

# Ofsted Targeted Local Authority Inspections

Inspection framework and guidance

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Ofsted Targeted Local Authority Inspections include an evaluation of the 'front door' for child protection, where children at risk of harm first become known to the local authority; this is a part of all targeted inspections.

They also include a 'deep dive' investigation. The deep dive is an evaluation of the experiences of children and young people at risk of a specific type (or types) of harm, or the support and care of children looked after and/or care leavers; this part of the targeted inspection will change between inspections to investigate different themes.

The targeted inspection will not be a programme of inspection. Ofsted will use this framework where it has concerns about a local authority but where using its single inspection framework for inspecting services for children in need of help and protection, children look after and care leavers would be a disproportionate response. We may also undertake inspections of particular themes where this will identify and highlight effective practice from which other local authorities can learn.

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**361**

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## Introduction

1. This guidance is for inspectors conducting Ofsted Targeted Local Authority Inspections (targeted inspections) of arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection in local authority areas in England.
2. Local authorities and Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) can use this guidance to understand how inspections are conducted. They may also find it useful when carrying out self-evaluations or improvement planning.
3. This guidance is designed to support consistency between inspections while allowing the flexibility to respond to the individual circumstances of each local authority. As such, it is a guide on the processes that usually govern the inspection.
4. This guidance is generic and applies to all targeted inspections. Each targeted inspection includes a 'deep dive' theme. Ofsted publishes separate guidance on each deep dive theme that should be read alongside this framework (see Annex A for further information on deep dive themes).

## Section 1. Scope of the inspection

5. Targeted inspections are carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. They are an inspection of local authority arrangements for:
  - the response to all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation at the point of identification
  - the quality and impact of assessment, planning and decision making in response to notifications and referrals
  - protecting children and young people at risk of a specific type (or types) of harm, or the support and care of children looked after and/or care leavers (evaluated through a deep dive investigation into the experiences of these children)
  - the leadership and management of this work
  - the effectiveness of the LSCB in relation to this work.

## Evaluation criteria

6. Inspectors will evaluate children’s experiences against the full range of the criteria, looking for strengths, areas for development and examples of innovative and effective practice. The evaluation criteria are subject to periodic review.

### The multi-agency ‘front door’<sup>1</sup>

7. This aspect of the inspection is about the effectiveness of practice and arrangements for identifying and managing the range of risks of harm to children and young people. Inspectors will evaluate against statutory requirements and associated guidance, and whether services are supporting the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Inspectors will evaluate:
- whether thresholds to access assessments and services are clear and consistent, and whether their application improves outcomes for children (ESN 01)<sup>2</sup>
  - how well the individual needs of children are taken into consideration, including the extent to which there is respect for diversity and sensitivity to age, race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability (ESN 02)
  - the quality and timeliness of referrals (ESN 03)
  - whether referrals are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner (ESN 04)
  - the quality and timeliness of assessments (ESN 05)
  - the impact of decisions and plans on outcomes for children and their families (ESN 06)
  - whether the local authority works effectively with other agencies, including appropriate and timely sharing of information (ESN 07)
  - the quality of analysis of risk and the factors within the child’s family and community that can help keep them safe (ESN 08)
  - whether signs of specific risks to individual children are recognised and appropriately responded to (ESN 09)
  - whether children and their families are involved in decisions about their lives (ESN 10)
  - the quality of recording in case files (ESN 11)
  - the effectiveness of out-of-hours provision at managing risk of harm through effective information sharing, referral and assessment (including the

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<sup>1</sup> This will be the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or the local equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation schedule numbers (ESN) are a referencing system to support inspectors when they record their findings in evidence records.

provision of emergency accommodation for children that go missing) (ESN 12)

- the impact of strategy discussions and any subsequent section 47 enquiries on actions taken to protect children and young people (ESN 13)
- the quality of management oversight, including:
  - effectiveness of senior management audits of how well workers manage risk of harm through effective referral and assessment (ESN 14)
  - risk assessment and prioritisation of referrals (ESN 15)
  - case allocation and workload management (ESN 16)
  - the quality and effectiveness of direct supervision, support and challenge (ESN 17)
  - the effectiveness of the arrangements for informing and involving senior managers in decision-making (ESN 18)
  - the effectiveness of escalation arrangements (ESN 19)
- how well leaders and managers know and understand what is happening at the 'front door' for their services. (ESN 20)
- how effectively leaders and managers use their knowledge to challenge and support practitioners and promote continuous improvement. (ESN 21)
- whether the LSCB actively monitors, promotes, coordinates and evaluates the work of the local authority to help, protect and care for children. (ESN 22)

### **The response to specific children and young people, evaluated through a deep dive investigation**

- The criteria for each deep dive are different. For a list of the deep dive themes and links to their criteria, see Annex A.

## Section 2. Inspection process

### The inspection team

8. The inspection team will usually comprise three inspectors.

### Overview of the inspection

Week one	Week two	Week three	Weeks four – eight
Notification and set-up discussion off site. (Tuesday)	Inspection team off site. Local authority evaluates children's experiences.	Inspection team on site Monday to Friday	Writing the letter of findings and quality assurance processes

9. The timeline for the inspection – including preparation, on-site work and writing the letter of inspection findings – is set out below. Annex A includes an outline of specific milestones for the information requested to support the inspection.

Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
<b>Before notification</b>	-1	Preparation (off site). The lead inspector reviews the pre-inspection briefing.
<b>Week one</b> Tuesday	0	<b>By 9.30 am</b> – the lead inspector notifies the Director of Children's Services (DCS) of the inspection by 9.30am and requests information to support the inspection.  The lead inspector will offer a more detailed set-up discussion later that day to allow the DCS time to convene their senior leadership team.  <b>By the end of the day</b> , DCS sends the lead inspector the list of children from the deep dive theme.
Wednesday	1	<b>By midday</b> – the lead inspector selects 20 children from the deep dive theme and requests further information on these 20.
Thursday	2	<b>By mid-afternoon</b> – the local authority provides additional information on the 20 children selected by the lead inspector from the deep dive theme  <b>By 5pm</b> – the lead inspector identifies between five and seven children from the list of 20 and asks the local authority to evaluate their experiences by the end of the day 7.  The local authority provides details of multi-agency meetings and the remaining lists of children and young people.
Friday	3	The lead inspector produces briefing note for the team.

Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
<b>Week two</b> Monday	4	Preparation (off site) – consideration of pre-inspection briefing and Annex A information. The lead inspector commences timetable development for the onsite week in consultation with the local authority. The agreed timetable should be finalised by day 8.
Tuesday	5	Local authority provides any information from Annex A that they have not yet submitted, including key documents relating to the children whose experiences they have been asked to evaluate.
Wednesday	6	The lead inspector review case file documents and allocates Annex A documents to inspectors to evaluate.
Thursday	7	<b>By the end of the day</b> , the local authority provides their evaluations of children’s experiences.
Friday	8	Inspection team considers the local authority’s evaluation of children’s experiences. Local authority confirm, in writing, that children and young people and their parents/carers have given consent to speak with inspectors. The lead inspector agrees the onsite programme with the local authority.
<b>Week three</b> Monday to Thursday	9–12	Onsite inspection days. Day 9 – team arrives and meet with the senior leadership team Day 9–12 – onsite activity (evidence collection ceases at 3.00pm on day 12) Day 12 – team meets in the afternoon to agree provisional findings An Ofsted senior analytical officer will usually be onsite for days 9–10.
Friday	13	Inspectors meet to identify key strengths, areas for development and areas for priority action (completed by lunchtime) Inspectors meet with the senior leadership team for the feedback meeting (concluded by mid-afternoon) <b>By the end of the day</b> , all inspectors submit their written-up key findings to the lead inspector and ensure that their evidence records are fully up to date.
<b>Week four</b> Monday to Wednesday	14–16	The lead inspector writes the letter of inspection findings. <b>By lunchtime on day 16</b> – the lead inspector and quality assurance (QA) manager agree a draft findings letter.
<b>Weeks four</b> Wednesday to Thursday	16–17	Days 16–17 – relevant Ofsted Regional Director signs-off the draft letter.

Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
Friday	18	<b>By the end of the day</b> – Ofsted sends the draft letter to the DCS for them to undertake factual accuracy checks.
<b>Week five</b> Monday to Friday	19–23	The DCS has five working days to respond on behalf of the partnership ( <b>by the end of day 31, usually Wednesday</b> )
<b>Week six</b> Monday to Wednesday	24–26	<b>By the end of day 24</b> – the lead inspector and QA manager consider factual accuracy comments received from the local authority. Day 25 – Ofsted Regional Director signs off final letter. Day 26 – final proof-reading of the letter.
Thursday	27	Ofsted sends pre-publication findings letter to the DCS.
<b>Week seven</b> Tuesday	30	The letter of inspection findings is published.
<b>Post inspection</b>		The local authority submits a statement of proposed action to <a href="mailto:ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk">ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk</a> (within 70 working days of the letter being published)

## Pre-inspection activity

10. The Ofsted senior analytical officer will coordinate the initial analysis of performance data and provide a pre-inspection briefing for the inspection team. This will summarise:
  - findings from all relevant inspections and regulatory activity
  - relevant nationally collected data
  - relevant reports from the local government ombudsman
  - the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis
  - serious incident notifications
  - the findings from any published serious case reviews
  - evidence from whistleblowing or complaints
  - regional intelligence including events of public concern, such as high-profile court cases or media issues
  - other related published documentation, as identified in Annex A.
11. The lead inspector will review the pre-inspection briefing before they notify the DCS of the inspection. All inspectors have a minimum of one day to prepare for the inspection. All inspectors will review the pre-inspection briefing and other relevant material before arriving on site and will discuss how they will gather and analyse evidence against the evaluation criteria.

## **Week one: notification, set-up and information request**

### **Notification**

12. The lead inspector will notify the DCS of the inspection by telephone by 9.30am nine working days before fieldwork begins. As part of this telephone call, the lead inspector will request information to support this inspection (Annex A). They will offer a further more detailed 'set-up' discussion with the DCS and their senior leadership team later the same day.
13. Immediately after speaking to the DCS, the lead inspector will confirm the start of the inspection and the request for information in writing.
14. Ofsted recognises that the Chair of the LSCB may not be immediately available to be notified of the inspection. Therefore, the lead inspector will ask the DCS to notify the Chair of the LSCB and the LSCB business manager as soon as possible and to provide them with the lead inspector's direct contact details.

