AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

The Department of Community Services Helpline

The Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

The Legislative Council
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

In accordance with section 38E of the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983*, I present a report titled: **The Department of Community Services Helpline.**

R J Sendt
Auditor-General

Sydney
June 2005

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Foreword

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Foreword

Children have the right to be safe from abuse and neglect. Unfortunately not all children are properly cared for and some are harmed.

Each week over 4,000 people contact the Department of Community Services with information about children at risk of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

The Department has a statutory duty to protect children it considers to be at risk of harm. To do this, it needs an effective system to receive, assess and refer information about children at risk.

This is the role of the Helpline, which is the front-end of the Department's child protection services.

This report informs Parliament and the community on the progress made - and what remains to be done - to ensure that information about children at risk of harm is properly assessed and referred for investigation.

R J Sendt
Auditor-General

June 2005

Executive summary

Executive summary

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has a statutory duty to protect children it considers to be at risk of harm. In order to do this, it needs an effective system to receive, assess and refer child protection information.

This audit examines the adequacy of the DoCS Helpline as the central intake for child protection reports in New South Wales.

The audit does not examine the response of local DoCS Community Services Centres (CSCs) or Joint Investigative Response Teams (JIRTs) to referrals from the Helpline.

Audit opinion

We established a variety of criteria against which to assess the performance of the Helpline. Against these criteria we believe the Helpline to be performing adequately overall. Some aspects are good. Some areas need further improvement.

The task is challenging as the Helpline receives more than half of Australia's child protection reports and handles over 4,000 contacts a week. DoCS has responded well during this audit initiating action to address matters we raised as the audit progressed.

Before this audit commenced, DoCS had established some service standards for the Helpline, and during the audit added additional standards relating to call waiting times and the time taken to refer reports to CSCs and JIRTs. These standards now provide a framework for assessing the performance of the Helpline both as a call centre and as a referral service.

Also on the positive side, DoCS has:
- adopted a central intake model for collecting child protection information, providing greater assurance that reports are assessed consistently
- improved the overall performance of the Helpline, reducing the average call waiting time to less than five minutes
- introduced processes to fast-track reports that clearly indicate a child is in imminent danger
- routinely monitored urgent reports to ensure they are referred in accordance with the service standards
- commenced a review of the assessment framework to identify additional tools to better weight risk and urgency.

Issues requiring further attention include:
- the abandonment rate (the proportion of callers who hang up) before speaking to a caseworker
- improving the requirements for taking and recording child protection information
- achieving service standards established for low and moderate risk reports
- improving data quality so that Helpline data can be used as a reliable indicator of demand to guide DoCS state-wide planning.

Summary of recommendations

This is a summary of more detailed recommendations contained in the body of the report at the cited page references. We liaised extensively with DoCS during the audit, and the Department has already acted to implement some of these recommendations.

Enhance Helpline's service standards

We recommend that DoCS further enhance the accountability framework for the Helpline by:

- including grade of service; that is the proportion of calls which must be answered within a specified time (page 17)
- reviewing the service standard for abandoned calls in the caseworker queue in light of the service levels achieved by its education team (page 19)
- publicly reporting against service standards for the Helpline (page 17 and 33).

Review minimum requirements

We recommend that DoCS review and restate minimum requirements for:

- taking and recording child protection information including decision or check points (page 19)
- screening all contacts to determine whether a risk of harm assessment is needed (page 25 and 26)
- triaging and prioritising reports for initial assessment (page 27)
- conducting and recording the review of a child's protection history (page 32).

Enhance software

We recommend that DoCS enhance software used by the Helpline to:

- enable end-to-end monitoring of calls (page 19)
- allow all contacts, including faxes, to be queued electronically (page 27)
- promote data integrity through the increased use of mandatory fields in KiDS (page 34).

Improve quality

We recommend that DoCS:

- continue its work to improve decision-making tools to support a more objective and consistent weighting of risk and urgency (page 32)
- routinely monitor the acceptance rate of Helpline's assessments by CSCs and JIRTs (page 34)
- audio-record telephone calls to the Helpline in order to assure the accurate capture of reports and to enable staff coaching and quality improvement (page 20).

