

Guide to the Care Inspectorate link inspector role

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1. The purpose of the link inspector guide

- 1.1** This guide provides information to local authorities, health and social care partnerships and community planning partnerships (hereafter referred to as 'partnerships') and their staff on the Care Inspectorate's link inspector role.
- 1.2** The guide clarifies the legislative context and aims of the role; the activities integral to the role, including potential frequency of these; people with whom the link inspector connects in order to undertake the role; the link inspector's role in supporting improvement and during strategic joint inspections; and quality assurance arrangements.
- 1.3** The guide supports a consistent approach to how the role is undertaken.

2. The legislative context of the link inspector role

- 2.1** Since its establishment in 2011, the Care Inspectorate has had link inspector arrangements in place with all 32 local authorities in Scotland. The role is undertaken by strategic inspectors.
- 2.2** Section 44(1) (b) of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 provides the Care Inspectorate's "general duty of furthering improvement in the quality of social services". Social services are defined as social work services and care services. This provides the statutory basis for the link inspector role and, in particular, for the Care Inspectorate's engagement with senior leaders within partnerships at a strategic level, outwith inspections.
- 2.3** The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 formalised arrangements for health and social care integration, particularly for adults' services. Local areas have taken different approaches as to which social work services are delegated within health and social care partnerships (HSCPs). In some areas all social work functions are delegated. In others solely adult social work services are delegated. The inclusion of justice social work services varies between both approaches. The link inspector role must be viewed in the context of these partnership arrangements.

3. The link inspector role

3.1 The vision:

In each of the 32 local authority areas, the link inspector(s) focus on:

- monitoring the performance and quality of social work and care services
- monitoring the performance of public protection arrangements, including MAPPA arrangements
- identifying factors which support these services to deliver good or improved outcomes, as well as any barriers, risks or challenges
- identifying good practice within these services and disseminating this as appropriate

- supporting partners' efforts to build capacity for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

3.2 The practice:

To support the above vision, a strategic inspector is identified as a link inspector for each partnership area. For larger partnership areas, there may be two link inspectors (one to cover children's and justice services and one to cover adults' services). Some link inspectors may also support two partnership areas.

3.3 Link inspector activities

In consultation with, and agreement from, senior leaders, link inspectors undertake a range of activities in their partnership areas. Activities may include:

- attending relevant strategic meetings including the child protection committee (CPC), adult support and protection committee (ASPC) or public protection committee (PPC); chief officer group (COG); integration joint board (IJB); council committees, children's services partnerships, community justice partnerships or other relevant senior fora
- reading and/or commenting on documents or papers either for these meetings or relevant to other link inspector role purposes. This includes the preparation time required to read documents in advance of meetings, such as CPC/ASPC minutes, strategies or plans
- acting as a 'critical friend', offering constructive challenge, clarity and assurance
- internal record keeping in relation to the link inspector role.

Link inspectors work collaboratively with Care Inspectorate colleagues. Relationship managers meet regularly with regulated services, partnerships and health boards. They lead in matters relating to registered care services, sharing information with link inspectors as appropriate.

3.4 Individuals with whom the link inspector could meet:

Engagement arrangements must be agreed with the chief social work officer or relevant senior leaders within the partnership and endorsed by the link inspector's service manager. The key individuals the link inspector liaises with include:

Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO): it is acknowledged that, as well as the role of CSWO, individuals may also have responsibilities as heads of service. This brings a range of responsibilities across the planning, delivery and management of services, as well as fulfilling the statutory aspects of each role. Accordingly, the link inspector's contact with the CSWO will take into account both parts of their role. Meetings will facilitate discussion about social work services in the round, as well as performance and quality assurance activities and aspects of practice as outlined in the annual chief social work officer report.

Chief Officer of the HSCP: this facilitates discussion about matters arising from health and social care integration.

Senior leadership: depending on partnership structures and how actively the CSWO is involved across the range of adults, children's and justice services, the link inspector needs to engage with this group as part of their monitoring role. It is at the discretion of the link inspector, in discussion with senior leaders of the partnership, as to whether – and how – some of these individual meetings dovetail together.

CPCs, ASPCs, PPCs and COGs: Attendance at these committees/groups supports the link inspector to fulfil the oversight role for protection arrangements as well as gain an oversight of wider operational activities in each link area.

Other potential engagement opportunities for the link inspector could include:

- attendance at the IJB, community justice partnership, children's services partnerships
- attendance at relevant partnership events, such as child and adult protection annual conferences (this could be either the link inspector or relationship manager)
- meeting elected members to gain a sense of political support and leadership of social work and social care services.

3.5 Frequency of engagement

The frequency of engagement may vary depending on factors such as partnership agreement, partnership business requirements and expectations, as well as link inspector availability and capacity. The following table suggests a minimum standard.

Individual meetings/fora	Frequency (minimum standard)
Chief social Work Officer/Chief Officer/senior leaders	Quarterly
Child protection committee	Bi-annually
Adult protection committee	Bi-annually
Public protection committee	Bi-annually
Chief officer group	Annually

3.6 Agenda for link inspector meetings:

The agenda for a link inspector meeting may vary across partnerships. It must be flexible and responsive to the needs of the partnership while also enabling the link inspector to fulfil their role. The below are suggested items for consideration.

- Key developments within the council/partnership relating to adults', children's and justice services and public protection.