### **Set-up discussion with the senior leadership team**

15. At the initial set-up discussion, the lead inspector will:
  - answer questions about:
    - the scope of the inspection
    - the format and methodology of the inspection
    - the data and information requested to support the inspection (Annex A)
    - quality assurance arrangements for the inspection
  - outline how inspectors will jointly gather evidence against the evaluation criteria
  - agree arrangements for:
    - devising the timetable for the inspection
    - regular meetings with the senior leadership team, including the scope and timing of these meetings
    - the feedback meeting at the end of fieldwork
    - practical issues, such as work space at offices inspectors will visit and arrangements for them to access records, information technology systems and staff support
    - a link person in the local authority to support the inspection and make arrangements for interviewing staff (the link person should have access to the senior leadership team in the local authority and sufficient authority to respond to the lead inspector's requests)
    - how the experiences of children, young people and families will be directly considered as an integral part of the inspection.

- provide contacts details for the inspection team and the QA manager
- provide information about the inspection for affected/relevant staff
- ask whether there are any serious incidents that are awaiting notification. This should include significant and current investigations, publication of serious case reviews or local issues of high media interest.

### **Information request**

16. Annex A outlines the milestones for the local authority to provide information to support the inspection. The information should be provided as soon as is practical and by the milestones in Annex A.
17. Inspectors will not request any documents in addition to those outlined in Annex A, unless there are exceptional circumstances. They may agree to look at any additional documents provided by the local authority. For any additional information the local authority/inspector must demonstrate that the documents/s:
  - are necessary for an accurate understanding of children’s experiences and the effectiveness of the local authority
  - have not already been made available through those requested in Annex A, which should be the local authority’s best and most recent examples of the information requested.
18. The local authority should provide any information requested using secure processes. Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that local authority can choose to use for this purpose. This site has been risk assessed by Ofsted against the Government’s Cloud Security Principles to handle sensitive personal data.<sup>3</sup>
19. The lead inspector will ask for information required to select the children and young people whose experiences and progress inspectors will track and sample during the inspection. Unique identification numbers, rather than full names, should be used on the lists provided. The first list required will relate to the deep dive aspect of the inspection. The DCS should provide this list by the end of the day that the local authority was notified of the inspection.
20. If there are particular contextual issues faced by the local authority in relation to the deep dive theme, the DCS can advise the lead inspector of this when they provide the list of children within the deep dive theme or at the initial set-up discussion. The lead inspector will take this into account when selecting the children whose experiences the team will track and sample for this inspection.

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<sup>3</sup> *Summary of Cloud Security Principles*; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/cloud-service-security-principles](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cloud-service-security-principles)

21. The lead inspector will select 20 children from the deep dive list and ask the local authority to provide additional data on these 20. By the end of Thursday in Week one, the lead inspector will select five to seven children from these 20 and ask the DCS to evaluate these children's experiences.

## **Week two: local evaluation of children's experiences**

22. From Friday of Week one to Thursday of Week two, the DCS will be asked to evaluate the experiences of five to seven children selected by the lead inspector. The local authority should evaluate the children's experiences using its own mechanisms while taking account of the scope of the inspection.
23. The evaluations should assess the overall strengths of the practice and identify areas for development. If the local authority has undertaken an evaluation of any of these in the three months prior to the inspection, they may choose to submit this as their evaluation for the purposes of this inspection. Inspectors' assessment of the evaluations will be based on their quality and not the number that the local authority is able to undertake in the time available.
24. The local authority should provide key case file documents about the children whose experiences they evaluate by Tuesday of Week two. The DCS should provide the evaluation of each child's experiences by the end of the day on Thursday of Week two. If the local authority chooses, they may provide a summary of themes and any learning from across their evaluations.

## **Week three: onsite**

25. When planning the inspection, the lead inspector should ensure that:
  - support is available to facilitate communication with children, young people, carers and parents who require additional support (for example, by a social worker, advocate or family member)
  - the timetable includes sufficient time for inspectors to reflect on meetings and interviews and to analyse evidence individually and together
  - the timetable allows sufficient travel time between appointments
  - the plan allows flexibility to respond to emerging findings
  - names and job roles of those being interviewed are specified in advance
  - practitioners are interviewed separately from their managers
  - they consider whether it is appropriate or the best use of inspectors' time to undertake any activity by phone or in person.
26. The lead inspector should appropriately modify the plan for the inspection, throughout the time onsite, based on the issues emerging from tracking and sampling children's experiences. This includes re-deploying inspectors where sufficient information has been gathered against the evaluation criteria. Where this happens, the lead inspector will work with the designated link person in the

local authority and ensure that senior leadership team are kept informed at the regular keep-in-touch meetings.

