National Child Protection Inspection Programme – Methodology for post-inspection follow up activity

Purpose

This document sets out the way in which HMIC proposes to conduct post-inspection follow-up activity of forces already inspected under the single-agency national child protection inspection across England and Wales.

Background

HMIC began a programme of single-agency child protection inspections of all police forces in England and Wales in April 2014. The aims of the inspection programme are to:

- assess how effectively police forces safeguard children at risk;
- make recommendations to police forces for improving child protection practice;
- highlight effective practice in child protection work; and
- drive improvements in forces’ child protection practices.

The focus of each inspection is on the outcomes for, and experiences of, children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.¹

Follow-up activity is an integral part of the National Child Protection inspection (NCPI) programme. It allows HMIC to assess the progress each force is making in its work to improve the services for the safety and protection of children.

Approach

Following inspection, HMIC requires an update of the action being taken by the police force to respond to the recommendations that should be acted upon immediately. Within six weeks of publication of the inspection report, the force is usually required to provide an action plan to HMIC specifying how it intends to respond to the other recommendations made in the report. At that stage, action plans are reviewed by HMIC inspectors and the precise nature of HMIC follow up is considered. Where inspection findings are broadly positive this is likely to be a ‘light touch’ process and involve a discussion on progress with force leaders. Where there are concerns about a force’s prospects for improvement, it could involve some additional inspection activity. In exceptional circumstances, full re-inspection may be necessary.

HMIC may decide at any stage that full re-inspection is necessary.

Subject to inspectors’ review of the action plans received from forces, HMIC will revisit each force no later than six months after the publication of the inspection report to assess how it is managing the implementation of all of the recommendations.

The specific aims of the follow-up activity are to:

- assess the extent to which the force is making sustainable improvements in child protection and safeguarding outcomes;
- assess the extent to which leadership and governance structures are robust and drive the successful implementation of necessary improvements;
- assess the extent to which the force understands and evaluates its own practice and performance and is taking steps to improve it, both immediately and for the longer term; and
- assess the overall progress of the force in responding to the findings and recommendations in the inspection report.

Forces will be expected to demonstrate progress against their post-inspection action plans.
Fieldwork

Post-inspection activity will range from:

- post-inspection visit;
- post-inspection review; and
- full re-inspection.

Post-inspection visit

Post-inspection visit - where inspection findings are broadly positive this will involve a discussion on progress against recommendations and implementation of the force’s action plan. Forces will be notified two weeks in advance of the date of their post-inspection visit. Issues arising during the visit will be raised in feedback during the visit. HMIC will provide formal feedback in writing to the chief constable (CC) and the police and crime commissioner (PCC) within three weeks of the visit and this will be published on the HMIC website. Activity to assess the above will include:

- interviews with key staff from the force including chief officers, the protecting vulnerable people lead and frontline staff;
- interviews with the chair of the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) and director of children’s services (DCS); and
- a limited review of key documents which demonstrate steps the force has taken to implement HMIC’s recommendations, e.g. policies and procedures.

Post-inspection review

Post-inspection review - where HMIC has some concerns about a force’s prospects for improvement, additional activity, including case audits, will be carried out in addition to that described above.

This will include:

- interviews with key staff from the force including chief officers, the protecting vulnerable people lead and frontline staff;
- interviews with the chair of the LSCB and DCS;
- a document review; and
- a modest selection of case audits relating to areas of concern in the action plan (for example, child sexual exploitation and missing from home).
The selection of documents requested for review by inspectors will be informed by inspection recommendations and the content of force action plans. This could include:

- the updated post-inspection action plan;
- progress reports on the implementation of recommendations and action plans;
- policies and procedures;
- minutes from governance meetings;
- internal audits;
- performance information; and
- problem profiles.

HMIC inspectors will provide feedback by at the end of the post-inspection review, and subsequently in writing to the CC and PCC within three weeks of the visit. This will be published on the HMIC website.

**Full re-inspection**

Full re-inspection - where HMIC has significant concerns about a force’s prospects for improvement, a full re-inspection will be carried out. In these circumstances, the full NCPI methodology will apply.

HMIC inspectors will review documents in advance of and in preparation for post-inspection visits or reviews. HMIC inspectors may require access to relevant force databases and systems during follow-up activity.

Forces will be informed in advance of the specific activity to be undertaken and the duration of the visit or review. HMIC inspectors will contact forces to make the necessary arrangements.

The findings from HMIC’s post-inspection follow-up activity will inform the scheduling of future inspections.