

Fieldwork visits - guidance for the local authority

Week 3: Political leadership, management and partners

The programme for the third week on site will need to model closely the organisational arrangements within the local authority and the way in which it structures relationships with partner agencies.

The reviewers will wish to see:

In social services

- divisional heads for the main client, provider or geographical areas (including the Youth Offending Service and the Out of Hours Service);
- commissioning/planning managers;
- resource and performance specialists (finance, performance, human resources, information, complaints);
- assistant directors/heads of service, the director of social services and the relevant first tier officer(s) - these are usually seen last.

At the corporate level

- the leader;
- the relevant portfolio holder(s);
- chairs and members of relevant scrutiny committees;
- the chief executive;
- relevant executive officers (housing, education, finance, legal services, etc.);
- trade union representatives.

Partners and external agencies

- health representatives (including the chair and the chief executive of the Local Health Board and key leads in health trusts);
- police representatives (including key leads for community safety, child protection and youth offending);
- the chief executive of the local voluntary sector umbrella organisation (county voluntary council).

It is helpful if some of the programme can be organised on a themed basis using the domains in the second judgement dimension *How well placed is the authority to sustain and improve performance?* (e.g. workforce, resources, planning and partnerships, corporate and political support and scrutiny).

Other departments or organisations

For some reviews you will be asked to nominate relevant organisations in your areas, particularly in the voluntary sector. Discuss the matter with the organisation in question, to ensure a willingness to contribute.

Please ensure that representatives know the nature and focus of the review. They will need sufficient notice for them to undertake any necessary preparatory work or consultation. Organisations may wish to consult with their own staff to gain accurate and up to date information prior to interview.

Information

Accurate and clear information about the review is essential, if unnecessary anxiety or uncertainties are to be avoided. Please pay particular attention to the following points.

- Make sure everybody understands the nature and focus of the review and why they are being seen.
- Everybody should be provided with a copy of the relevant joint review leaflets, briefing notes and information about the codes of conduct for reviewers and lay assessors;
- Make sure that they know the name(s) of the reviewer(s) undertaking the visit.
- Fieldwork time scales are usually tight, so punctuality is important for all those involved, including the joint review team. Delays may well impact on numbers of people.

Areas for examination

The fieldwork visits are a crucial means of obtaining evidence regarding the areas for examination in which judgements are made. The Joint Review Handbook outlines these areas and, when asking questions, the reviewers will focus upon them. We will be looking in particular at two key issues:

- How well are needs currently being met by social services?
- How well equipped is the local authority to deliver improvements in the quality of those services?

We will have prepared some questions, in part to check out some of the information we've already received. As well as asking questions, we want to make sure that interviewees have the chance to talk about the issues that concern them. We are interested in what works well as much as what needs to improve.