

Joint Area Review of Children's Services in Kent

November 2007

1. Introduction

Kent is soon to be subject to a Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children's Services, with inspection fieldwork taking place in early 2008. The JAR aims to assess how effectively partners work together to improve outcomes for Children and Young People, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. This briefing provides information about the process, preparations and links to other inspections.

2. Background

All authorities are subject to inspection of children's services, usually every four years, although Kent has not had a full inspection since 2000 when Education and Social Services were subject to separate inspection processes. Since then the Inspection model has been subject to frequent changes which culminated in a new rationalised methodology applied to all authorities from April 2007.

During this period a related process called the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of Children's Services was introduced in 2005. Kent County Council scored well in the first two years scoring 3s (good) for service delivery and 4s (excellent) for capacity to improve. These results have been sustained through the 2007 process.

3. The New APA / JAR Methodology

These two processes are closely related with the APA acting as a risk assessment which is used to help target inspection fieldwork during the JAR.

3.1. The APA process involves:

- Submission of a self evaluation, which this year required a review of progress against the Children and Young People's Plan. The self evaluation included a clear statement of what is being done to improve outcomes for Children and Young people, why it is being done and what impact it is having.
- This statement has been moderated and challenged by the Inspectorates making use of intelligence held by regional and national government and the grade criteria and key judgements in the Inspection framework.
- The 2007 self evaluation was submitted in the middle of June and there was a follow-up visit by Inspectors on October 4. We received a letter containing the scores and then published them in mid November. This letter indicates areas that may be further investigated during the JAR fieldwork. The scores apply to KCC, though partners are involved in the self evaluation.

3.2 The JAR methodology has been rationalised and it now focuses on specific service areas rather than all of Children's Services. It also makes judgements about performance across the partnership. Key features are:

- Five core areas investigated in all inspections - Safeguarding, Looked After Children (LAC), Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD), Service Management and Capacity to Improve. These are all scored between 1 (inadequate) and 4 (outstanding).
- Additional areas of investigation (usually between one and three) depending on the APA result and national influences. These are judged but not scored. The discretionary areas for Kent are a) Teenage Pregnancy and b) Participation and Attainment 16-19.
- An inspection of Youth Services to be carried out at the same time as the JAR, and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) inspected three weeks beforehand. The findings of the YOS inspection may influence the fieldwork carried out through the JAR inspection.
- An analysis of 10 case files held by Children's Social Services (chosen by the inspection team from a submitted list of 100) and then detailed case tracking of 3-4 cases, which is key to the final inspection outcome.
- Surveys sent to a sample of voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs).
- Fieldwork which will include visits to see frontline services and interviews with Cabinet Members, key staff, stakeholders and service users. This may include visits to some voluntary and community sector projects and services.
- An extensive dataset which is used to inform both the JAR and APA and a small scale pupil survey.

4. JAR - Milestones

November 2007	
•	26 th - publication of APA results
•	27 th - Joint set-up meeting (JAR/Corporate Inspection)
January/February 2008	
•	9 th - 11 th - JAR analysis week
•	7 th - 11 th - Corporate Inspection analysis week
•	7 th - 11 th - YOS Inspection (fieldwork)
•	28 th - 8 th Feb
	- JAR fieldwork weeks
	- Corporate Inspection fieldwork weeks
	- Enhanced Youth Service Inspection
	- YOS, Inspection findings feed into JAR
March 2008	
•	31 st - Draft JAR report sent from OfSTED to KCC/partners
June 2008	
•	3 rd - Final JAR report published