the local community should be developed
  - more emphasis should be placed on the school improvement agenda
  - the contribution of housing services should be more fully exploited
  - local authorities would like a summary of current inspections and more clarity over what the joint area review coverage subsumes
  - for the sake of clarity, the actual services covered by each criterion should be listed
  - further clear criteria would be needed to ensure a consistency of approach to the interpretation of the outcomes
  - there needed to be more measurable criteria
  - the youth offending bullets needed to be worded more positively and that youth offending teams should be included as part of the inspection
  - the role of family needed more emphasis
  - the role of play needs to be strengthened in the outcomes in Appendix 2
  - other areas such as substance misuse, domestic violence and parents with mental health problems all needed to be addressed
  - children using out of authority services were also included
  - the voluntary sector should be used to gain information on children's experiences
  - the independent sector needs to be taken into account more
  - the current list was too education focused
  - Local Children's Safeguarding Boards should be given a higher profile
  - the weighting given to the criteria should be clarified

- health in general, especially mental health, needs a higher profile
- there was a danger of losing focus on the universal by focusing too much on vulnerable groups
- further clarity was needed on how learning and skills councils Connexions and local health trusts would be held to account
- more thought needed to be given to handling boundaries that are not coterminous
- more emphasis should be given to the principle of enjoyment
- a clearer link with the safeguarding children boards needs to be established.

### Question 6

***We propose to give particular attention to joint action by local services to support those who are disadvantaged and/or vulnerable. Two groups will always be covered in detail in every review – children in care and those with special needs and/or disabilities. Do you agree with this approach?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
6	32	18	36	25	16	127

34. This question gave rise to mixed views. A majority of respondents found the proposals good to satisfactory, but there was a strong minority in disagreement, largely over the idea of selecting two vulnerable groups to be investigated in every inspection. Many felt that these groups should be selected by the local authorities in relation to the local context.
35. The following suggestions were made:
- the idea of selecting two vulnerable groups for every inspection contradicted the principle of differentiation of inspection and inspection according to risk
  - special needs needed clearer definition
  - the focus on two vulnerable groups could mean that other groups which could be deemed equally vulnerable could lose out. A number of suggestions were made as to the identity of these other vulnerable children, comprising:
    - gifted and talented
    - minority ethnic
    - traveller
    - those in transition
    - those leaving full-time education at 16
    - asylum seekers
    - those on the child protection register

- those in need of protection from abuse and neglect
  - those excluded from school
  - drug users or those with parents who are drug users
  - the homeless
  - teenage parents
  - those with mental health issues
  - those from low income homes
- there should be scope for selecting vulnerable groups to suit the local context – for example, where there were large numbers of asylum seekers, this group should become a focus
  - as no age-specific standards exist for psychiatric units or immigration detention centres, these anomalies need to be addressed.

### Question 7

***In joint area reviews, we propose to comment on features of management relevant to the effectiveness of joint working. Is the list appropriate?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
7	30	17	43	30	7	127

36. Overall the response to this aspect of the proposals was positive, with a majority of respondents deeming it good. However, tension was perceived between the wide range of the outcomes and accountability: would it really be possible for inspectors to apportion responsibility for the current outcomes to local services? It was regularly pointed out that much of the responsibility for them lies with people and organisations over which authorities have little or no control – including, for example, parents and carers, schools and general practitioners, and the voluntary and private sector.
37. The following suggestions were made:
- there should be a judgement made on each individual service and one on the effectiveness of joined-up management
  - the credibility of inspection teams will be an issue, with training seen as essential to overcome this
  - the judgement should comment on and include all key partners including district councils, drugs action teams, voluntary organisations, children's trusts etc
  - clear lines of accountability needed to be developed and set out
  - the reference to race equality should be amended to refer to equality in general
  - more focus on collaborative commissioning should be included
  - a specific reference to effective referral was needed

- diversity should also include disability
- cross-sector workforce modernisation developments such as multi-disciplinary teams should be mentioned
- the role of users' views in shaping local recruitment and quality appraisal exercises should be addressed
- more emphasis should be placed on the corporate strategy
- the role of elected members needs more elaboration
- stringent quality assurance procedures are in place to ensure a common approach across inspection teams
- more clarity was needed in terms of the accountability of managers for follow up after inspection, such as in the design and monitoring of action plans
- there should be more emphasis on performance management.