Continue to work with mandatory reporters

We recommend that DoCS continue its work with mandatory reporters (who are obliged by law to report child protection concerns), to:

- standardise the forms used to report risk of harm (page 21)
- provide the option of interactive electronic reporting (page 21)
- explore opportunities to introduce dedicated teams at the Helpline to handle reports from police and health (page 22).

Audit findings

Chapter 1
Introduction

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has a statutory obligation to respond to information about a child's safety, welfare or wellbeing. A child is at risk of harm if current concerns exist that he or she is at risk of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Before the Helpline, 84 local DoCS Community Services Centres (CSCs) across New South Wales, took child protection information, assessed and responded to it.

Chapter 2
Taking information

The Helpline takes over 4,000 contacts each week.

Before the audit commenced, DoCS had some service standards for taking calls. During the audit DoCS introduced additional standards that provide a sound basis for managing the Helpline. DoCS needs to build on this work and upgrade its software in order to improve monitoring of performance and review of resource requirements.

By September 2004 the Helpline had reduced the average time callers wait to speak to a caseworker to less than 5 minutes.

However, there are two concerns regarding the level of assurance that the Helpline is capturing all available information about children at risk.

Nearly one in ten callers hang up before their information is collected. The risk that information is lost is mitigated because the majority of callers work with children, have a statutory duty to report and are liable for a $22,000 penalty if they do not. As a result callers who hang up are likely to call again or fax their information, but there is a risk that they may not.

Secondly, Helpline's practices for recording child protection information vary. The audio-recording of calls is recommended as it would support call coaching and retrospective checking of compliance, as well as providing an objective record of telephone calls.

Significant gains may be achieved by improving how the Helpline works with people who work with children (who provide 76 per cent of risk of harm reports). DoCS is continuing its work to improve the quality of information from mandatory reporters and the quality of feedback provided to them.

Chapter 3
Screening
information

The Helpline manages the workflow by screening contacts to determine whether a risk of harm assessment is needed, and triaging reports to determine how and when assessments should be done.

Currently, staff use a range of approaches to screen calls and conduct triage depending on how the Helpline receives the information.

For example, Community Services Officers (CSOs) screen information from members of the public and distressed callers to determine whether or not to refer the call to a caseworker who will determine whether or not there is a risk of harm. There are no protocols to guide the screening decision and the Helpline does not monitor or review calls handled by CSOs.

DoCS has recognised the need for procedures to guide CSO decision-making and is providing additional training.

On the other hand, we found an absence of screening by caseworkers in regard to reports received from mandatory reporters. In these instances, caseworkers will complete an initial assessment of all reports regardless of content. However, some reports are triaged to determine how and when an initial assessment will be done.

It would be more efficient to screen the information using agreed criteria to decide whether or not an initial assessment is warranted.

Chapter 4

Assessing and referring child protection reports

Caseworkers assess reports to determine firstly whether the child is at risk and secondly to decide how urgently DoCS needs to respond.

DoCS has recognised the need to enhance the decision-making tools currently used by caseworkers conducting these assessments. DoCS is investigating tools to help weight risk and urgency and to improve the reliability and consistency of responses.

During the course of this audit, the Helpline introduced standards for, and started to monitor, the time taken to assess and refer reports to CSCs and JIRTs.

The Helpline ensures that reports about serious or immediate risk of harm, which require a DoCS response within 24 or 72 hours, are handled appropriately and referred promptly to CSCs and JIRTs. On average the Helpline receives 186 of these reports a day.

There have been delays in approving reports recorded on KiDS about lower levels of risk. Each day on average, the Helpline receives 129 reports, which it assesses to involve a moderate to low risk of harm, that DoCS should respond to within 10 days. By its own standards, the Helpline should refer these reports to a JIRT or CSC within 3 days. But in April 2005 there were 861 of these reports at the Helpline of which 742 were over 3 days old and 305 were over 10 weeks old.

DoCS also recognises that Helpline data can provide critical information for state-wide planning and has initiated a number of projects to improve data quality.

Response from the Department of Community Services

Thank you for providing me with a copy of The Audit Office's Performance Audit on the NSW Department of Community Services' (DoCS) Helpline, and the opportunity to comment on its findings.

I would like to thank The Audit Office for undertaking a Performance Audit of the Helpline. It was important to the Department that an external review be undertaken, to obtain an outside opinion of the Helpline's operations as a centralised state-wide intake service for all child protection reports in NSW.

