

Scottish Borders – follow up report for performance inspection

Introduction

The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) was established in April 2005 to undertake performance inspections of Scotland's local authority social work services. Each inspection focussed on the approach to continuous improvement by the local authority.

SWIA subsequently monitors the implementation of the recommendations made in the performance inspection for one year and then undertakes a follow up inspection.

SWIA used a six point scale to evaluate social work services. These are not re-evaluated when the follow up is completed but there is a statement on the extent of progress made in respect of each recommendation.

The inspection of Scottish Borders Council, in 2009

Scottish Borders Council's social work service inspection report was published in February 2009.

The report gave a positive account of many aspects of the social work service provided by Scottish Borders. At the time of the inspection many people were receiving good services. There were areas where services could have been better, for example services for people with mental ill health and people who misused substances.

The department was ambitious for change and there were two major change projects underway, Transforming Children's Services (TCS) and Transforming Older Persons Services (TOPS). The majority of the staff were highly motivated, enthusiastic and well trained and were responding well to the proposed changes.

The work done to improve the impact on the local community was very good. Social work services involved a wide range of people in developing services and genuinely listened to their views. The department had good strategies for tackling poverty and maximising benefits and had a proactive approach to identifying and addressing the needs of the migrant population.

Elected members, the Chief Executive, the Director of Social Work, the senior management team and managers and staff all contributed to a vision for services and collectively achieved effective leadership. Some people who used services were aware of the range of consultations and plans, many were pleased to have been involved but they were looking for results. There was evidence that social work services were able to listen and learn from these differing views and that if they

continued this approach the range and quality of services in Scottish Borders would continue to improve.

We identified a number of key areas for improvement including:

- finding ways to make sure that managers gathered information which helped them to know how good services were;
- making sure that respite care for children in foster care was carefully considered and, if at all possible, children were not placed with carers they did not know;
- regularly assessing the needs of young carers;
- increasing the range of accommodation for young people leaving care;
- making sure that joint financial management information is seen regularly by elected members;
- social work services and partners developing joint strategies for commissioning services for all community care groups; and
- prioritising the implementation of plans for different services.

Background to the follow up inspection

Scottish Borders Council produced an action plan in response to the inspection report which was discussed with the link inspector and quarterly meetings were held to discuss progress on the recommendations. Scottish Borders provided regular reports on progress.

Follow up report

This report is based on consideration of the action plan, follow up inspection in the week of the 22nd of February 2010, a self evaluation day organised by Scottish Borders health and social care, and meetings with staff from the Care Commission.

SWIA has been part of and contributed to the Local Area Network (LAN) and the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) managed by Audit Scotland. The initial findings of the follow up inspection were communicated to Audit Scotland in advance of the final meeting of the LAN and the finalisation of the SRA.

The follow up inspection involved meetings with people who use services, young people who are looked after, foster carers, staff, managers, senior managers and NHS partners. (Appendix 1)

Four SWIA inspectors undertook the follow up inspection and two young people inspectors participated. In preparation the team read a range of documents provided by the council to explain and evidence progress on each of the recommendations.

Recommendations

Scottish Borders had taken seriously each of the recommendations and had made progress in all of them. This report discusses each recommendation separately.

Recommendation 1

Social work services managers responsible for service planning, development and care management should take a proactive role in shaping the future information requirements to support the measurement of outcomes and performance management.

This recommendation has been met.

A significant number of data sets and systems were in place and analysed regularly in meetings. Reports to senior managers were regular. Managers were in a strong position to identify which areas they wished to focus on and to build links to performance and outcomes. Structures were in place to consolidate relationships with the locality planning forums, and to deliver services appropriate to local need. Processes for analysing the views of people who use services and carers were being introduced, for example with looked after children, and in other areas plans were in hand to seek the views of other groups of people later in 2010.

Social care and health services were taking forward self evaluation. During the week of the follow up inspection a whole day event on self evaluation was organised.

Recommendation 2

Social work services should make explicit reference to the respite arrangements in the care plan for each child in foster care. This should include an assessment of the risk to a child being placed with a carer the child does not know.