### Question 8

***We have outlined the process of the review and the timescales involved. Does the process seem practical and appropriate?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
8	40	11	29	35	12	127

38. The proposed timescales for joint area reviews were seen by some as too optimistic. Stakeholders felt that the time and resources they would need in order to prepare themselves and their data adequately for the process were simply not available to them. Senior managers worried that this could lead to excessive pressure on front-line staff which would have the potential to exacerbate existing staffing difficulties.
39. The following suggestions were made:
- more detail was needed
  - the seven-month timescale for the review process was too long
  - the timescales were too tight in general
  - every four years would be preferable to every three years
  - the fieldwork time seemed too short considering the breadth of services to be looked at
  - other inspectorates needed time to align their data to local authority boundaries
  - local authorities needed adequate time to collect the required data

- longitudinal studies need to be instigated to collate the data emerging from joint area reviews
- case files needed to be selected carefully and care taken not to allow individual cases to skew the judgements unfairly
- the pace of change was too rapid and could encourage mistakes to be made
- time was needed to learn from the pilots
- further clarification was needed on follow-up
- inspection teams should be selected once the documentation has been analysed to allow for bespoke packages tailored to the local context.

### Question 9

***We have outlined our basic approach to using self-assessment. Is this approach manageable?***

Question	Response grades				Total	
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory
9	34	7	43	31	12	127

40. The majority of responses to this aspect of the proposals were positive, with most respondents judging it good.
41. While participants welcomed the idea of self-assessment, there were serious concerns about resourcing this and about the approach that would be taken. Some favoured a fairly prescriptive model with clear criteria set up by the inspectorates whilst others preferred a more individualistic approach which the local authority and its partners could control more.
42. The following suggestions were made:
  - the process would be resource intensive
  - the number of self-assessments which are required need to be rationalised
  - a self-assessment proforma addresses the five key outcomes and aligns with the criteria for judgement
  - a robust template for self-assessment is devised with an appropriate grading system
  - some of the partner agencies might not have the necessary systems to provide a reliable self-assessment
  - it is naïve to believe that organisations will honestly rate themselves as unsatisfactory in their self-assessments and that it is potentially dangerous to rely on this
  - the self assessment must allow for differences in local context

- qualitative comments are more helpful than gradings for frontline staff
- the self-assessment should be tied in with the planning process so that frontline staff see it as a helpful procedure rather than merely an added burden
- more clarification would be needed on the weight given to self-assessment as opposed to fieldwork
- care would need to be taken in judging self-assessments accurately to ensure that an honest assessment is not judged negatively thus provoking defensive responses in future
- confidentiality/data protection issues need to be very clearly addressed and a common approach taken.

### **Question 10**

***We have indicated how we intend to seek the views of children and young people. Is the approach likely to be practical and effective?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
10	34	11	33	37	12	127

43. Responses to this aspect of the proposal were evenly split.
44. It was felt that more use could be made of the local authorities own existing methods of consulting with children and young people and that the involvement of the voluntary sector would be valuable in reaching traditionally hard-to-reach groups. Some were concerned about the relative weighting that could be given to the views of individuals, given the case-tracking approach, and emphasised the care needed to ensure a balanced view.
45. The following suggestions were made:
- there needed to be more clarity over how traditionally hard-to-reach groups of children and young people would be accessed
  - there was a danger of it being tokenistic without major inspection expenditure
  - the expertise and knowledge of other agencies such as Connexions, the youth service and the voluntary sector would need to be used
  - care must be taken to avoid too much consultation of certain groups
  - the methodology for taking young people's views into account must be made transparent
  - feedback would be needed for those consulted as to the response made to their comments

- care must be taken to obtain views which were representative rather than one individual's opinion
- it was vital that those directly involved in obtaining and interpreting children's views had the necessary training and expertise
- vulnerable/disadvantaged groups do not like to be labelled as such and care must be taken to avoid this when consulting with them.

