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Joint targeted area inspections

Inspection framework and guidance

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Introduction

1. This guidance is for inspectors conducting joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) of arrangements and services for children in need of help and protection in local authority areas in England. These inspections are undertaken by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation).
2. The three safeguarding partners together with other agencies can use this guidance to understand how inspections are conducted.¹ 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 area. As such, it is a guide on the processes that usually govern the inspection.
4. This guidance is generic and applies to all JTAs. Each JTAI includes a 'deep dive' theme. The inspectorates publish separate guidance on each deep dive theme² that should be read alongside this framework.

Section 1. Scope of the inspection

5. JTAs are carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. They are an inspection of multi-agency 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)³
 - the leadership and management of this work
 - the effectiveness of the local safeguarding arrangements in relation to this work.

¹ Member agencies are specified in chapter 3 of 'Working together to safeguard children 2015' – www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2 – the local authority, police, National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies, youth offending team, NHS England and clinical commissioning groups, NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts (all or most of whose hospitals, establishments and facilities are situated in the local authority area).

² Joint inspections of local area services; www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-inspections-of-local-area-services

³ Depending on the prevalence and breadth of issues looked at within the specific deep dive investigation, the JTAI may focus on specific cohorts of children at the point of identification, notification and referral. This will be made clear within the relevant deep dive guidance.



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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'⁴

This aspect of the inspection is about the effectiveness of practice and arrangements for identifying and managing risks of harm to children and young people. Some JTAIs will inspect responses to all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation but others will mainly focus on a specific type (or types) of harm in line with the theme identified for the deep dive aspect of the inspection.

7. 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)⁵
 - 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, ethnicity 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 local agencies work together effectively, 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)

⁴ This will be the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) or the local equivalent.

⁵ The evaluation schedule numbers (ESN) are a referencing system to support inspectors when they record their findings in evidence records.



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- 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 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 local safeguarding partners actively monitors, promotes, coordinates and evaluates the work of the statutory partners that help, protect and care for children in the local area⁶ (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 their criteria see www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-inspections-of-local-area-services.

⁶ The role of the LSCB or the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is in line with the Working Together requirements and guidance on the arrangements for transition.

Section 2. Inspection process

The inspection team

8. The inspection team will usually include four inspectors from Ofsted, including an education inspector, four inspectors from HMICFRS, and three from CQC, and HMI Probation. An Ofsted social care HMI will lead the inspection.

Overview of the inspection

Week one	Week two	Week three	Weeks four – eight
Notifications and set-up discussion off site. (Tuesday)	Inspection team off site. Local area 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
Before notification	-1	Preparation (off site). The lead inspector and an inspector from each of CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation review the joint pre-inspection briefing.
Week one Tuesday	0	By 9.30 am – the lead inspector notifies the director of children's services (DCS) of the inspection by 9.30am, followed by calls from each inspectorate to senior leaders in other relevant local agencies. Each inspectorate requests information from the relevant agencies 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 senior leaders from the other local agencies. DCS sends the lead inspector the list(s) of children identified as child in need and children who are the subject of a child protection plan in the three months prior to the inspection.
Wednesday	1	By 3pm on day one (Wednesday) the local authority with partner agencies should also provide specific lists that will be outlined in each deep dive theme guidance. The lead inspector selects 20 children from the deep dive theme and requests further information on these 20.

Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
Thursday – Friday	2 – 3	<p>The local authority provides additional information on the 20 children selected by the lead inspector from the deep dive theme</p> <p>The lead inspector identifies between five and seven children from the lists provided and asks the local partnership to jointly evaluate their experiences by the end of the day 7.</p> <p>The local authority provides details of multi-agency meetings and the remaining lists of children and young people.</p> <p>The lead inspector produces a briefing note for the team.</p> <p>HMI Probation will request details of 10 cases from each of their inspected bodies (i.e. National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company and Youth Offending Team) for single agency sampling. The HMIP lead inspector will liaise with each agency to agree a criteria that is consistent with the deep dive theme. These cases lists should be submitted to the HMIP lead inspector by Day 8 i.e. the Friday before fieldwork commences.</p>
Week two Monday	4	<p>Preparation (off site) – consideration of pre-inspection briefing and Annex A information.</p> <p>The lead inspector commences timetable development for the on-site week in consultation with the local area and other inspectorates. The agreed timetable should be finalised by day 8.</p>
Tuesday	5	<p>Local agencies provide 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.</p>
Wednesday	6	<p>The lead inspector reviews case file documents and allocates Annex A documents to inspectors to evaluate.</p>
Thursday	7	<p>The local area agencies provide their joint evaluations of children’s experiences.</p>
Friday	8	<p>Inspection team considers the local partnership’s joint evaluation of children’s experiences.</p> <p>Local agencies confirm, in writing, whether children and young people and their parents/carers have given consent to speak with inspectors.</p> <p>The lead inspector agrees the on-site programme with the senior leaders (through the designated link person).</p> <p>National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company and Youth Offending Team each submit details of 10 cases for single agency sampling to the lead inspector HMIP.</p>



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Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
Week three Monday to Thursday	9–12	On-site inspection days. Day 9 – team arrives and meet with senior leaders. Day 9–12 – on-site activity (evidence collection ceases at 3.00pm on day 12). Day 12 – team meets in the afternoon to agree provisional findings.
Friday	13	Inspectors meet to identify key strengths, areas for development and areas for priority action (completed by lunchtime). This should include an opportunity for individual inspectorates to identify any specific messages for individual agencies, including matters the individual inspectorate may take forward. The lead inspector and representatives from each inspectorate meet with senior leaders of inspected agencies and services for the feedback meeting (concluded by mid-afternoon). All inspectors submit their written-up key findings to the lead inspector and ensure that their evidence records are fully up to date.
Week four Monday to Wednesday	14–16	The lead inspector consolidates findings from all inspectors into a single joint letter. On day 16 – the lead inspector and the Ofsted quality assurance (QA) manager agree a draft findings letter.
Weeks four Wednesday to Week five Friday	16–23	Days 16–21 – HMICFRS, HMI Probation and the CQC consider and sign off the draft letter. Days 21–22 – Ofsted National Director, Social Care signs-off the draft letter. Day 23 – editors review draft letter
Week six Monday to Week seven Friday	24–33	Ofsted sends the draft letter to the DCS for them to coordinate a single factual accuracy check that takes account of comments from all local agencies. The DCS has 10 working days to respond on behalf of the partnership (day 33, usually a Friday)
Week eight Monday to Week nine Tuesday	34–40	Day 34 – the lead inspector and Ofsted QA manager consider factual accuracy comments received from the local partnership and send proposed revisions to CQC, HMIC and HMI Probation. Day 37 – Inspectorates agree letter. Days 38–39 – Ofsted National Director, Social Care signs off final letter. Day 40 – editors review final letter.
Wednesday	41	Ofsted sends pre-publication findings letter to the DCS (copied to all senior leaders and the chair of the LSCB).

Usual day of week	Working day	Activity overview
Tuesday	43	Letter of inspection findings published.
Post inspection		Where required, the local agencies submit a statement of proposed action to ProtectionOfChildren@ofsted.gov.uk (within 70 working days of the letter being sent to the local agencies)

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 assessment
 - serious incident notifications
 - the findings from any published serious case reviews
 - evidence from whistleblowing or complaints to any of the inspectorates
 - regional intelligence, including events of public concern, such as high-profile court cases or media issues
 - other relevant published documentation, as identified in Annex A.
11. The lead inspector and a representative from each of CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation will review the pre-inspection briefing before they notify the local partners 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 discuss how they will jointly 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 senior leaders from all the relevant local agencies later the same day.⁷

13. Immediately after speaking to the DCS, the lead inspector will confirm the start of the inspection and the request for information in writing. The lead inspector will contact the other inspectorates to confirm that they have notified the DCS. The other inspectorates will then notify senior leaders in the other relevant local agencies and request information. The inspectorates will notify:
 - **CQC:** the clinical commissioning group (CCG) chief executive and executive lead for safeguarding children
 - **HMICFRS:** the chief constable and the force liaison officer
 - **HMI Probation:** manager of the youth offending service, director of the National Probation Service (NPS), the head of the NPS local delivery unit, the chief executive of the community rehabilitation company.
14. The inspectorates recognise that the person responsible for independent scrutiny of the local safeguarding arrangements may not be immediately available to be notified of the inspection. Therefore, the lead inspector will ask the DCS to notify the person with this responsibility as soon as possible and to provide them with the lead inspector's direct contact details.

