

SUMMARY GUIDE TO PERFORMANCE INSPECTIONS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Working together to improve social work services

Contents

Introduction	3
Other sources of information	5
Context	
1. Improving social work services: key issues and challenges	6
2. Responding to change	6
3. The performance inspection process	11
4. Involvement of elected members	14
Conclusion	15

Introduction

The local authority has a key role in protecting the most vulnerable members of the community and in meeting their social care needs. This includes children and young people, older people, people who have mental health problems, people with learning disabilities and people who have physical disabilities or sensory impairments. Social work services also help those who take on a caring role for others, including young carers.

The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) is working to help improve these vital public services and thereby the quality of life available to those who rely upon social work services.

It is evident from the work done in local authorities by the Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWIA's predecessor), that elected members are very eager to:

- fulfil their responsibilities for providing social work services with direction and scrutiny and
- contribute to the programme for improvement.

The programme of performance inspections in Scotland provides one of the most important opportunities for us all to join forces in achieving our common goals. For SWIA, it is a crucial mechanism for ensuring public accountability and for helping the local authority to ensure that the forces for improvement are properly aligned. Elected members can anticipate a number of benefits from a successful and collaborative performance inspection exercise.

Each inspection compares an authority's policy objectives against actual outcomes for people, who use services, and for carers. Account is also taken of external pressures and the contribution of other agencies. Analysing this information helps inspectors to determine whether key policies are working.

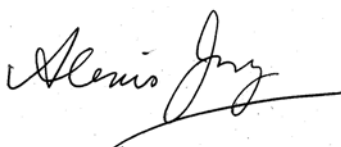
The performance inspection programme is designed to support delivery of the local authority's own improvement agenda for social work services. The inspection team works openly with members and officers to identify those changes that will improve the range and quality of social work services.

The performance inspection process does not seek to duplicate other inspection or regulatory activity, such as that carried out by the Care Commission. Rather, it is designed to deliver an overview of the

organisation as a whole and to identify cross-cutting strengths and areas for development.

Elected members can expect:

- participation throughout the inspection, reflecting their crucial roles as policy makers and elected representatives of local people;
- direct information on whether there is coherence between their policy intentions, the management of resources, and the outcomes for people, who use services, carers and taxpayers;
- a summary of the extent to which partnerships have been forged, both corporately and with other agencies;
- a presentation and report outlining the main issues and placing them in the context of the local values and priorities as expressed by elected members;
- clear evaluations about how the authority is performing in key areas of social work service provision and how its performance compares with others;
- an indication of how good practice in the authority can be consolidated and where improvements might be considered, and
- the opportunity (in responding to the inspection's conclusions) to examine their agenda for change.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexis Jay', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alexis Jay,
Chief Inspector

Other sources of information

This summary guide is intended for elected members in local authorities. It should provide you, as an elected member, with much of the information you will need to participate fully in performance inspections in:

- preparing for a performance inspection;
- engaging with the process; and
- benefiting from the results of the inspection.

There are also information leaflets about performance inspections for the general public (including people, who use services, and carers), social work services staff and for other stakeholders (including partner agencies such as voluntary organisations and other providers of social care). These are available on our website: www.swia.gov.uk.

There is also a *Performance inspection Handbook* that takes you chronologically through the different phases of the performance inspection process and the activities associated with them. This is also available on our website: www.swia.gov.uk.

Context

1. Improving social work services: key issues and challenges

As elected members, you have the primary responsibility for the performance of local authority social work services in your area. Hence you have a key role in delivering:

- the considerable government agenda for reform in the way these services are delivered;
- increased public expectations about higher standards of care and support, with services that are more responsive to the needs and preferences of people, who use services, and carers; and
- political leadership, support and scrutiny for their area of the council's work which contains inherent risks and significant statutory responsibilities.

You are required to carry out these responsibilities and to meet the challenges involved within a context that is changing rapidly. Originally, local authorities provided most services directly. They organised, managed and staffed day centres, home care services, residential and other services. Now the emphasis is on local authorities working in partnership with other agencies (such as the NHS) to plan, arrange and deliver social care in their area. Some services continue to be delivered by in-house providers but increasingly authorities purchase services such

as domiciliary and residential care from a range of providers in the voluntary and private sectors.

Changes are taking place at every level - not only at the point of service delivery but also in policy development, in inspection and regulation and within local authorities themselves - all with the clear aim of improving the quality of the experience of those who need and use public services.

2. Responding to change

This pressure for improvement has many strands:

Legislation and financial regulation

- a) Legislation such as the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 and Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2005, have imposed significant duties and obligations upon local authorities, especially in terms of being responsive to the needs of people who use services.
- b) There has been unprecedented investment in social care and the Scottish Executive expects this investment to be accompanied by reforms that will ensure service quality and value for money. Taxpayers want to know that their money is well spent. The current political and economic climate demands a combination of service improvements and efficiency savings. New monies invested in public services need to result in real benefits and better outcomes for people, who use services, and carers.