The Helpline was established in response to the Police Royal Commission's recommendation that DoCS improve its child protection intake services, and to enable the people of NSW to have 24 hour a day access to a service focussed on child protection and dealing with general inquiries about community services.

As the Audit Report notes, the commencement of the Helpline in December 2000 coincided with the proclamation of major parts of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. The introduction of the new Act saw a massive increase in child protection reports being received by DoCS, which was not anticipated. At that time, 54 caseworkers were employed at the Helpline, its budget was $6.942 million, call waiting times were not satisfactory and the technology for the intake service struggled to meet the demand.

Since that time, caseworker positions have increased to 142, technology and software has been upgraded to manage incoming calls both quickly and efficiently, procedures have been modified and the Helpline's budget has increased to $15.7 million per annum.

DoCS is moving forward to help ensure that the Helpline provides a consistent intake system across NSW, screening all matters and applying risk assessment processes to reports where a child or young person is at risk of harm.

The Performance Audit has provided the Department with an assurance that it is heading in the right direction, and will be a helpful guide as we build the Helpline's operational capacity.

The majority of the recommendations are supported, and DoCS has identified a range of measures that are either in progress, or which the Department intends to adopt, to address issues identified in the Report.

The measures currently in progress include:

- *reviewing the current Initial Assessment process and considering the need for more objective criteria and decision making tools for caseworkers, such as Structured Decision Making, to make the process more reliable and consistent. DoCS anticipates making a decision on this towards the end of 2005*

- *finalising and maintaining the Helpline's intranet webpage as the reference for all relevant business rules and procedures, to promote staff compliance and consistency in application. It is anticipated that the webpage will be finalised by August 2005*

- *upgrading the Helpline's phone management system to improve reliability and efficiency, provide a better understanding of Helpline call patterns, and assist in improving forecasting and review performance. This work has begun and should be in operation by September 2005*

- *ongoing upgrades to the Key Information and Directory System (KiDS) to support Initial Assessment more efficiently*

- *piloting electronic reporting (e-reporting) with the Department of Education and Training, to elicit relevant information in a structured way. Phases 1 and 2 of the pilot are planned for Term 4, 2005*

- *continuing to work with mandatory reporters and seek agreement on simplified 'feedback' requirements*

- *developing tools for Community Services Officers to guide them in their work, and a training program to include call-answering techniques, throughout the rest of 2005*

- *the commencement of a 'Handle Times' trial with the objective to provide a reliable measurement of the average time taken by a caseworker to process incoming calls and faxes*

- *reviewing the NSW Child Protection Interagency Guidelines to improve feedback to mandatory reporters. This is due for completion in 2006.*

Prior to DoCS adopting other recommendations outlined in the Audit Report, consultation will be required with key stakeholders and mandatory reporters.

DoCS also acknowledges there is further room to improve practice and standards. The Audit Report provides valuable advice and direction in this context on aspects which we will address over the coming months.

I appreciate the level of cooperation that existed between the Department of Community Services and The Audit Office in the preparation of the Audit Report, and I thank the staff of both agencies for their professionalism and cooperation.

(signed)

Neil Shepherd
Director-General

Dated: 13 May 2005

1. Introduction

1.1 Description of the Helpline

DoCS must respond to child protection reports

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has a statutory obligation to respond to information about a child's safety, welfare or wellbeing. A child is at risk of harm if current concerns exist that he or she is at risk of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. DoCS must receive such information, assess it, determine the level of risk and intervene appropriately.

Before the Helpline, 84 local DoCS Community Services Centres (CSCs) across New South Wales, took child protection information, assessed and responded to it.

The Helpline receives, assesses and refers reports about children at risk

The Helpline was established at a single site in December 2000 to:

- provide a 24-hours a day, seven days a week single entry point for people wanting to report child protection issues
- consistently record, assess and refer information about children at risk of harm
- provide an after-hours crisis team to respond to call-outs in metropolitan Sydney
- respond to general enquiries about community services.

The opening of the Helpline coincided with the commencement of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988.* The Act:

- broadened the definition of a report of a child at risk of harm
- expanded DoCS' role of assessing a child's need for protection
- increased the range of mandatory reporters obliged to report child protection matters and introduced a $22,000 penalty for not reporting.