Set-up discussion with senior leaders

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 identified representatives, including the scope and timing of these meetings
 - the feedback meeting at the end of fieldwork

⁷ Ofsted can provide details for accessing a conference call that will enable senior leaders to dial in from multiple locations

- practical issues, such as work space at each of the agencies inspectors will visit and arrangements for them to access records, information technology systems and staff support
 - a link person in the local area to support the inspection and make arrangements for interviewing staff (the link person should have access to the senior leaders in the agencies and sufficient authority to respond to 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 agencies to provide information to support the inspection. They should provide the information as soon as is practical and by the milestones in Annex A.
17. Inspectors will not request any information in addition to that outlined in Annex A, unless there are exceptional circumstances. They may agree to look at any additional information provided by the local partnership. For any additional information the partnership/inspector must demonstrate that it is:
 - necessary for an accurate understanding of children's experiences and the effectiveness of local services
 - not already available through the request in Annex A, which should be the partnerships' best and most recent examples of the information requested.
18. The local agencies should provide any information requested using secure processes. Inspectors will provide details for accessing a secure online site that local agencies 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.⁸
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, not full names, should be used on the lists provided. The first list/s required will relate to children

⁸ 'Summary of cloud security principles'; www.gov.uk/government/publications/cloud-service-security-principles



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identified as a child in need and children who are subject to a child protection plan. The DCS should provide these by the end of the day that the local area was notified of the inspection.

20. If there are particular contextual issues faced by the local area in relation to the deep dive theme, the DCS can advise the lead inspector of this. The lead inspector will take this into account when selecting the children whose experiences the team will track and sample for this inspection.
21. The lead inspector will request further lists of children as set out in the time line for the inspection and then select 20 children from these lists and ask the local authority to provide additional data on these 20. The lead inspector will select five to seven children from these 20 and ask the DCS to coordinate a joint evaluation by the local agencies of 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 work with the local partnership to evaluate the experiences of five to seven children selected by the lead inspector. The local partnership 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. The partners will be asked to submit both single and agency audits of each case as well as a multi agency audit. If the local partnership has undertaken a single and/or joint 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 single and joint evaluations will be based on their quality and not the number that the partnership is able to undertake in the time available.
24. The local partnership should provide key case file documents about the children whose experiences they evaluate by Tuesday of Week two. The DCS should provide the joint and single evaluations of each child's experiences by the end of the day on Thursday of Week two. If the partnership chooses, they may provide a summary of themes and any learning from across their evaluations.

Week three: on site

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 modify the plan for the inspection, throughout the time on site, 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 area and ensure that the local partnership is 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 keep-in-touch, team and findings meetings
 - review any health and safety risks for individual inspectors.

Initial on-site meeting with senior leaders

28. The lead inspector and a representative from each inspectorate will meet with senior leaders from the local agencies on the first day on site. At this meeting, attendees will review the matters discussed at the set-up discussion. Inspectors will answer any remaining questions and ask local leaders to confirm that the practical arrangements inspectors requested are in place.
29. The local agencies 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 partnership, as well as any known issues of concern or public interest during the course of the inspection.

Team working on site

30. Team working will be essential to capture, evaluate and coordinate findings from across the area as a whole, as well as for the separate sectors within the area. All inspectors will evaluate across the breadth of the framework, but multi-disciplinary teams within the overall inspection team will coordinate the findings of an aspect of the inspection:

- the effectiveness of the 'front door' arrangements (both joint and individual)
 - 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).
31. All inspectors will consider the impact of the workforce, managerial oversight and leadership in the area.
32. In addition to the joint evaluation of services, each inspectorate will consider findings in relation to their particular aspect of the partnership in the area (for example, HMICFRS will consider specific findings in relation to the Police Force).