Most local authorities are finding that the demands and pressures on social work services budgets are especially volatile and difficult to control. There is a growing emphasis on priority budgeting, good financial management and understanding costs.

Regulation and inspection in Scotland

SWIA intends to ensure performance inspection is a well-integrated part of the overall programme of other inspection, regulation and improvement agencies such as the Care Commission, HMle, NHS Quality Improvement Service (NHS QIS), and Audit Scotland.

It is crucial that performance inspections are located properly within the evolving work of these agencies and complement the way local authorities are tackling the improvement agenda by means of better corporate governance (both executive and scrutiny functions), performance management, risk assessment, planning and partnerships. This includes

the need to address more holistically the links between social care and health care.

Performance inspections do not duplicate work that is already undertaken by other regulatory or inspection bodies, but SWIA will take account of the information produced by them.

National Care Standards

Under the National Care Standards Act, the Scottish Executive has set national minimum standards, covering matters such as:

- choice of service;
- planning for individual needs and preferences;
- quality of life;
- quality of care and treatment;
- staffing;
- management;
- concerns, complaints and protection, and
- the physical environment.

The Care Commission now regulates the organisations providing social care services, including private businesses and voluntary organisations. SWIA will not duplicate this work.

Local government

Local government itself has been set a challenging agenda for modernisation and for ensuring the effective management of the services for which it is responsible. The quality of social care locally is one of the major benchmarks by which the performance of a local authority is evaluated by local communities. Consequently, improving social work services has become a key corporate priority.

Working in partnership

Improving partnership and collaborative working across the public sector is a clear policy priority in Scotland. Services are increasingly delivered through partnerships that include the private and voluntary sectors. Partnerships need to work better to make a difference for people. Key partnership arrangements include:

- Joint Future partnerships between local health boards and local authorities. These provide real opportunities for partnership working in planning, commissioning and delivering the whole range of social care services.

- Integrated children's planning, which stresses the importance of working together across agencies in order to develop good quality family support services and to protect children.
- The Supporting People programme has encouraged partnerships involving local authorities and a wide range of service providers, to promote more opportunities for people who use services to live independently.
- Similarly, those people who have disabilities need to benefit from the increased opportunities for employment made available through successful regeneration partnerships.

The community leadership role of local authorities presents new challenges in the allocation of resources to priorities, promoting equality and social inclusion for the benefit of those who depend upon social work services. In delivering these local strategies, there are inherent difficulties in dealing with competing claims and conflicting interests. Effective governance arrangements and the ability to make best use of the council's capacity are vital factors in managing such demands.

Continuous improvement

As part of their own improvement agenda, local authorities are seeking to develop an improved understanding of which services work, the costs involved, the best way to provide or commission the services and how they might be delivered and managed efficiently. Not only must local government deliver quality services and a shared national agenda, it must also identify and address specific local needs and respond in an innovative way.

Stakeholder participation

People, who use services, and carers, the organisations that represent their interests, those who champion their cause within local government and elsewhere have used new mechanisms for participation (such as frameworks for planning services) to press for services that are more flexible and responsive to needs. People who use public services are less willing to accept post code variation of standards in different areas. Their expectations are increasing, with advocacy groups properly taking an active role in promoting rights to quality care, choice, flexibility and respect.

Carers help some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society. They devote considerable time and energy, physical and emotional, to these tasks. As carers gain increased rights to an assessment of their needs, public services are starting to respond to the

challenge of supporting carers in their own right and to find ways of meeting those needs.

Communities are becoming more diverse and public services need to respond better in providing services that are culturally sensitive. There is an increasing focus on equality of access and on the need to meet statutory requirements in respect of language, race, age, sexual orientation, gender, disability and religion.

The role of regulation, inspection and review

The Scottish Executive believes that external regulation, inspection, and review, independent of local authorities, has an important part to play in:

- providing assurance to the public about the safe and proper delivery of social work services and
- contributing to the improvement of those services.

SWIA is seeking to ensure that the framework for performance inspections reflects best practice and the principles set out by government that public services inspection should:

- pursue the purpose of improvement;
- focus on outcomes for people, who use services, and carers;
- take a service user and carer perspective;
- be proportionate to risk;
- encourage self-assessment by managers;
- use impartial evidence, wherever possible;
- disclose the criteria used for making evaluations;
- be open about the processes involved; and
- continually learn from experience.

3. The performance inspection process

The process consists of three phases.

Phase 1 - Pre-inspection

The first phase of the performance inspection is a broad and comprehensive evaluation in which the focus is on gathering information from a wide variety of sources, using a range of methods. For example, SWIA inspectors collate and analyse existing information about performance and send out questionnaires to a sample of staff, people who use services, carers and key partners and stakeholders. The inspection team will also spend about a week in the local authority reading a random

sample of case files. The local authority will nominate a number of their own staff to assist the inspection team with this exercise.