This recommendation has been met.

Managers, staff and foster carers had all given substantial attention to this recommendation. An audit of case records was being completed at the time of the follow up inspection and the completed version has been forwarded to SWIA. The complexity of the relationship between the needs of the child and the needs of the foster carer had been opened up for discussion and review with the result of a better understanding of the needs of children and their carers.

Social workers for children had looked closely at how and when respite was provided for children in foster care. Training in attachment issues had been offered to foster carers, and many of those carers we met, told us this had been valuable training. Risk assessments of respite care had been undertaken in respect of children in foster care and staff and foster carers were able to discuss these with us and explain their importance to the development and overall care of the child.

Recommendation 3

Social work services should speed up the introduction of the revised format for single shared assessment and engage with partners to implement this across all relevant services.

Substantial progress has been made on this recommendation.

A revised comprehensive, person centred format had been produced to meet the individual needs of people. There were appropriate prompts for different groups of people who use services and an appropriate risk assessment. Partners we met were aware of the new framework. Mental health service users we met were not fully aware of the specific mental health component to the single shared assessment and some considered that the carers' assessment focussed on the physical side of care with less emphasis on mental health issues.

The development of partnerships with health colleagues was being planned to take forward this work.

Recommendation 4

Social work services should make sure that young carers' needs are assessed and updated regularly.

Substantial progress has been made on this recommendation, further work will be taken forward by the integrated children's' service

Young carers have been identified as a priority group for the work of the new locality children's teams. The formation of the locality team was a key aspect of the strategy which was still being completed at the time of the follow up. A member of staff had been identified to work with the young carers groups. An open day for young carers was held in October 2009 and their views were collated and had informed the development of the strategy. Joint staff awareness raising had been undertaken and more was planned to help staff in education and services of adults, including mental health to identify potential young carers. A section 23 assessment (Children (Scotland) Act 1995) had been developed for children affected by disability.

The Children and Young People's Planning Partnership (CYPPP) represents agencies which provide services for children young people and their families within Scottish Borders. Young carers have been identified as a priority group for the CYPPP to develop services.

Recommendation 5

SBC should work to increase the range of accommodation for young people leaving care.

This recommendation has been met

The needs of young people leaving care had been addressed seriously and strategically by the establishment of the newly formed transitions team which was intended to support all young people including disabled young people. The team started working together in early 2010. New supported accommodation for four young people opened in March 2010 at Albert Place. Two foster carers had been recruited to concentrate on the needs of older young people. Registration with the Care Commission had been completed. The council had introduced a policy which recognised the wishes and needs of some looked after young people to remain with their foster carers until they were aged 21 years.

Providing appropriate accommodation for young people has been given careful thought by the council. A choice – based letting service has been introduced but at the time of our follow up inspection we were told by some young people and staff that there could be difficulties in finding the right accommodation for young mothers.

Recommendation 6

Social work services should make sure that full partnership joint financial management information is developed and regularly submitted to elected across all relevant services.

Substantial progress has been made on this recommendation.

Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders had acknowledged the financial pressures both agencies were facing and had agreed a timetable for setting and reporting on budgets. Social work services were in a stronger position to gather information on the social work budget and report on it regularly to the Senior Management Team. The joint financial budget for the CHCP was being developed. Joint financial information was being brought to elected members but further detail was necessary to facilitate opportunities for closer analysis particularly in relation to older people's and mental health NHS in-patient services. Presenting joint financial management information to elected members remained a target for the future, alongside regular scrutiny of financial monitoring by the CHCP where the council and NHS Borders had committed expenditure against jointly agreed service developments.

Recommendation 7

Social work services and partners should develop a joint commissioning strategy for all community care groups

Substantial progress has been made on this recommendation.

The report to the CHCP set out a timetable for progressing or completing a number of joint service strategies, older persons, physical disability, learning disability, mental health, addiction and short breaks. Borders Dementia Strategy was produced jointly with NHS and with two voluntary sector organisations. Overall work had been progressed to produce guidance and a timetable for all community care groups. A physical disability strategy was the subject of consultation at the time of the follow up inspection. Further detail on the service changes proposed to meet increased demand for services was to be included in the final strategy.