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 local safeguarding arrangements
 - 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 agencies aware of key developments
 - provide a brief period to reflect as a team.
34. All team meetings should be attended by the lead inspector, at least one person from each inspectorate and at least one person from each of the 'mini-teams' outlined in paragraph 30 (those inspectors attending may fill more than one of these roles).

Engaging senior leaders: keep-in-touch meetings

35. The lead inspector will inform senior leaders of emerging findings throughout the on-site week through keep-in-touch (KIT) meetings. A representative from each inspectorate will usually attend. These are likely to happen on Tuesday, 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 senior leaders 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 relevant agency (or agencies) 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 agencies can take steps 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 with the other agency senior leaders who will attend each of these KIT meetings. No more than one person representing each key agency should attend unless it is agreed that the emerging findings require other specific individuals to attend.

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 partnership as a whole and in relation to specific agencies where appropriate.

The feedback meeting

40. On the final on-site day, all senior agency leaders and the person responsible for independent scrutiny of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements will be invited to meet with the inspection team to hear the provisional findings and the supporting evidence. There will be 'no surprises' as inspectors will have shared main strengths and areas for development throughout the inspection at KIT meetings. The lead inspector and at least one inspector from each inspectorate will attend. The local area will be asked to keep attendance to a minimum to enable manageable and effective dialogue.
41. The individuals from the local agencies are encourage to engage in a dialogue about the evidence supporting the findings 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 partnership 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. Inspectors will invite discussion about what the findings mean. The inspection team should be clear about what will make the most difference in the area and for the children the local agencies help, protect and care for.
44. Where there are particular issues for an individual agency where an inspectorate might consider taking further action independently, it will offer a separate meeting with that agency.
45. 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.

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 and parents/ carers 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 local agencies are aware of which children and parents, or carers they have spoken with. Where appropriate, they will provide feedback on these conversations if this will help local agencies to keep children safe and provide appropriate care for them – this will usually be through the KIT meetings with senior leaders. 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 agencies to arrange opportunities for inspectors to talk directly with the children whose experiences they will track, and opportunities to speak with their parents, or carers. The local agency should record consent from children and parents or carers. Where consent is not given or a discussion is not possible, the local agency 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 local agencies 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 area 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 local services; 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
 - (for tracking) at least one child or young person where the National Probation Service or community rehabilitation company has been involved (where possible)
 - 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 area 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, their social worker, health and education professionals and other practitioners involved. Where relevant, inspectors may contact providers of commissioned services (for example, managers of children's homes or CAMHS) or other services that may be relevant to understanding the child's experience (for example, where adult mental health services are provided to the child's parents and carers).
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 wholly or partly 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 and individual impact of the agencies that are the focus of the inspection.

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 evaluate the response to all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation at the point of identification, notification and referral (the 'front door') and to triangulate evidence across the inspection, including evidence for the deep dive theme. They will use sampling to investigate areas of both strong and weak practice identified through tracking, earlier sampling and from the general records of any relevant service.
62. The lead inspector, in discussion with colleagues from all inspectorates, 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. Inspectors will undertake both multi-agency and single-agency sampling.

Observations of practice

63. Inspectors may, where possible 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 and agencies that should be represented.
67. Inspectors will usually meet with:
- the director of children's services
 - head of social care
 - the person responsible for independent scrutiny of the local safeguarding arrangements
 - 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
 - MASH/CRU police lead
 - the MAPPA chair where appropriate
 - youth offending team manager
 - senior representative of the clinical commissioning group(s) in the area
 - safeguarding lead for the community rehabilitation company
 - safeguarding lead for the National Probation Service
 - anyone with direct management responsibility for the group of children or the practice areas within the deep dive theme
 - the lead within the safeguarding partnership with responsibility for the group of children or the practice areas within the deep dive theme.
68. Inspectors will usually only meet the local authority chief executive and the lead elected member for children's services where the emerging findings on the inspection require this.
69. 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.