This is followed by an interim assessment in which the findings from the first phase of the inspection are fed back to the local authority. This feedback is informed by the extent of reliable evidence already gathered. From this, the inspection team makes a provisional assessment of relative strengths and areas for improvement, and determines the areas of focus for Phase 2 – the fieldwork.

Key activities in Phase 1:

- local authority notified of the inspection;
- introductory meeting between SWIA and key members of the social work services senior management team;
- planning meeting between SWIA and the local authority co-ordinator;
- SWIA gather and analyse existing information;
- questionnaires sent to people who use services, staff, carers and partners/stakeholders;
- conduct file reading; and
- provide Phase 1 interim assessment.

Phase 2 – Fieldwork

The main fieldwork programme takes place in Phase 2 which provides a more detailed examination of specific areas and issues. Again a range of methods are used (such as observation of practice, interviews with staff and meetings with people, who use services, and carers). Some of these methods are standard and others are customised to enable chosen areas to be explored in depth. This phase ends when the inspection team present their findings to date, at the Phase 2 headline feedback meeting with the local authority.

Key activities in Phase 2:

- introductory meetings;
- fieldwork (including observed practice and meetings with people who use services, carers and service providers);
- fieldwork (including meetings with social work services staff);
- fieldwork (including meetings with management and partners); and
- Phase 2 headline feedback meeting.

Phase 3 – Analysis, report completion and follow up

Performance inspections are designed to provide added value through an independent and comprehensive examination of social work services, every three years.

Each performance inspection results in a published report, which delivers the overall conclusions on how local people are being served and how well placed the authority is to sustain and improve performance.

SWIA has adopted a six point scale in its inspection of local authority social work services. In their final report, the inspection team give an evaluation in relation to each of the ten areas for evaluation, as detailed in the Performance Inspection Model (PIM). The six point scale is set out below.

Level	Definition	Description
Level 6	Excellent	Excellent or outstanding
Level 5	Very good	Major strengths
Level 4	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
Level 3	Adequate	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Level 2	Weak	Important weaknesses
Level 1	Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

The report sets out the key evidence gathered during the inspection and identifies strengths and good practice as well as areas for improvement. It will seek to give an overview of social work services as an organisation. It will not deliver a detailed analysis of each area of work. The inspection and the report will identify key issues and explore or comment upon some of these in detail.

The final report will be presented to elected members in a meeting open to the public. In response to the report, the local authority produces an action plan setting out how it will make the changes that are needed. This must be agreed with SWIA. There is a jointly agreed programme for monitoring how the plan is put into effect.

Key activities in Phase 3:

- draft report sent to the local authority for comment;
- final report published and presented to elected members;
- action plan; and

- follow up activity - undertaken by a link inspector, appointed to the local authority at this stage of the process.

The period from the introductory meeting with the local authority to the presentation of a draft report is expected to be six months.

4. Involvement of elected members

Elected members will want to play a part in the performance inspection process that is proportionate with their considerable and diverse responsibilities. The inspection process has not only been designed to reflect this principle, but also the fact that the pattern of governance arrangements varies from one authority to another. The political make up and culture may influence the ways and degree to which different groups are involved. The performance inspection methodology enables sufficient scope for these matters of detail to be negotiated between the lead inspector and the local authority.

Phase 1

At the start of the performance inspection, the authority will be asked to complete a self-evaluation questionnaire and produce key documents about the council. In producing this advance information, officers draw upon elected members' policy decisions and plans.

Phase 2

During the fieldwork, the performance inspection team will seek to establish with elected members the extent to which they have, with the advice of officers:

- considered the needs of their population and decided on the priorities which their social work services should follow;
- set out the overall policies for social work services and provided leadership for the process of implementing those policies;
- made the decisions about how resources are allocated and ensured that resources and policies are consistent;
- taken a corporate view of their overall aims and the contribution of other public services, for example education and housing, to their policies in respect of social work services;
- acted as corporate parents of children looked after by the authority, and exercised their general responsibilities care of certain adults; and
- ensured that their policies are effective and resources are put to best use.

Phase 3

Following publication of the final report, the local authority produces an action plan and there is a jointly agreed programme for monitoring progress. During the follow-up, members will have a key role in:

- endorsing the action plan and
- helping to ensure that it is delivered (through collective responsibility, leadership, the portfolio role and effective scrutiny).

An especially poor overall evaluation will trigger consideration of whether there are grounds for serious concerns and, as a result, a need to put into effect more serious interventions.

Conclusion

The performance inspection represents a significant opportunity for elected members to contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of social work services in their authority. In taking up this opportunity, SWIA both acknowledges and appreciates the considerable efforts made by staff and elected members to prepare for inspection and to assist inspection team members.