Following the introduction of the Act and the Helpline, the number of child protection reports requiring a response increased significantly.

There has been a growing number of reports

Exhibit 1: Number of child protection reports requiring a response
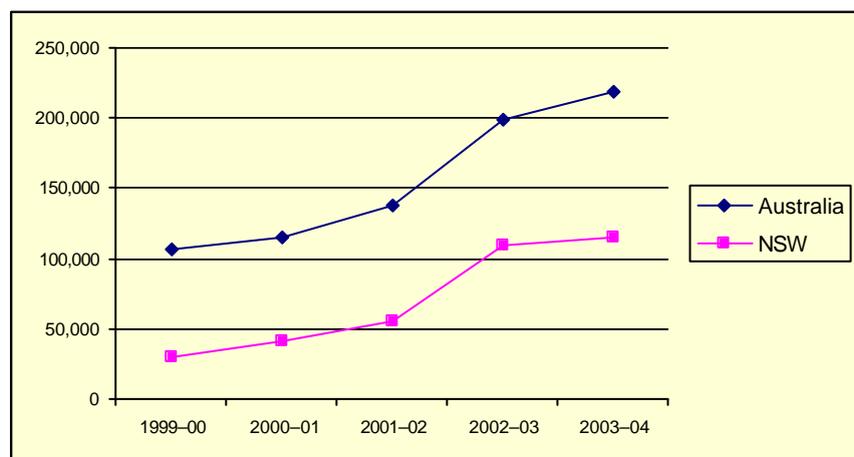
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) *Child Protection Australia 2003-2004*

Note: NSW data includes all reports referred to CSCs and JIRTs.

The Helpline was initially staffed with 54 caseworkers. A caseworker is a qualified child protection worker who carries out initial assessments of risk of harm reports.

From the outset, unanticipated call volumes combined with implementation issues led to call waiting times and a level of unanswered calls that were unacceptable to DoCS. DoCS modified Helpline procedures, upgraded technology and software and increased staffing and resources in order to cope with the number of reports.

At the time of our audit the Helpline operated with 185 staff including 134 caseworkers and a budget of $15.7 million.

1.2   What happens when you call the Helpline?

Exhibit 2: What you hear when you call the Helpline

Callers to the Helpline first hear the following Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) message.

"Welcome to the New South Wales Department of Community Services Helpline. The Helpline priority is to take reports of children at risk of harm.

If there is a life threatening situation, please <u>hang-up</u> and dial triple zero now.

To help us respond to you as quickly as possible, please make one of the two following options:

- If you wish to make report about a child at risk of harm, please press <u>one</u> now.
- If you have a matter that is serious and urgent, or you are extremely distressed and urgently need to speak to someone, please press <u>two</u> now.

For all other enquiries, please <u>hold</u> the line and someone will be with you shortly."

Genesys (the Helpline's communications software) allocates callers to different queues according to their response.

Community Services Officers (CSOs) answer callers who have pressed two (urgent or distressed) or hold (other enquiries). Where the CSO determines that the call may involve a child protection matter, the CSO transfers the call to the caseworker queue for assessment.

Child protection caseworkers answer callers who have pressed one (risk of harm report) or who have been screened by a CSO. The caseworker records caller information in the Key Information Directory System (KiDS) and does an initial assessment of risk.

Caseworkers also assess information that has been faxed to the Helpline. Since 2001, mandatory reporters can fax information instead of calling the Helpline and speaking to a caseworker. A mandatory reporter is a person who becomes aware of a child at risk of harm while delivering health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement as part of their paid work.

In consultation with team leaders, caseworkers determine whether further action is required. The team leader either closes the report or, if the child is assessed as possibly needing care and protection, refers the report to a:

- CSC for further assessment
- Joint Investigative Response Team (JIRT) for investigation where there is evidence of criminality. JIRTs are staffed by NSW Police and DoCS officers trained in child protection and investigation.

The current focus of the Helpline is to protect those children in the greatest danger. The Helpline does not refer less urgent cases to other government or non-government agencies providing early intervention and family support services.