### **Team briefing at the start of the inspection**

27. The inspection team will meet on site on Monday of Week three. The purpose of this is to:
  - review key issues arising from their pre-inspection preparation
  - allocate any remaining tasks and responsibilities
  - confirm arrangements for keeping in touch, team and findings meetings
  - review any health and safety risks for individual inspectors.

### **Initial onsite meeting with the senior leadership team**

28. The lead inspector will meet with the senior leadership team on the first day onsite. At this meeting, attendees will review the matters discussed at the set-up discussion. The lead inspector will answer any remaining questions and ask the senior leadership team to confirm that the practical arrangements they requested are in place.
29. Other inspectors from the team may also attend the initial onsite meeting.
30. The local authority may also use this as an opportunity to explain their local context and help inspectors understand how the local services are structured. This can include any key strengths or challenges faced by the local authority, as well as any known issues of concern or public interest during the course of the inspection.

### **Team working onsite**

31. Team working will be essential to capture, evaluate and coordinate findings. All inspectors will evaluate across the breadth of the framework, but an inspector will be allocated to coordinate the findings of an aspect of the inspection:
  - the effectiveness of the 'front door' arrangements
  - the safety and experiences of children and young people at risk of a specific type (or types) of harm, or the support and care of children looked after and/or care leavers (the deep dive theme).
32. All inspectors will consider the impact of the workforce, managerial oversight and leadership in the area.

## Inspection team meetings

33. Team meetings will usually take place in the morning. Their purpose is to:
- triangulate findings and evidence (including evidence from the children's experiences inspectors will track)
  - ensure that a holistic view of children and young people's experiences is being achieved
  - consider the impact of leadership, management and the LSCB
  - agree where inspectors have gathered sufficient evidence against the evaluation criteria
  - agree how best to gather further evidence in the time remaining
  - enable the lead to coordinate the inspection effectively and keep the local authority aware of key developments
  - provide a brief period to reflect as a team.
34. All inspectors should attend each team meeting unless there are exceptional circumstances that prevent this.

## Engaging the senior leadership team: keep-in-touch meetings

35. The lead inspector will inform the senior leadership team of emerging findings throughout the onsite week through keep-in-touch (KIT) meetings. These are likely to happen on Wednesday and Thursday morning of Week three. Where possible they will be face-to-face but attendance can be by conference call if this is the most efficient way for individuals to attend. Whether or not individuals are able to attend will not influence inspection findings.
36. The KIT meetings are an opportunity for the senior leadership team to hear live feedback from the inspection, understand emerging findings and, where appropriate, challenge these findings so the lead inspector can consider whether further evidence may be required.
37. KIT meetings will be short, sharp, focused and explore the key issues arising. The meetings will be informed by the headlines from the inspectors' team meeting. Where there are concerns about individual children, inspectors will share these at the earliest opportunity and request written feedback from the local authority on the action they have taken (Annex C). Inspectors may also provide feedback about what specific children and young people have told them. This is so the local authority can take steps, where required, to assure the safety and care of these children. Inspectors will always consider the confidentiality of what children have told them before sharing this information.
38. The DCS will identify who will attend each of these KIT meetings but the number of attendees should be kept to only those that are necessary to support a concise and focused discussion.

## Finalising evidence and feedback

### Finalising evidence

39. The inspection team will meet on Thursday afternoon in the fieldwork week to finalise their evidence and agree provisional findings. Inspectors will review the evidence against the evaluation criteria and use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings. They will identify areas of good practice, development and priority action about the local authority.

### The feedback meeting

40. On the final on-site day, the senior leadership team and the Chair of the LSCB will be invited to meet with the inspection team to hear the provisional findings and the supporting evidence. The meeting will encourage dialogue between the inspection team and those attending. There will be 'no surprises' as inspectors will have shared main strengths and areas for development throughout the inspection at KIT meetings. All inspectors will attend. The local authority will be asked to keep attendance to a minimum to enable manageable and effective dialogue.
41. The senior leadership team are invited to engage in this final discussion about the evidence supporting the findings. The purpose of the meeting is to help them:
  - understand the key evidence on which the findings are based
  - understand the strengths and areas for development likely to appear in the letter of findings
  - disseminate the findings throughout the local authority accurately to help them build on their strengths and inform discussions about improvement.
42. The lead inspector will outline the overall findings. Then the inspection team will outline the key evidence supporting these. Inspectors should share an analysed, prioritised and themed summary of the evidence that demonstrates the strengths and areas for development found across the scope of the inspection.
43. The presentation of findings should not be scripted. Inspectors will invite discussion about what the findings mean. The inspection team should be clear about what will make the most difference in the local authority and for the children they help, protect and care for.
44. Inspection findings are subject to quality assurance processes after the fieldwork has finished. In the vast majority of inspections, the provisional findings discussed at the feedback meeting will not change.
45. There is further information on quality assurance later in this document and in the timeline in section two.

## Section 3. Gathering and evaluating evidence

46. Most inspection evidence will be gathered by tracking and sampling individual children's experiences and through interviews. Inspections will focus on direct practice by:
- meeting with children, parents and carers
  - scrutinising and discussing children's experiences alongside practitioners working with the child
  - observing practice in multi-agency agency meetings
  - examining key documents and interviewing staff to understand the support provided by senior officers and the impact of quality assurance.
  - evaluating the effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children at risk of harm.