Documentation

70. The inspection team will review the documentation requested in advance of their arrival on site. Inspectors will not request any information in addition to that outlined in Annex A, unless there are exceptional circumstances. They may agree to look at any additional information provided by the local partnership. For any additional information the partnership/inspector must demonstrate that it is:
- necessary for an accurate understanding of children's experiences and the effectiveness of local services
 - not already available through the request 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 relevant senior officer and that the related agency provides 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 leaders 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 a senior officer as soon as possible. They will ask the senior officer 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 senior officer. The lead inspector and senior officer 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. 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 evidence from across the local agencies; 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. Each inspectorate will retain its inspectors' contemporaneous records in accordance with their retention policies. Ofsted will retain the SEA on behalf of the inspectorates in accordance with its retention policies.

Writing the letter of findings

82. Inspectors will write up their findings in a letter addressed to the senior leaders in the local partnership. 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 criteria as set out in this guidance and the relevant deep-dive theme guidance
 - balanced between being accessible to a wider audience and providing sufficient detail to the local partnership
 - based on the evidence gathered on the inspection.
 - clear where good practice or areas for development are about the partnership or a particular agency in the local area.

Summary of findings

84. The letter will start with a brief summary of findings that outlines the overall experience of children and young people in the local authority area. The summary will cover key issues from across the scope of the inspection, but will focus on issues arising from the specific deep dive theme.

Strengths and areas for development

85. Inspectors are not required to report against all of the evaluation criteria. The letter should focus on the key strengths and weaknesses.
86. Inspectors should include strengths where the partnership has delivered services that have had a demonstrable positive impact on the experiences of children and young people. In particular, they should identify where multi-

agency working has been effective. 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.

87. 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

88. 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 systemic 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 multi-agency 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 frontline 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.

89. 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.

90. 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. If there are matters where an inspectorate decides to provide further detail to a particular agency to help them understand and act on the findings, that inspectorate may write to that agency directly after the inspection. This will occur by exception.

91. The letter will usually be sent or copied (as required) to the following people or their local equivalents:

- **local authority:** director of children's services, chief executive
- **health:** the clinical commissioning group (CCG) chief executive and executive lead for safeguarding children
- **police force:** the chief constable, police and crime commissioner and force liaison officer
- **probation:** manager of the youth offending service, director of the National Probation Service (NPS), the head of the NPS local delivery unit, the chief executive of the community rehabilitation company
- the person responsible for independent scrutiny of the local safeguarding arrangements

Quality assurance

92. 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
 - that any concerns raised by the local agencies 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 agencies at the end of the inspection.
93. The QA manager will be a Senior HMI from Ofsted. They will usually be on site on Thursday and Friday of the fieldwork on behalf of all the inspectorates. QA managers from the CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation may also be on site, but this will be by exception where particular issues on the inspection require their attendance.
94. The lead inspector will ask the DCS to coordinate a response from the partnership to a short evaluation questionnaire. The inspectorates 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 partnership's views on the inspection letter so responses should not be submitted until after the final letter has been published.
95. Quality assurance will continue after the inspection as part of the report (letter) writing process. Senior managers in all inspectorates will review and agree the findings presented in the letter. The DCS will be provided an opportunity to coordinate a shared review of the factual accuracy of the letter and provide a single joint response on behalf of the local partnership.



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Action plan after the inspection

96. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) may decide that a written statement of proposed action should be made in response to the findings. Ofsted will decide this in consultation with the CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation. They will also decide which agency should lead and which agencies should cooperate in making the statement.⁹ This decision will be included in the letter of findings from the inspection.
97. It is anticipated that this will usually be a multi-agency plan setting out how the partnership or relevant individual agencies will respond to the findings of the inspection. The local partnership may choose to involve other partners in addition to those identified in the letter.
98. Where the letter identifies that a statement of action should be made, the identified agency must make that statement within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection findings letter.¹⁰
99. The lead inspector will review the action plan and prepare a response on behalf of the inspectorates. All inspectorates will agree the response before it is sent. The purpose of this review is to confirm whether the action plan shows that the local agencies have understood the strengths and areas for development in the letter of findings.

