

## 26.1 Evaluating performance and evaluation categories

Each performance inspection should provide clear, well evidenced and well considered evaluations about performance that can be understood and acted upon by a wide range of stakeholders, locally and nationally.

All these stakeholders have proper expectations that the final evaluations are consistent, rigorously tested and demonstrated conclusively in the report made to the local authority.

### How evaluations are made

The performance inspection is not an inspection of specific services, nor an examination of individual workers' practice. It is designed to provide an overview of the local authority's performance in relation to social work services, by exposing a diagonal 'slice' across and through the organisation, connecting the experience of people who use services and carers with the policies and decision-making of elected members and senior managers. It examines the self-evaluation of the authority and compares it with actual experience at the frontline. Inspectors talk with staff at all levels and with the key staff from the authority's main partner organisations.

The inspection draws on a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence and seeks to explain the differences and gaps in the story they tell. This 'diagonal slice' is complementary to the evaluation and scrutiny of others, such as the Care Commission, HMIE and NHS QIS, and to the internal processes of the organisation in managing its performance. The process culminates in the production of evaluations that are informative, can be understood by the public and will allow comparison between authorities.

At each stage of the performance inspection, the SWIA inspection team will form provisional evaluations on the authority's performance. These develop and evolve as more evidence is gathered and analysed. Some of them are shared at key points in the process, to focus the work of the SWIA team and to allow the local authority opportunities to engage in dialogue about the issues and to provide additional evidence.

Once all the evidence has been gathered and assessed, there follows a rigorous process of challenge within the SWIA inspection team before the final conclusions are shared with the local authority and other key stakeholders. This is intended to ensure that any evaluations:

- draw on the whole range of qualitative and quantitative evidence;

- derive from correct application of the performance inspection methodology;
- are rigorously tested against known criteria; and
- are deliberate, fair, consistent, informed and free from bias.

### **Evaluations and quality assurance**

The performance inspection process as a whole is designed to ensure that the evaluations reached by the SWIA team achieve these standards but there are also specific safeguards of quality:

- transparent criteria for reaching evaluations;
- evaluations made by inspectors who are accountable, have relevant experience and meet the competence standards required by SWIA;
- use of teams that contain inspectors and lay and carer inspectors with complementary skills and perspectives;
- use of a comprehensive and uniformly applied methodology that is based upon best practice;
- triangulation of evidence obtained from a wide range of sources and using a variety of approaches; and

### **Evaluations of performance**

As part of the programme of performance inspections, SWIA uses a six-point scale in its inspection of local authority social work services. This mirrors the six point scale developed by HMIE and introduced in August 2005 for its inspection of schools and education authorities.

The six point scale will enable:

- familiarity on the part of local authorities, as SWIA and HMIE apply similar scales for evaluation;
- clearer recognition of exemplary best practice;
- greater differentiation and discrimination in evaluations;
- more refined evaluations of provision where there is a combination of strengths and weaknesses;
- enhanced tracking of improvement over time; and
- an enhanced focus on securing improvement.

In the course of completing the Self Evaluation Questionnaire at the start of the inspection process, the local authority will be asked to provide self ratings, outlining evidence in support.

The scale can be summarised as follows:

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

Awarding levels will always be more of a professional skill than a technical process and there are many ways in which provision can merit a particular evaluation. However, the following key characteristics will be consistently applied:

An evaluation of **excellent** will apply to provision which is a model of its type:

- Service user outcomes and experiences will be of a very high level.
- An evaluation of *excellent* will represent an outstanding standard of leadership, management and service delivery which will exemplify very best practice and is worth disseminating across the sector.
- It will imply these very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.

An evaluation of **very good** will apply to provision characterised by major strengths:

- There will be very few areas for improvement and any that do exist will not significantly diminish service user outcomes and experiences.
- While an evaluation of *very good* will represent a high standard of leadership, management and service delivery, it is a standard that should be achievable by all.
- It will imply that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there will be an expectation that the local authority will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.

An evaluation of **good** will apply to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement.

- An evaluation of *good* will represent a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of service user outcomes and experiences will be diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required.
- It will indicate that the local authority should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.

An evaluation of ***adequate*** will apply to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses:

- An evaluation of *adequate* will indicate that service users have access to a basic level of provision.
- It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on service users outcomes and experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they will constrain the overall quality of service user outcomes and experiences.
- It will indicate that the local authority should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.

An evaluation of ***weak*** will apply to provision which has some strengths, but where there will be important weaknesses:

- In general, an evaluation of *weak* may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish service user outcomes and experiences in substantial ways.
- It will indicate the need for structured and planned action on the part of the local authority.

An evaluation of ***unsatisfactory*** will apply when there are major weaknesses in provision in critical aspects:

- This will require the local authority to urgently investigate the practices that have led to this performance and to consider immediate remedial action – particularly where service user outcomes and / or experiences display significant levels of risk.

In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies outwith the local authority.

### **Details of factors considered in the 'unsatisfactory' evaluation**

If an authority has systematic weaknesses in one or more major service areas which are so significant and entrenched that the authority is considered to be failing local people, this will be considered when evaluating performance. An unsatisfactory social work system is one which is not:

- protecting vulnerable people; or
- offering reasonable standards of care; or
- meeting statutory obligations in respect of care management or service provision.