Exhibit 3: Helpline's intake process 2003-04[a]
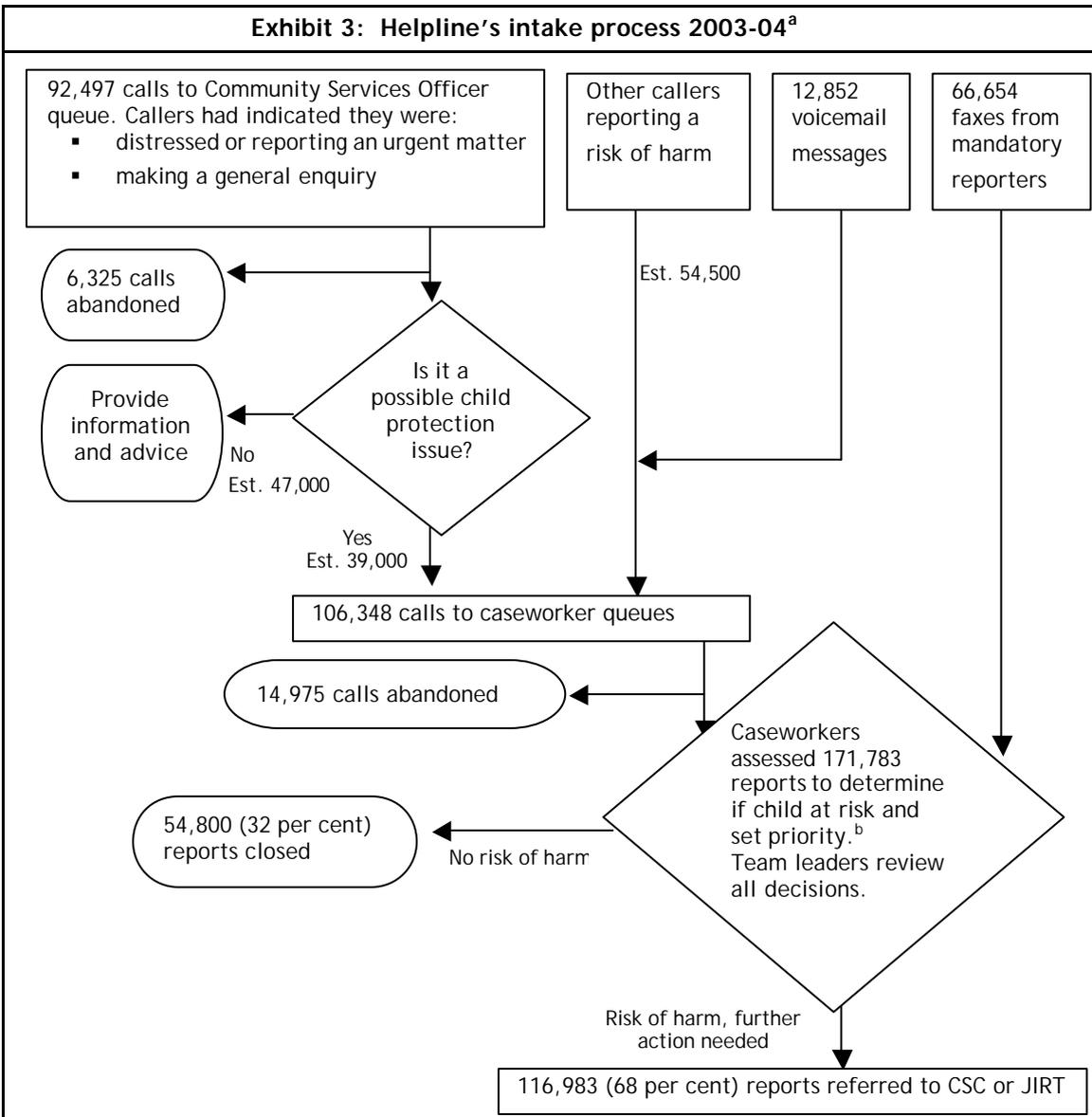
Source: Department of Community Services
Note: [a] The data refers to contacts and reports received by the Helpline. The 2003-04 DoCS Annual Report cites a total of 185,198 reports which includes 13,415 reports received directly by CSCs.
[b] A call or a fax may result in more than one report if it relates to more than one child or young person.

1.3 Who calls the Helpline?

The Helpline does not record information about callers who are only provided with information and advice.

Four of every five of the 171,783 reports requiring an initial risk of harm assessment come from mandatory reporters.