Complaints

100. The great majority of each of the inspectorate'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.
101. If it has not been possible to resolve concerns through these means, a formal complaint can be raised through published complaints procedures. Where a complaint relates to a specific inspectorate, it should be raised with that inspectorate. Where a complaint relates to the joint inspection arrangements, Ofsted will process and coordinate the investigation of the complaint on behalf of all the inspectorates. Our arrangements for this are set out in Annex D.

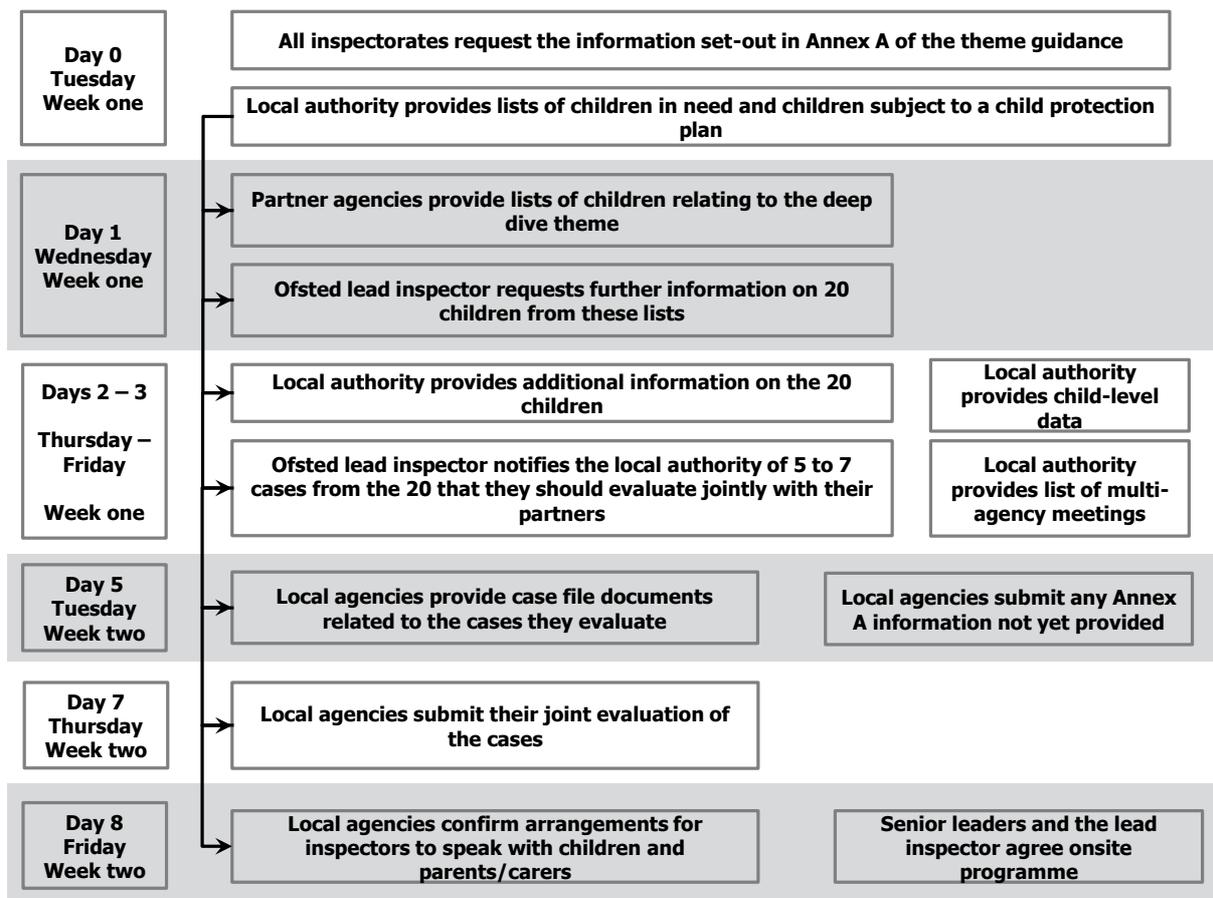
⁹ Regulation 3 of The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015;
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1792/regulation/3/made

¹⁰ Regulation 4 of The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015;
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1792/regulation/4/made

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: www.gov.uk/government/collections/joint-inspections-of-local-area-services

The flow diagram below outlines the milestones by when the local agencies should provide the information requested.





