FOLLOW-UP

Introduction

Joint reviews have a discrete and distinctive role to play within the range of improvement and evaluative work undertaken by SSIW and ACiW in respect of local authority social services. However, they must link effectively with all the other elements within this overall programme and that of the Wales Programme for Improvement. As a periodic exercise, joint reviews must benefit from and contribute to the monitoring of performance that takes place more routinely. It is especially important to integrate the work to follow up a joint review with the annual SSIW performance evaluation of social services in the local authority. This section of the guide describes how responsibility for follow-up is managed by SSIW and ACiW after the report has been published.

Purpose

The main purpose of joint review follow-up is to check the progress of the authority in acting on the findings of the review. Priorities for action and recommendations are set out in Chapter 1 of the review report. The report itself does not contain an action plan; the authority is expected to produce this in the period between agreement of the draft report and publication.

Serious concerns

An especially poor judgement in either of the two main dimensions used for judging performance in joint reviews (*how good are the services?* and *how well placed is the authority to sustain and improve performance?*) will trigger consideration of:

- whether there are grounds for serious concerns
  and, therefore,

- a need to put into effect the agreed protocol, rather than the processes described below.

Handover meeting

About eight weeks after the publication of the report, the review support co-ordinator will arrange a handover meeting. This involves the local authority, the SSIW link inspector, the ACiW relationship manager and the District Auditor. In the meeting, the action plan and progress to date are reviewed. Agreement is reached about:

- any routine monitoring arrangements;
- the roles of SSIW and ACiW in following up progress.

The timing and nature of any formal follow-up will be determined at this meeting. In normal circumstances, the parties agree to meet after a further year to sign off the process.

Responsibility

At this point, responsibility passes from the lead reviewers and the lead managers to the link inspector, the relationship manager and the District Auditor. The link inspector is required to liaise with relevant deputy chief inspectors in organising any monitoring work over and above the annual performance evaluation of social services. Similar management arrangements apply within ACiW.

Scope

The scope and nature of the follow-up work will be agreed in the light of:

- the review findings, (especially the impact upon service users and carers of the areas identified in the report as in need of development);
- the discussion at the handover meeting

- the effectiveness of the local authority's own arrangements for monitoring progress
- the level of political concern.

Wherever possible, any follow up exercise will precede the annual performance evaluation undertaken by SSIW and the work will be an agreed part of the annual regulatory plan. It is likely that the priorities for action arising from the joint review and from the performance evaluation will coincide. In accordance with the principle that the scale of inspection is in proportion to risk, more time will be spent on services that were a cause for concern and less on those where it is possible to be confident of a positive response.

In authorities where risk is regarded as being low, it is likely that SSIW and ACiW would want to spend at least two days following up the implementation of the action plan and the outcome for service users and carers. In medium-risk authorities (i.e. in general, those with a judgement of *inconsistent* and *uncertainly placed*), there would be a minimum of three days follow-up.

Process

Confirmation of agreement

Following the handover meeting, the link inspector writes to the Director of Social Services (with copies to the other parties and to other regulators or improvement agencies), to summarise the discussion at the meeting and to confirm the agreed arrangements for monitoring progress. This will include written reports to be provided by the authority and details of any activities planned by SSIW or ACiW.

Progress reports

The link inspector, the relationship manager and the District Auditor meet to read the progress reports submitted by the authority. They agree a written response to the local authority, commenting on progress and requesting any further information needed to verify progress. In cases of least risk, this may be all the follow-up needed and any residual issues will be taken up within the framework for annual performance evaluation of social services.

Service reviews

In some cases, a service review will be scheduled within a year of the handover meeting. This can usually be used to check progress on some key action points. The review report will refer to the joint review and describe what progress has been made.

In exceptional cases, the Minister for Health and Social Services may request a special inspection to follow up the joint review. The scale and scope of this inspection will be determined by SSIW in the light of the Minister's concerns and other considerations.

Visit

A monitoring visit may be necessary to check progress if:

- the joint review described key areas as in need of considerable development

or

- progress reports are inadequate

or

- these reports indicate that insufficient improvement has been achieved in the key areas.

A standard follow-up visit will be for two days. The focus of the visit will depend on the key issues raised in the review and on the agreed areas for monitoring progress. It will normally have two elements:

1. Selective *reality checking* to see that the progress report is accurate and that there has been a real impact on service delivery. This part can be based in a service setting, such as a fieldwork office. It should always include reading some case files. It may involve interviews with practitioners and local managers. There should be interviews or meetings with service users. Inspectors may also wish to check documents, such as committee reports, procedure manuals, management information reports or new forms.
2. *Discussion with managers* on the progress in implementing the action plan, in the light of the written report and the reality checks.

Ending the process

After the visit, a letter is sent to the Director of Social Services, setting out the results of the follow-up. Outstanding actions will be taken up in the annual evaluation of social services performance, unless serious concerns have become evident. In these circumstances, more formal action will be considered, including the steps outlined in the agreed protocol.

The link inspector, the relationship manager and the District Auditor will usually arrange a signing-off meeting about a year after the handover meeting. SSIW and ACiW will provide a record of this meeting and formal confirmation that the joint review process has ended.