Recommendation 8

Social work services should implement a standard set of policies and procedures for monitoring and evaluating contracts agreed with independent organisations for services purchased by social work services.

This recommendation has been met.

A clear and detailed framework had been established. The Outcome Based Commissioning and Contracting paper usefully set the scene by drawing on Talking Points and the national outcome framework from which an action plan would be developed. A useful distinction had been drawn between the roles and responsibilities involved in tendering for social work services and the roles of the corporate procurement section of the council. Appropriate guidance and procedures, were planned.

Providers were being consulted on the content of the framework, health and social care providers had been closely involved in the process. Home care had been subject of a new tendering process a year ago which had changed the range of providers and there had been a number of issues to be resolved both in terms of budgets and service delivery. BVCCF has been commissioned to undertake a review of the first year of the service.

Recommendation 9

Given the ambitious and challenging improvement agenda, social work services should consider prioritising the implementation of service plans.

This recommendation has been met.

Service plans were focussed, SMART and were relevant to setting priorities.

The two major programmes, transforming children's services and transforming older person's services were being implemented with clear priorities identified. The integrated children's service was launched on the first day of the follow up inspection and was the culmination of extensive and systematic planning and development

between social work and education. Transforming Older Person's Services had been the subject of more recent consultation, and also had involved extensive planning.

The second round of service plans with financial planning fully integrated into the process has been completed. The outcomes of this prioritisation have been evidenced in the successful implementation of the Transforming Children's Services agenda, and the progress of Transforming Older People's Services, and the review of the corporate Review of Support Services across the council.

Conclusion

In addition to our specific recommendations Scottish Borders had included a number of other points for improvement in their action plan, including mental health services and promoting partnerships with NHS Borders.

The self evaluation day for social care and health involved over fifty staff and provided a focussed opportunity for staff to share and evaluate how they provide and organise services. Detailed action plans were developed in response to the issues raised. These included a wide range of issues which required to be addressed including mental health services and the impact of the recent home care contracts which had brought in two major providers in place of smaller providers.

The new integrated children's service had become a reality at the time of the follow up inspection. Staff we met, recognised the significance of the changes and the prospects for the future, and most were excited and optimistic. Self evaluation of this new service was being planned in partnership with education and SWIA has been invited to be involved in this process. Self evaluation is also proposed for criminal justice services and further details of both these developments are expected by the end of August 2010.

The Scottish Borders had experienced one of the most severe winters for over thirty years. The roads were blocked and power supplies affected, placing a formidable challenge to sustaining services to people with the greatest needs. We heard from older people who use services and from staff about the determination and resourcefulness of staff who made sure that crucial services were sustained. This was a major achievement in terms both of different parts of the council planning and working together and for staff on the ground.

Chris Robinson

Link Inspector

June 2010

Appendix 1

Sessions completed during SWIA visit to Scottish Borders Council, 22nd – 24th February 2009

Management /social work resources meetings:

- Strategic Parenting Group Committee
- Family Placement Team
- Supporting Front Line Staff Meeting
- Senior Management Team Meeting

Focus Groups

- Mental Health Service Users
- Elder Voice
- Albert Place Project – Services for Young People
- Foster Carers meeting
- BVCCF (TOPS)

Interviews

- Introductory Meeting – Andrew Lowe (Director of Social Work)
- Jason McDonald – Group Manager (Performance & Improvement)
- Jason McDonald – Group Manager (Performance & Improvement)
- Dave Brands (Locality Services Manager – Children’s Integrated Services)
- Jane Douglas (Group Manager for Assessment and Care Management)
- Stella Everingham (Head of Service – Children’s Integrated Services)
- Elaine Torrance (Head of Service – Social Care and Health)
- Ralph Roberts (Director of Integrated Health Service, NHS Borders)

Additional meetings

- Meeting with staff from the Care Commission