### Hearing the views of children, young people and their families

47. There are various ways for inspectors to hear the views of children, young people and their families. These include:
- talking to children and their families directly
  - reading views in case records and meeting minutes
  - views expressed by practitioners on behalf of children or based on their work with the child and their family
  - the use of specific consultation tools, including those used by the local partnership.
48. Inspectors will talk directly to as many children as possible. It is accepted that this will not always be face to face. Inspectors will discuss any risks or ethical issues in meeting children and their family with the practitioners to determine whether it is in the person's (child or adult) best interests.
49. Inspectors must make sure that the local authority are aware of which children they have spoken with. Where appropriate, they will provide feedback on these conversations if this will help the local authority to keep children safe and provide appropriate care for them – this will usually be provided through the KIT meetings with the senior leadership team. Inspectors will consider the confidentiality of what children have told them before sharing this information.

### Seeking consent to speak with children and their families

50. The lead inspector will ask the local authority to arrange opportunities for inspectors to talk directly with the children whose experiences they will track. The local authority should record consent from children and parents or carers. Where consent is not given or a discussion is not possible, the local authority seeking that consent should inform the lead inspector of the reasons.

Arrangements to talk with these children, parents or carers, or the reasons why these discussions cannot take place, should be confirmed by the local authority in writing as soon as possible and by the end of Week two.

51. In all activities involving children and their families, inspectors will ask the appropriate practitioner/s in the local authority to get consent before the inspector speaks to the child/family or observes any work directly with them. Before proceeding with any discussions or observations, inspectors should always check with the child and family that they have given informed consent.

### **Tracking and sampling individual children's experiences**

52. Inspectors will evaluate the application of thresholds for children and young people at the point of referral and assessment and as relevant to the deep dive aspect of the framework, including:
  - children and young people who are at risk of harm (but who have not yet reached the 'significant harm' threshold)
  - children and young people referred to the local authority, including those for whom urgent action has to be taken to protect them; those subject to further assessment; those subject to child protection enquiries and those where no further action is taken
  - children who become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan
  - children and young people who are receiving services as children in need, but these have not reached the significant harm threshold
  - children looked after by the local authority and those placed in the local authority area by other local authorities.
53. There are three routes to evaluating the experiences of children and young people: through the evaluations undertaken by the local authority; and through the tracking and sampling of children's experiences by inspectors.
54. The group of children and young people whose experiences inspectors will track and sample will be adjusted to ensure a balance of:
  - age, gender, disability and ethnicity
  - children and young people at different stages of involvement with public services
  - any contextual issues specific to the local area in relation to the deep dive theme.

## **Tracking children's experiences**

55. Tracking will focus on the experiences of the children within the deep dive theme of the inspection. Inspectors will track the individual experiences of the five to seven children whose experiences the local authority was asked to evaluate in Week two of the inspection.
56. Tracking is an 'end to end' look at specific children's experiences. Inspectors will take an in-depth look at the quality of the help, care and protection children have experienced (including the implementation of early help, children in need plans or child protection plans, where applicable). Tracking will focus on children within the deep dive theme of the inspection.
57. Reviewing case files is only one aspect of tracking the child's experiences. Inspectors will discuss children's experiences with the child or young person, their parents and/or carers, and their social worker. Where relevant, inspectors may contact other professionals, such as health and education professionals involved with the child, and providers of commissioned services, for example, managers of children's homes.
58. Inspectors will discuss case records with the allocated workers, using their knowledge of the child, file structure and recording systems. They will also consider case supervision notes. Where case records are electronic, the service should arrange for identified inspector(s) to have individual access to the electronic system.
59. Inspectors will examine, discuss and evaluate children's experiences against the criteria set out in this guidance and the separate deep dive guidance relevant to the specific inspection (see Annex A). Findings will be based on contemporary practice and generally be based on practice that has an impact on the child's or young person's current situation. However, inspectors will read some historical information to understand the child's journey. Inspectors will bring together individual findings to evaluate the overall impact of the local authority.

## **Sampling children's experiences**

60. Sampling is a more targeted look at the experiences of a greater number of children, focusing on particular points in children's journeys.
61. Inspectors will use sampling to investigate matters arising from other evidence (including tracking) and to evaluate the response to all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation at the point of identification, notification and referral (the 'front door'). The lead inspector will make a proportionate decision about the number of children whose experiences the inspection team should sample in order to secure sufficient evidence to support representative findings.
62. Inspectors will use sampling to triangulate evidence across the inspection and to pursue areas of both strong and weak practice identified through tracking, earlier sampling and from general records of any service.

## Observations of practice

63. Inspectors may gather evidence by observing meetings, such as:
- an initial and a review child protection conference
  - a strategy discussion/meeting
  - a multi-agency panel and a risk management meeting
  - a looked after children review, including a meeting when the child has been missing from care
  - a child in need or other planning or review meeting relating to the deep dive theme.
64. The inspector will have a brief discussion with the practitioner (and manager if present) following the observation.