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Annex B. Inspection notification email

Email to notify the local agency senior leaders of the start of the inspection

Dear [insert name of agency senior leader]

Joint targeted area 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, CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation will arrive on site in [insert name of area] to begin fieldwork for a joint targeted area 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/joint-inspection-of-arrangements-and-services-for-children-in-need-of-help-and-protection.

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

The inspectorates have asked local agencies to provide information to support the inspection. We have arranged access to a secure online portal to receive the information requested from each service/agency by the relevant inspectorate. 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



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Annex C. Referring concerns to the local agencies

Case details (include details of other children in the family/household if relevant)	Reasons for referral back (select one category)	
Case number(s):	Category 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Serious issue of concern (for example, failure to follow child protection procedures and/or child at immediate risk of significant harm)	Category 2 <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:	What are the issues that led to the case being referred?	
Service:		
Response and explanation required by:		
Inspector's evaluation of the information provided by the agency		
Sign off		
Chief officer:	Lead inspector:	
Date:	Date:	



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Annex D. Challenges and complaints about joint inspections

This annex provides guidance on responding to challenges or complaints about joint inspections carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004 by two or more of the organisations: Ofsted, the CQC, HMI Probation and HMI Constabulary.

The inspection team will make sure the inspected bodies are aware of how to raise a challenge or complaint about the inspection. Any queries on this guidance should be sent to Ofsted's Complaints Team at complaints@ofsted.gov.uk.

The separate organisations contributing to the inspection process will have different policies and processes for responding to challenges or complaints about their own work. However, we have agreed this approach for complaints arising from these joint inspections.

All challenges or complaints relating to the joint inspection arrangements should be submitted to Ofsted who, as the lead inspectorate, will coordinate an investigation and joint response on behalf of all the relevant inspectorates. Where a complaint relates to a specific inspectorate, it should be raised with that inspectorate.

Challenges to inspection findings are often interlinked with complaints about the inspection process. Therefore, a single investigation will consider all concerns at the same time. This approach is consistent with Ofsted's published complaints procedure, available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted.

All local authority areas should be encouraged to raise any concerns about the inspection process, including challenges to inspection findings or complaints about staff conduct, with the lead inspector during the inspection so that these can be resolved at the earliest opportunity. If a local authority area feels that this is not possible, it should contact Ofsted directly and ask to speak with the Ofsted Senior HMI assigned to the inspection as the quality assurance manager at the earliest opportunity so that the issues can be considered while the inspection is ongoing.

A local authority area can raise a formal challenge or complaint up to 10 working days after the publication or finalisation of the inspection report. Challenges or complaints should be submitted to Ofsted using the online form available at <https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/onlinecomplaintsofsted>. Concerns raised later than this will not usually be considered.

The publication or finalisation of a report will not usually be withheld or withdrawn unless exceptional circumstances exist. An application to withhold or withdraw a report should be made when a formal complaint is made to Ofsted. The application should set out any exceptional circumstances that may be relevant.

Challenges or complaints will be dealt with as follows.

Complaints about the inspection process and/or challenges to the inspection outcome

Ofsted will appoint a lead investigator to formally consider and respond to the challenges or complaints. A final response to each challenge or complaint about the inspection process or inspection outcome will be sent within 30 working days of receipt of the concern.