### Question 11

***We have outlined the proposed structure of the review reports. Is this likely to inform different users while providing you with a helpful basis for improving your services?***

Question	Response grades					Total
	Ungraded	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	
11	47	7	35	31	7	127

46. The majority of responses to this proposal were in the good/satisfactory range, with a high proportion not graded.
47. The following suggestions were made:
- a summary for the general public and a more detailed report for a professional readership could be helpful
  - a grading structure should be devised to sharpen judgements
  - the report needs to make recommendations which provide a clear and unambiguous base for action planning
  - it would be helpful if the report included a section on comparative data
  - reports should comment on the quality of individual services
  - forms of graphic presentation should be used in the report.

## **Part C: response to the findings of consultation**

48. The steering group of commissions and inspectorates proposes to take the action outlined below in order to address the main points raised in the consultation.

### ***Working together***

- continue to work together to develop arrangements for integrated inspection based on the principles already outlined in the discussion document. This will include finding ways of reducing burdens and making inspection, in particular the joint area review, manageable and harmonising the approaches to inspection, review and assessment which are currently in use
- develop a multi-disciplinary training programme for inspectors so that a common approach to inspecting children's services can develop.

### ***Profile of health***

- work with the Healthcare Commission to further clarify the profile of health within the framework and to make the requirements compatible with the national service framework.

### ***Focus on outcomes***

- develop standards and criteria which demonstrate the expectations about how local services contribute to the outcomes and show the evidence on which judgements will be based
- undertake to recognise the differences in accountability for local services in the findings and recommendations of the report
- strengthen the references to the partnership with independent and voluntary sector and the contribution to commissioned services provided by the voluntary sector
- continue to seek balanced coverage of universal, preventive and targeted services.

### ***Vulnerable groups***

- devise a method for identifying vulnerable groups which are significant in any particular local context
- continue with the current approach to focus on two vulnerable groups (looked-after children and learning difficulties and disabilities) within every joint area review and also gather evidence on vulnerable groups which have local significance with the inspection of the five outcomes.

### ***Local context***

- develop a consistent set of data which can be used to describe and compare local contexts



- decide how performance indicators can be compared with other similar local areas.

### ***Timescales***

- establish September 2005 as the start date for the implementation of new inspection arrangements
- prepare a timeline for the completion of a joint area review and clearly identify requirements at each stage and talk through the requirements and manageability of the whole process with the reference group
- take account of the experience of trials in developing manageable inspection requirements.

### ***Inter-relationships between joint area reviews and other inspections and assessments***

- clarify and provide a clear statement which relates the current inspection programme with the future intentions and in doing this clarify which inspections will be subsumed into the joint area review
- work with the Audit Commission to ensure that the sequencing and requirements of joint area reviews and corporate assessment are compatible and explore closely the prospect of normally running the processes concurrently in order to maximise coherence and efficiency and reduce burdens overall.

### ***Boundaries***

- ensure that inspection criteria and the methodology for joint area reviews reflect children and young people who are in placements such as residential schools or young offender institutions outside their local area are covered
- include rates of mobility within the data which describes for inspection teams the context of the local area
- develop a detailed approach to selecting and conducting neighbourhood studies.

### ***Consulting children and young people***

- develop ways of using the findings from the local area's own processes of consulting with children and young people
- being clear in inspection criteria about how children and young people's views contribute to judgements.

### ***Self-assessment***

- define expectations of self-assessment and how it will be organised; in particular, rationalise current requirements and develop a tool which provides a structured framework for local areas to conduct self-assessment, using data, their own self-evaluation and inspection criteria as the basis.

### ***Action planning***

- include in the DfES inspection regulations and in the specification of the arrangements for joint area reviews information on the requirements and responsibility for following up the findings of inspection, including arrangements for intervention in unsatisfactory performance.