## Interviews with practitioners, managers, leaders and stakeholders

65. Inspectors will triangulate evidence by talking to practitioners and/or managers, either by telephone or in person. Inspectors are likely to ask about:
- how they are helped to minimise risk
  - workloads and workload management
  - the availability, quality and impact of training and development.
66. The core activities of the inspection methodology are tracking and sampling children and young people's experiences. Where meetings do occur, the inspector leading the group will usually identify the key professionals that should attend.
67. Inspectors will meet with:
- The local authority Chief Executive
  - the Director of Children's Services
  - the lead elected member of children's services
  - head of social care
  - the Chair of the LSCB and LSCB Business Manager
  - police superintendent responsible for child protection and safeguarding (including those matters in scope of the specific deep dive theme)
  - supervisor of investigative/multi-agency team relating to the specific deep dive theme of the inspection
  - representatives of partner agencies relevant to the deep dive theme

- anyone in the local authority with direct management responsibility for the group of children or the practice areas within the deep dive theme
  - the lead LSCB member with responsibility for the group of children or the practice areas within the deep dive theme.
68. Where individuals are not available, inspectors may talk to those who deputise for them. Where alternative service models are in place, inspectors will talk with the appropriate local equivalent to those identified above.
69. The Ofsted senior analytical officer will support the onsite activity by meeting: the local performance team to understand how they manage and monitor performance; any data specialist within the scope of the deep dive theme of the inspection; and the manager of the 'front door' service. These meetings will usually include a member of the inspection team.

## Documentation

70. The inspection team will review the documentation requested in advance of their arrival onsite. Inspectors will not request any documents in addition to those outlined in Annex A, unless there are exceptional circumstances. They may agree to look at any additional documents provided by the local authority. For any additional information the local authority/inspector must demonstrate that the documents/s:
- are necessary for an accurate understanding of children's experiences and the effectiveness of local services
  - have not already been made available through those requested in Annex A, which should be the partnerships' best and most recent examples of the information requested.

## Roles and responsibilities of the inspection team

71. All inspectors are responsible for the quality of the inspection and their contribution to it.
72. The lead inspector will:
- coordinate the inspection between the team and local leaders
  - ensure that all areas of the inspection scope are evaluated
  - determine, alongside the team, where inspectors have gathered sufficient information against the evaluation criteria
  - prioritise inspection activity in response to emerging findings
  - oversee the quality of the work of the inspection team
  - ensure that evidence is sufficiently robust to support the findings
  - consider any health and safety risks for individual inspectors

- ensure that cases of concern are fed back to the local authority and that they provide a documented and timely response
- give clear expectations to inspectors about what they need to prepare for any meetings and the deadline for any written submissions
- work with local authority to resolve any concerns or issues that they may have in relation to the conduct of the inspection
- take overall responsibility for the accuracy and quality of the letter of inspection findings.

73. Team inspectors will:

- provide constructive challenge and scrutiny to the work of other inspectors throughout the inspection
- present a succinct analysis of key findings at team meetings
- advise the lead inspector where additional evidence (quantity and content) is required
- contribute to the content of the letter of inspection findings.

## **Section 4. Supplementary guidance**

### **Issues of concern**

74. Where serious issues of concern are identified – for example, a failure to follow child protection procedures and/or where a child is discovered to be at immediate risk of significant harm – inspectors will notify the local authority as soon as possible. They will ask the local authority to provide a written response to the inspector’s concerns using the form at Annex C. The notifying inspector will inform the lead inspector who will ensure that the response is received centrally through the keep-in-touch meetings. The inspector who raised the concern and the lead inspector will evaluate the response and share their evaluation with the local authority. The lead inspector and DCS will sign the form to confirm that both have seen the final version and that the process of review is completed.

### **Recording evidence**

75. Inspectors should ensure that their records of evidence are clear, evaluative, focused on outcomes and linked to the scope of the inspection. They should record the source of the evidence, and the date or time they reviewed the evidence or that a meeting took place. They should make clear whether the evidence recorded represents effective practice or an area for development.

76. Each inspector will maintain their own contemporaneous records of the evidence obtained from all aspects of the inspection. They should record summaries of their evaluations in the summary of evidence and analysis (SEA).

77. The SEA is the shared record of inspectors' evaluations and is a key tool in supporting inspectors to review their findings and arrive at overall conclusions about the experiences of children and young people. To this end, SEA entries should be evaluative and clearly express the inspector's view about the quality and effectiveness of practice, rather than simply describing the practice.
78. Two or more inspectors may coordinate their findings and agree for one inspector to record an evaluative summary in the SEA. Inspectors should complete SEA entries within two days of collecting the evidence. All SEA entries must be made before the team meeting on Thursday afternoon where provisional findings are agreed, though inspectors may review and update the SEA to reflect discussions at this meeting and the feedback meeting on Friday morning. All SEA entries should be completed by the end of the day on Friday of Week three as an accurate record is needed to support report writing and QA processes that start in week four.
79. All inspectors should individually and collectively review the SEA regularly to identify gaps in the evidence and confirm where the team has gathered sufficient evidence. The lead inspector will have oversight of the quality of recording and whether the evidence collated in the SEA covers the full scope of the inspection.
80. Inspectors should not use the names of individual children, young people, family members or staff in their records. They should record only the information that is necessary to help them accurately connect related sources of evidence; for example, case reference numbers, a person's initials and/or dates of birth. For individual staff and practitioners, inspectors should use their job titles/roles.
81. Ofsted will retain inspectors' contemporaneous records and the SEA in accordance with its retention policies.