There can be no absolute definition, although government statutes and guidelines provide an important starting point. Whatever the service under consideration, the key issues for the performance inspection are whether the weaknesses are:

- dangerous;
- systematic (i.e. not just due to some individuals' actions);
- widespread (i.e. relating to more than one team or unit);
- persistent (i.e. lasting over several months);
- current (i.e. not yet resolved).

### **Children's services**

In unsatisfactory children's services, there will be serious concerns about the management of risks to children. Typically, these will be due to a combination of several of the following:

- poor screening of initial referrals;
- poor partnership working, at strategic and/or operational levels;
- significant numbers of unallocated cases;
- poorly managed child protection investigations;
- failures to carry out statutory reviews and/or visits;
- child protection plans not followed, with a sense of 'drift' in individual planning;
- weaknesses in performance management, perhaps to the extent that the authority was previously unaware of its shortfalls.

## **Adults' services**

Unsatisfactory adults services would have many or all of the following characteristics, on a significant scale:

- service weaknesses having a very negative impact for service users and carers, to the extent that people are left struggling to cope or are being caused real distress;
- weakness in care management practice;
- backlogs of uncompleted reviews;
- unallocated casework;
- poorly managed adult protection or vulnerable adult investigations;
- very poor access, including long waits for services or funding;
- poor availability of services (e.g. respite care);
- poor quality of services (e.g. domiciliary care);
- failure to meet national priorities (e.g. in relation to hospital discharge);
- poor partnership working;
- weaknesses in performance management, perhaps to the extent that the local authority was previously unaware of its shortfalls.

## 26.2 The moderation process

### Internal moderating

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 Formal moderating will take place at three stages of the performance inspection:

- first editorial meeting;
- interim moderating meeting; and
- final moderating meeting (where required).

1.2 At each stage, the purpose of moderating is to ensure that:

- the recommendations and gradings reached accord with SWIA guidance and criteria, are consistent and are based on the evidence available;
- the views of the whole team (and, at the final moderating meeting, the local authority) are taken into account;
- appropriate benchmarking with other inspections has been undertaken; and
- the recommendations and gradings can be reasonably explained and evidenced to those who may question them.

#### 2. First editorial meeting

2.1 The lead inspector will normally chair the first editorial meeting, when the initial working draft of the performance inspection report is considered. Inspectors writing the report will present a provisional grading for their particular area for evaluation (box) and each of the corresponding quality indicators.

This grading will have been reached according to:

- evidence from the draft report;
- the criteria set out in the SWIA six point scale (see section 6.2 of the handbook);
- illustrations from the PIM ('weak' and 'very good' practice); and
- the report writer's knowledge, based on previous SWIA performance inspections.

In addition, recommendations appearing in this early draft report will also be considered. Recommendations should be proportionate, with a clear outcome or improvement required. A recommendation should be made for any area assessed as adequate or below.

- 2.2 The inspection support manager will ensure that a brief note of the meeting is kept, setting out each of the agreed gradings, a short summary of the reasons presented and any additional evidence / information required as a result of the discussion. Any areas of unresolved disagreement will also be recorded, to be referred to the interim moderating meeting.

### **3. Interim moderating meeting**

- 3.1 The chief inspector will normally chair the interim moderating meeting. Attendance will consist of:
  - the lead inspector;
  - senior management team members;
  - a non-executive member of the SWIA board, if available;
  - one other inspector, with lead inspector experience; and
  - a note taker.
- 3.2 The lead inspector will present a grading for each area for evaluation / PIM box in turn, along with a summary of supporting evidence. The meeting will also consider the recommendations contained in the draft report.
- 3.3 A brief note of the meeting will be kept, setting out:
  - each of the agreed gradings;
  - a short summary of the reasons presented;
  - any changes in grading from the first editorial meeting, and the reasons for the decisions reached;
  - changes to any of the recommendations contained in the report; and
  - any additional evidence/ information required as a result of the discussion.
- 3.4 Once agreed, the gradings and recommendations will be included in the first draft sent to the local authority. In event of any disagreement, the chief inspector's decision will be final.
- 3.5 Upon receipt of the draft report, the local authority has the opportunity to comment on the draft report (see section 20 of the

SWIA handbook). The lead inspector will consider any comments on the draft report and will:

- correct any factual inaccuracies;
- provide any necessary clarification; and
- attempt to resolve any other matters that do not alter the agreed and moderated findings of the team.

#### **4. Final moderating meeting (where required)**

- 4.1 The purpose of the meeting will be to consider any substantive changes to recommendations or gradings, as proposed by the local authority. Where the local authority has relevant further evidence, the lead inspector will convene a final moderating meeting. However, if the local authority has expressed satisfaction with the gradings and recommendations contained in the report, no final moderating meeting will be necessary.
- 4.2 The chief inspector will normally chair the final moderating meeting. Attendance will consist of lead inspector and senior management team members.
- 4.3 A brief note of the meeting will be kept, setting out any changes in recommendations or gradings from the first moderating meeting, and the reasons for those changes. Again, in the event of any disagreement, the chief inspector's decision will be final.