

Common weaknesses in local authorities judged  
inadequate under the single inspection framework  
– a summary

November 2015

# Introduction



## Purpose of this slide deck

- This slide deck gives a summary of common weaknesses in local authorities that were judged inadequate in the inspections, between January and May 2015, under the single inspection framework.
- It aims to help local authorities identify whether they have these or similar weaknesses and improve practice.

## Weaknesses identified are in:

- management oversight
- changes in social worker, managers and leaders
- performance management and data
- drift and delay, mainly in children's case work
- recognising potential cases of child sexual exploitation, missing children and carrying out missing and return interviews.

# Management oversight



- Managers do not ensure that plans for children in care, child protection and children in need:
  - contain sufficient detailed information
  - are audited frequently enough and with sufficient scrutiny
  - identify and prioritise risks, and take robust action to challenge when this is not the case.

- Leaders and managers have:
  - been too slow to respond to findings from their previous inspection reports
  - been inconsistent in supervision of and feedback to social workers
  - not sufficiently reflected on or analysed poor practice.

# Changes in manager, social worker and leaders





- Frequent changes in social workers:
  - exacerbate the delay and drift that too many children experience in their care plan updates
  - have led to poor engagement between the social workers and children and young people causing a lack of relationship-building

- High turnover of staff and significant changes:
  - in management at all levels have led to poor continuity for children and families
  - lead to poor partnership working with other statutory and voluntary organisations
  - in the business and administrative support to the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) has had a negative impact on the continuity and the consistency of the work of the LSCB

# Performance management and data



- Leaders and managers have:
  - not sufficiently improved children and young people's progress and experiences
  - not made good use of performance and management information to prioritise issues and to challenge staff
  - not ensured that robust plans to tackle known weakness in early help and protection are in place. For example, pathway plans for care leavers do not always track or take account of young people's achievements or make clear what support is available.

- Poor recording of data by local authorities:
  - undermined their ability to have a fully accurate picture of their own performance
  - created gaps in the data available to senior managers. For example, attendance of parents, young people or agencies at child protection conferences, making it difficult for managers to scrutinise the current quality of frontline services and the performance of their staff.

# Drift and delay in children's casework



- Drifts and delays in decision-making processes and actions following decisions:
  - were often not effectively challenged by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
  - affected children looked after, particularly in regard to where the children are to live and how they can be given permanence.

- Inspectors identified cases of current or recent delays to children receiving support or protection. For example, some initial child protection conferences were not set up in time to ensure that the children affected were appropriately protected.
- Local authorities do not engage enough with the family courts and Cafcass to develop a joint understanding of the reasons for delay and to agree strategies to improve performance.



# Child sexual exploitation and missing and return home interviews



- Missing children are not consistently safeguarded because they do not always receive:
  - a coordinated response from authorities involved; for example, in one local authority the police are not routinely informing children's services of missing episodes
  - an effective return home interview.
- Local authorities do not consistently evaluate the outcomes from return home interviews to assess any emerging patterns and trends.

- Protecting children at risk of potential child sexual exploitation is not strong enough due to lack of:
  - strong strategic planning within local authorities and between partners about their response to child sexual exploitation
  - sufficient focus on disruption activity
  - consistent use of child sexual exploitation screening tools by social workers
  - good quality training for practitioners that support these young people.