## **Writing the letter of findings**

82. Inspectors will write up their findings in a letter addressed to the DCS and the Chair of the LSCB. Team inspectors are accountable for the quality of their contributions. The lead inspector is responsible for collating all contributions to the letter and is accountable for the letter's overall quality and accuracy.
83. The letter should be:
  - written in clear, straightforward language and free of jargon
  - concise and evaluative
  - a fair and accurate reflection of the strengths and areas for development in the local area
  - aligned to the inspection requirements as set out in this guidance and the relevant deep-dive theme guidance

- balanced between being accessible to a wider audience and being of value to the local partnership
- based on the evidence gathered on the inspection.

### **Strengths and areas for development**

84. Inspectors are not required to report against all of the evaluation criteria. The letter should focus on the key strengths and weaknesses.
85. Inspectors should include strengths where the local authority has delivered services that have had a demonstrable positive impact on the experiences of children and young people. When identifying strengths in the letter, inspectors should consider both innovative practice that has led to improvement and established practice that has delivered good outcomes.
86. Areas for development will be unequivocal. They will make clear where statutory guidance is not followed or where practice is weak and, as a result, good outcomes for children are not supported.

### **Areas for priority action**

87. Inspectors will include an area for priority action where a serious weakness is placing children at risk of inadequate protection or significant harm. Priority actions may result from particular or localised failings to protect children as well as systematic failures or deficits. Examples of situations that could result in a priority action are:
  - weakness in processes, decision-making and practice that result in a failure to respond to and investigate child protection referrals
  - unrecognised or unallocated child protection cases and/or significant delays in addressing child protection concerns
  - failure to manage the timeliness or quality of assessment and planning for children and young people in need of protection
  - failure to address practice deficits in referral and assessment arrangements that were identified as areas of learning from serious case reviews or as actions from previous inspection findings
  - a significant shortfall in capacity (including front-line staffing numbers and/or qualifications and expertise) or lack of effective management oversight and supervision that impacts adversely on the protection of children
  - significant delays in allocating or assessing children in need cases, which exposes those children to potential and unquantified risk of harm
  - ineffective partnership working and/or poor information sharing which impacts on the arrangements to protect children from significant harm.

88. This is not an exhaustive list. Any practice that leads to children being at immediate or potential risk of significant harm could lead to a priority action.
89. The letter of findings is an overview of the strengths and areas for development. Not everything discussed at the feedback meeting will be in the letter.
90. The letter will usually be addressed to the DCS, chief executive and the Chair of the LSCB.

## Quality assurance

91. A quality assurance (QA) manager will be assigned to the inspection to ensure:
  - consistent and correct application of the inspection guidance, methodology and criteria
  - that emerging concerns or gaps in the inspection evidence are quickly addressed
  - that senior officers are confident that the inspection is being properly conducted in line with the guidance
  - any concerns raised by the local authority about the inspection are resolved
  - that the findings in the final letter link clearly to the evidence from the inspection and align with the feedback provided to the local authority at the end of the inspection.
92. The QA manager will usually be onsite on Thursday and Friday of the fieldwork.
93. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to respond to a short evaluation questionnaire. Ofsted will use the feedback to improve future inspection. The lead inspector will provide the evaluation form at the start of the inspection. The evaluation will ask for the local authority's views on the inspection letter so responses should not be submitted until after the final letter has been published.
94. Quality assurance will continue after the inspection as part of the report (letter) writing process. Senior managers in Ofsted will review and agree the findings presented in the letter. The DCS will be provided an opportunity to review the factual accuracy of the letter.

## Action plan after the inspection

95. The local authority must publish a written statement of action they propose to take in light of the report within 70 working days.<sup>4</sup>