Exhibit 4: Source of reports to the Helpline in 2003-04
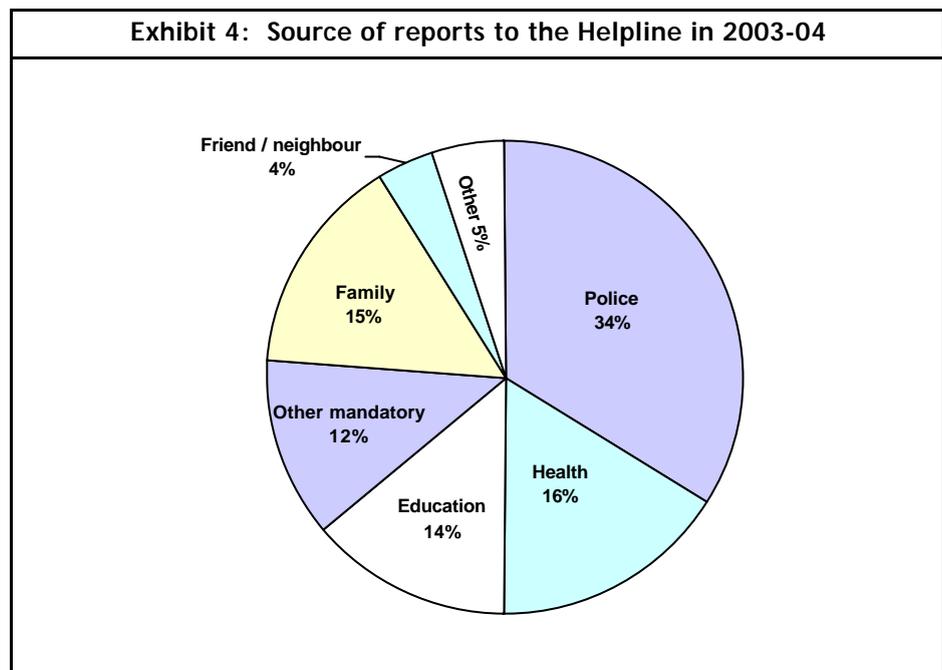
Source: Department of Community Services.
Note: Family includes 619 children and young people who self-reported.

1.4 What is reported?

The Helpline records the major issue of concern in each risk of harm report. At the intake stage, reports are more frequently about risk of harm than actual harm. Actual harm is often not identified until further assessment occurs at a CSC or JIRT.

Exhibit 5 shows the breadth of issues identified in the 101,039 reports for which the Helpline conducted an initial assessment between October 2003 and June 2004.

