

8 March 2016

By email: socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk

ADCS Response to Ofsted's Consultation on the Re-Inspection of Inadequate Local Authorities

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) is the professional association for directors of children's services (DCSs) and their senior management teams. Under the provisions of the *Children Act 2004*, the DCS is the chief officer responsible for the discharge of local authority (LA) functions with regard to education and wider children's services, including social care.

ADCS has long called for a reduction in the burden of inspection imposed on LAs and recently published a policy position paper, in conjunction with the LGA and Solace, to this end. A more proportionate approach to the inspection of children's services was advocated in this paper and ADCS welcomes the proposals to reduce the degree to which councils judged to be inadequate are subsequently re-inspected, specifically:

- An approach focused on the areas of particular challenge and weakness. ADCS believes this represents a step towards the methods of inspection outlined in the joint position paper published in 2015
- The flexibility to be employed around the duration of the re-inspection as well as the size of the inspection team (meaning this activity will be less resource intensive for both the LA and Ofsted)
- Plans to publish a letter detailing the authority's progress to date with a focus on strengths as well as ongoing challenges. ADCS has long argued that single worded judgements do not accurately reflect the complex realities of children's services. Greater use of a narrative result is therefore welcome.

ADCS welcomes the move to reduce the inspection burden on placed LAs thus allowing focus to remain firmly on the improvement journey rather than servicing the machinery of inspection itself. ADCS recognises that this approach represents a calculated risk for both the Inspectorate, and the inspected, and ADCS members stand ready to work with Ofsted to establish how best to collectively manage and mitigate against any such risks.

Ofsted's acknowledgment that the timing of re-inspection is critical is a welcome development, as is the suggestion that LAs will have the opportunity to provide input into the likely timeframe for this to take place. ADCS believes that the re-inspection of an inadequate LA should take place at least 24 months after the original inspection, with an option for the authority to request an earlier assessment if it was confident that its improvement journey was sufficiently advanced and transformation of services was secured. Past experience shows that re-inspecting in a shorter timescale can be highly disruptive to the improvement process, particularly if there has been a significant change in the senior management team – leadership needs a chance to lead.

ADCS requests further clarity around the role the Department for Education (DfE) might play in deciding when an authority is to be re-visited by inspectors. There will be a need for transparency in the conversations that take place between Ofsted and the DfE as to the timing of the re-inspection and ADCS members are clear that the main driver must be the views of the LA itself. It is critical that the Inspectorate retains its impartiality and is free from political influence.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd

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Finally, whilst the Association is disappointed that the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) has been further extended to the end of 2017, ADCS members would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Inspectorate how this new risk-based approach can feed into the development of the universal framework that will replace the SIF in 2018.

ADCS would be pleased to discuss any of the points raised here with Ofsted representatives at a future meeting of the Association's Standards, Performance and Inspection Policy Committee in London.

For further information, please contact Katy Block, ADCS Policy Officer, katy.block@adcs.org.uk / 0161 826 9490.

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