- Matters arising from current or planned strategic scrutiny activity, including improvement plans.
- Thematic issues arising from inspections of registered care services.
- Updates, themes or improvement work arising from serious incident reviews, learning reviews or notifications of the deaths of looked after children.
- Important areas of service improvement and development, in particular, areas of potential risk or challenge and the impact of these; as well as areas of good practice.
- Progress towards implementation of national policies, procedures or legislation.
- Self-evaluation and supported self-evaluation activity.
- Key developments within the Care Inspectorate.

Important matters arising from link inspector meetings are discussed in individual supervision between the service manager and link inspector as part of the supervisory relationship. Should any matter require urgent discussion, the link inspector must advise the service manager accordingly.

3.7 Recording link inspector activity

For performance and quality assurance purposes, link inspectors maintain a record of their engagement with partnership areas. This is compliant with general data protection requirements. The Care Inspectorate may need to consult records, for example, if a significant event or development takes place in that area when the link inspector is unavailable. Records are maintained in accordance with the Care Inspectorate Retention policy.

4. Internal Care Inspectorate engagement

4.1 The link inspector's main internal contact is with relationship managers who oversee registered care services across partnership areas.

4.2 The purpose of liaison between link inspectors and relationship managers is:

- to liaise on any pertinent matters regarding registered services about which the link inspector may need to know. This may involve follow up activity with local areas on strategic matters
- in addition to link inspectors' engagement with ASPCs and CPCs, they should liaise with relationship managers about the possible need for additional Care Inspectorate attendance, for example where there has been a large number of ASP referrals relating to care homes, it may be appropriate for the relationship manager to attend these fora
- provision of intelligence for internal documents or meetings or the recording of shared risk assessments
- information which contributes to strategic risk assessment for joint inspections, including from registration and complaints teams. The relationship manager is also the conduit for gathering registration and complaints information and analysis to be shared with the link inspector

- link inspectors keep relationship managers informed of any significant developments within the local authority/partnership area, especially where these may be relevant to the activity of registered care services
- where possible, link inspectors and relationship managers representing each partnership area communicate regularly to support routine information sharing.

4.3 Link inspectors can contact any of their strategic inspector or Care Inspectorate colleagues where this supports the function of the link inspector role. For example, when there is a request for support in an area of work which is not the link inspector's area of expertise; or where the support of the improvement support team may be beneficial. Where this may impact on colleagues' workload, this should be discussed with the service manager in the first instance.

5. Requests of the link inspector to support improvement activity

5.1 Link inspectors may be asked to support specific pieces of improvement activity outwith the above arrangements. These requests must be discussed initially with a service manager before being agreed with the partnership. Agreement requires to be flexible in response to the link inspector's capacity. It may also be the case that another internal colleague or organisation is best placed to support the request.

5.2 Discussions about these requests should consider the below.

- Specific details (area of work; activity required).
- Rationale for the request.
- The expected outcome/benefit.
- Resource required (time; equipment; people).
- Individual(s) best placed to undertake improvement activity.

6. Link inspector contribution to shared risk and intelligence

As well as sharing intelligence internally, link inspectors have a role in ensuring intelligence is shared in appropriate external fora to support an analysis of shared risk. Along with other scrutiny bodies, the link inspector contributes to local and national discussions which inform shared risk, intelligence and national scrutiny plans. For example, national scrutiny planning led by Audit Scotland and the sharing health and care intelligence network (SHCIN).

7. Link inspector contribution during and after strategic joint inspections

7.1 Inspection programmes and activities evolve over time. However, as a general principle, link inspectors always contribute to joint inspections by providing information and intelligence on their link partnership area to the inspection team.

7.2 During a strategic joint inspection in their partnership area, the link inspector is required to have discussions with their senior leadership contact in the partnership area to determine how best the link inspector role should be undertaken over the period of the joint inspection.

7.3 This means the below options could be considered.

- Dependent on the focus of work under inspection, the link inspector could continue in their link role but withdraw from discussion on the area of work under inspection. For example, if the partnership area is undergoing a strategic joint inspection of children's services, the partnership area may still wish the link inspector to support them in relation to adults' and justice services.
- The link inspector could attend certain strategic fora/meetings, but not others (i.e., in the example above, the link inspector may withdraw from attendance at the CPC but continue to attend the ASPC).
- The link inspector could withdraw from all link inspector activity for some, or all, of the duration of the joint inspection.

7.4 The inspection lead may invite the link inspector to the team's final meeting with the partnership to enable them to hear final key messages and findings alongside the partnership.

7.5 Once a joint inspection is complete and the report published, the partnership area may be required to submit an improvement plan within a certain period of time. Following ratification of the improvement plan by the inspection lead and relevant service manager, the responsibility for monitoring and oversight of the improvement plan lies with the link inspector.

7.6 Following a joint inspection and after the improvement plan, it may be appropriate that partnerships undertake additional levels of improvement support as outlined in the Care Inspectorate's strategic scrutiny framework for support. The link inspector may also have a role in supporting this framework, in discussion with the inspection lead and the service manager.

8. Quality assurance arrangements and the role of the service manager

Care Inspectorate strategic service managers monitor and systematically evaluate strategic inspector activities. This includes oversight of the efficiency and effectiveness of link inspector responsibilities, maintaining an oversight of improvement plans and facilitating communication with service managers responsible for registered services.

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