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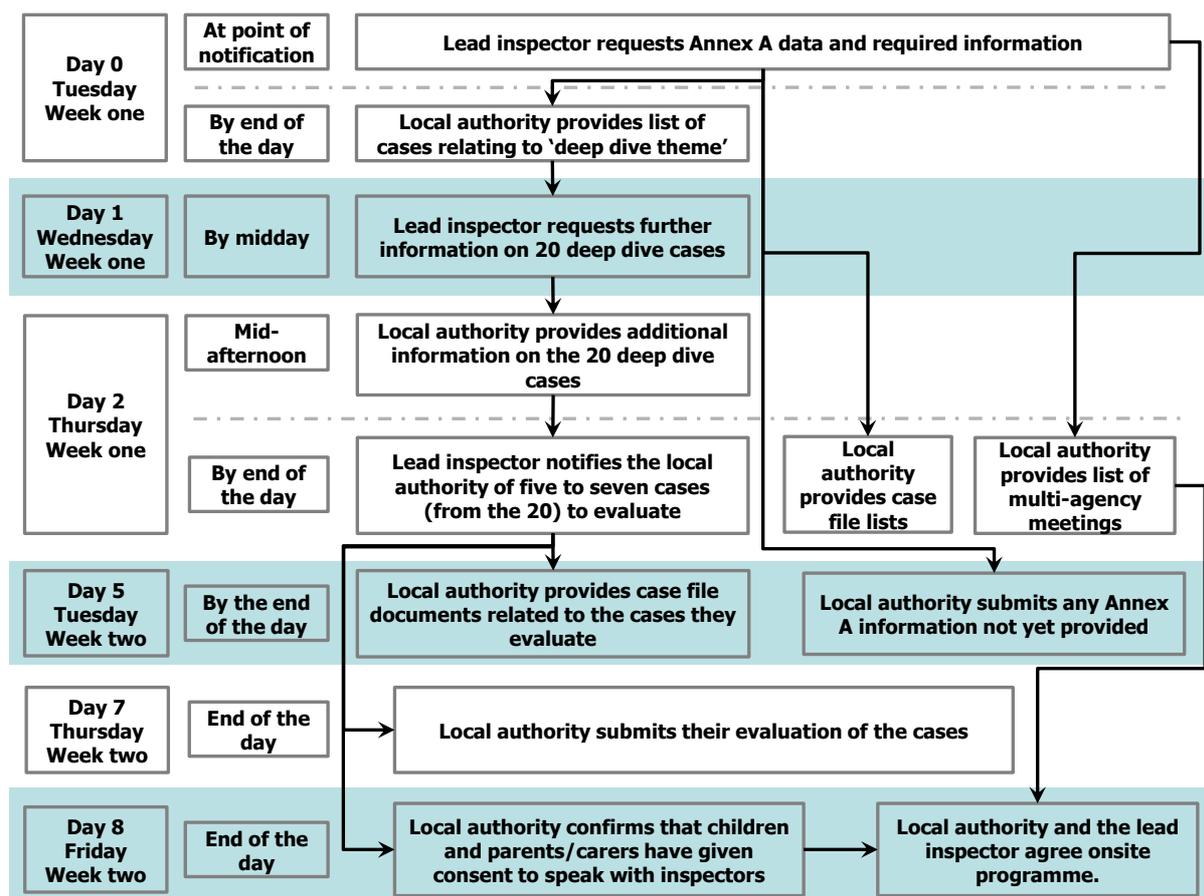
<sup>4</sup> Section 137 of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/137](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/137) and section 3 of *The Education and Inspections*

## Complaints

96. The great majority of Ofsted's work is carried out smoothly and without incident. If concerns arise during an inspection, these should be raised with the lead inspector or QA manager as soon as possible during the inspection visit to help resolve the matter before the inspection is completed. Any concerns about the factual accuracy of the findings in the letter can be raised after the inspection and will be considered as part of the QA process.
97. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised through published complaints procedures.

## Annex A. information to support the inspection

The evaluation criteria and the information requested for the inspection depend on the focus of the deep dive investigation. A list of the deep dive themes and the information requested for each is in the relevant deep dive guidance document (see links below). The flow diagram below outlines the milestones by when the local authority should provide the information requested.



### List of deep dive investigation themes

- the response to child sexual exploitation and those missing from home, care or education: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-inspection-of-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-inspection-of-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children)

## Annex B. inspection notification email

### Email to notify the local authority of the start of the inspection

Dear [insert name of DCS]

#### **Ofsted Targeted Local Authority Inspection of services for children [insert name of area]**

Earlier today I spoke with [insert name and title or 'you'] to inform **him/her/you** that on [insert date] inspectors from Ofsted will arrive on site in [insert name of area] to begin fieldwork for a Targeted Local Authority Inspection of services for children.

The particular deep dive theme for your inspection will be [insert theme].

The guidance outlining how the inspection will be conducted is available at the links below:

Framework and guidance – [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-inspection-of-local-authority-arrangements-and-services-for-children-in-need-of-help-and-protection](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-inspection-of-local-authority-arrangements-and-services-for-children-in-need-of-help-and-protection)

Guidance on the deep dive theme – [insert link].

I have asked the local authority to provide information to support the inspection. We have arranged access to a secure online portal to receive the information requested from you. Details for accessing and uploading information to this portal are in a guidance note appended to this letter.

The names and contact details of the inspection team are appended to this letter.

All inspections are assigned a Quality Assurance Manager. If there are any issues the inspection team cannot resolve, you can discuss these with the Quality Assurance Manager for this inspection: [insert name, number and email].

Yours sincerely

## Annex C. referring concerns to the local authority

<b>Case details</b> (include details of other children in the family/household if relevant)	<b>Reasons for referral back</b> (select one category)	
Case number(s):	<b>Category 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Serious issue of concern (for example, failure to follow child protection procedures and/or child at immediate risk of significant harm)	<b>Category 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> concern that the service offer or risk assessment may not be appropriate for the child's needs
Inspector referring:		
Date of referral:	<b>What are the issues that led to the case being referred?</b>	
Local authority team:		
<b>Response and explanation required by:</b>		
<b>Inspector's evaluation of the information provided by the local authority</b>		
<b>Sign off</b>		
<b>DCS:</b>	<b>Lead inspector:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	