Milestone	Activity
Within 10 working days of report publication	Local authority area submits formal challenge or complaint to Ofsted.
Within five working days of complaint being made	Ofsted sends an acknowledgement letter to the complainants and will confirm expected response deadlines. Ofsted shares copies of all challenges or complaints with the lead inspectors from other relevant inspectorates.
Within 10 working days of complaint being made	Lead inspectors have five working days to provide written comments on relevant aspects of the challenge or complaint. This may include queries about some aspects of inspection practice or inspector conduct.
Within 20 working days of complaint being made	The Ofsted lead investigator will consider all inspectorate responses and draft a response to the concerns raised. They will send this to the other inspectorates for comments.
Within 22 working days of complaint being made	Inspectorates send their comments on the response to Ofsted.
Within 25 working days of complaint being made	The Ofsted lead investigator will consider all comments received and finalise the response letter.
Within 30 working days of complaint being made	The response letter will undergo final checks and sign off in Ofsted. The final response letter will be shared with all inspectorates before being sent to the complainant.

Complaints about inspector conduct

Specific complaints about inspector conduct will be undertaken by the relevant inspectorate as these concerns may link directly to performance management and/or disciplinary action. However, for consistency, all investigations should be completed and final responses sent out within 30 working days.

Milestone	Activity
Within five working days of complaint being made	Acknowledgement letters will be sent to complainants and will confirm expected response deadlines. The letter will explain which inspectorate will undertake the investigation.



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<p>Within 30 working days of complaint being made</p>	<p>Internal deadlines and sign-off arrangements within an inspectorate will be used to consider complaints about inspector conduct.</p>
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In order to maintain appropriate confidentiality, investigation outcomes into specific complaints about inspector conduct will not automatically be shared across all inspectorates. However, the overall outcome must be provided to Ofsted as to whether a complaint about inspector conduct has been upheld.

Complaints that contain challenges to both inspection process/outcomes and concerns about inspector conduct

These will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In some cases it may be appropriate for queries about inspector conduct to be included in a broader complaint investigation. In other cases, for reasons of confidentiality, complaints about conduct might be considered separately.

Where this occurs, it is important to consider whether the outcome of an investigation into a complaint about conduct might impact on the robustness of the inspection process itself or the inspection outcomes. The relevant inspectorates will be consulted in all such cases.

Ofsted will record learning outcomes from the complaint investigations and share this with all other inspectorates.

Requests to withhold or withdraw publication of a joint inspection report

All inspectorates agree that publication of a joint inspection report will not be withheld or withdrawn unless exceptional circumstances are identified. The issue of exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Such requests are by nature urgent, and often require a response within 48 hours. Whenever practicable, Ofsted will seek the views of the lead inspectors from all other inspectorates before making the decision whether or not exceptional circumstances exist that justify withholding or withdrawing publication. However, in very urgent cases, the other inspectorates agree that it may be necessary for Ofsted to make a decision unilaterally. In those circumstances, Ofsted will advise the other inspectorates of the decision at the earliest opportunity so that they can make representations.

Summary of framework changes

This section outlines additions to guidance or changes to the inspection methodology. This does not include corrections or changes made to improve clarity.

Changes made in January 2018

- We amended the guidance to make clear that our evaluation of the 'front door' may be of all forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation or it may focus on specific types of harm in line with the deep dive theme for that inspection.
- We changed references to the 'local safeguarding children board (LSCB)' to local safeguarding arrangements
- HMICFRS will now usually allocate four inspectors to the team rather than three.
- For the cases that we ask the local agencies to evaluate, we will ask for individual agency's evaluations (where available) as well as the joint evaluations.
- We have added a request for local agencies to identify some specific cases that relate to the deep dive theme to support inspectors to select the children whose experiences they will evaluate.
- We have added a request for youth offending teams, the national probation service and community rehabilitation companies to identify some specific cases with their involvement to support inspectors to select the children whose experiences they will evaluate.

Changes made in April 2017

- A new footnote in section one clarifying that the JTAI may focus on specific cohorts of children at the point of identification, notification and referral.
- Removed some references to activities happening at specific times of day. Any such deadlines will now appear in the guidance for the deep dive theme.
- Changes to the list of meetings: inspectors will usually only meet with the local authority chief executive and the lead elected member of children's services where emerging findings on the inspection require this.

Changes made August 2016

- Guidance on including a summary of findings in the inspection report.
- Additional information on the inspectorates' review of post-inspection action plans.
- A new annex outlining the complaints procedure for joint inspections.



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