Exhibit 5: Principal issue reported Oct 2003 - Jun 2004
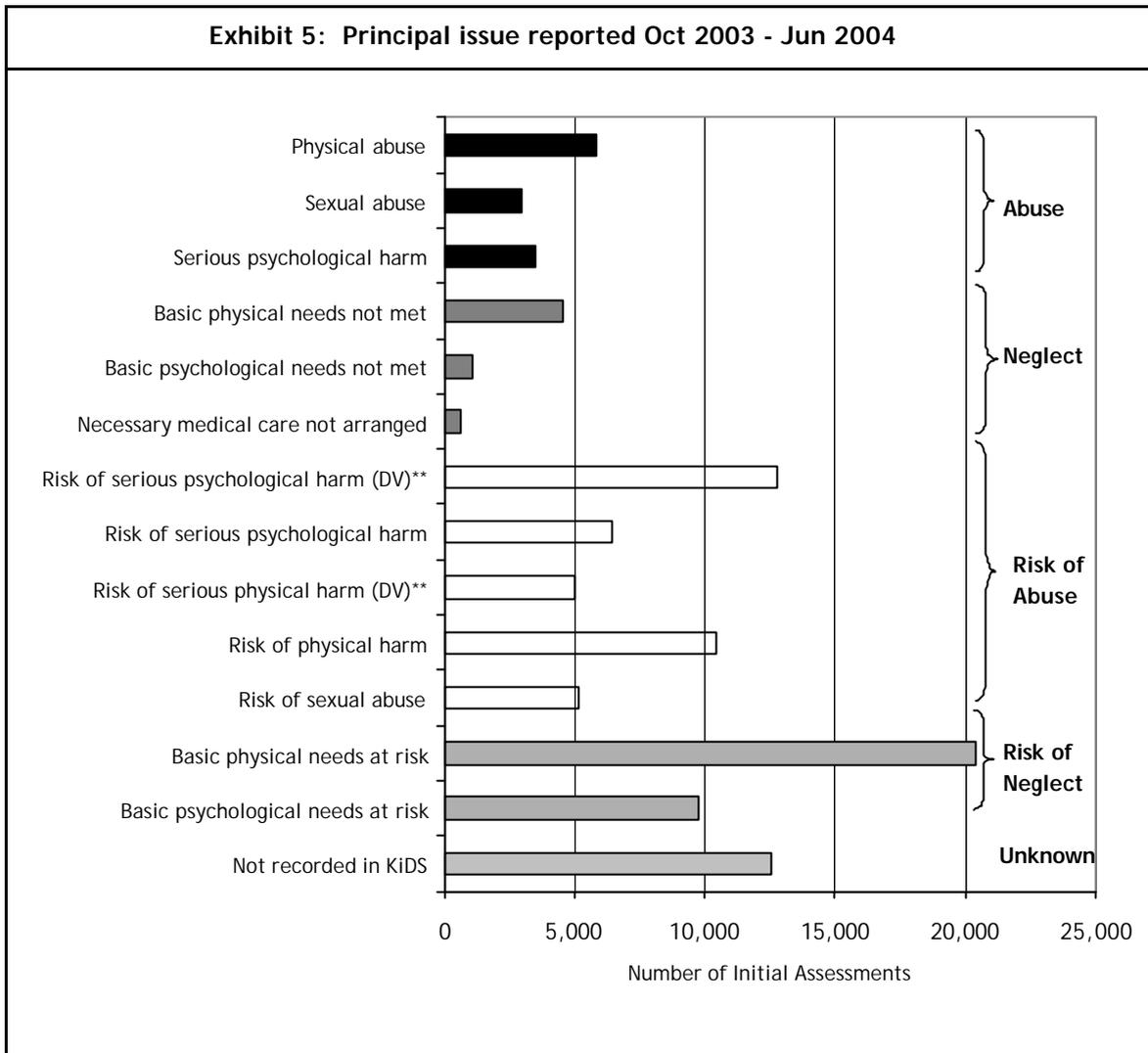
Source: Department of Community Services Key Information and Directory System.
Note: Data only available since October 2003.
This exhibit refers to reports received by the Helpline and does not include reports received by CSCs.
(DV)** refers to risk of harm reported in the context of domestic violence.

1.5 About the audit

This audit examined the adequacy of the Helpline as the central intake for child protection reports in New South Wales.

The audit did not examine the response of local CSCs and JIRTs to referrals from the Helpline.

Further information on the scope, criteria and approach of the audit can be found in Appendix 1 of this Report.

2. Taking information

At a glance	The Helpline takes over 4,000 contacts each week.
	Before the audit commenced, DoCS had some service standards for taking calls. During the audit DoCS introduced additional standards that provide a sound basis for managing the Helpline. DoCS needs to build on this work and upgrade its software in order to improve monitoring of performance and review of resource requirements.
	By September 2004 the Helpline had reduced the average time callers wait to speak to a caseworker to less than 5 minutes.
	However, there are two concerns regarding the level of assurance that the Helpline is capturing all available information about children at risk.
	Nearly one in ten callers hang up before their information is collected. The risk that information is lost is mitigated because the majority of callers work with children, have a statutory duty to report and are liable for a $22,000 penalty if they do not. As a result callers who hang up are likely to call again or fax their information, but there is a risk that they may not.
	Secondly, Helpline's practices for recording child protection information vary. The audio-recording of calls is recommended as it would support call coaching and retrospective checking of compliance, as well as providing an objective record of telephone calls.
	Significant gains may be achieved by improving how the Helpline works with people who work with children (who provide 76 per cent of risk of harm reports). DoCS is continuing its work to improve the quality of information from mandatory reporters and the quality of feedback provided to them.

2.1   Factors that affect performance of an intake service

DoCS established the Helpline as a call centre in order to provide an efficient and consistent way of receiving and assessing large volumes of child protection information. The Helpline currently handles over 4,000 contacts a week.

The performance of a call centre is affected by three factors: call volume, call duration and the availability of resources.

Exhibit 6: Factors that affect call centre performance
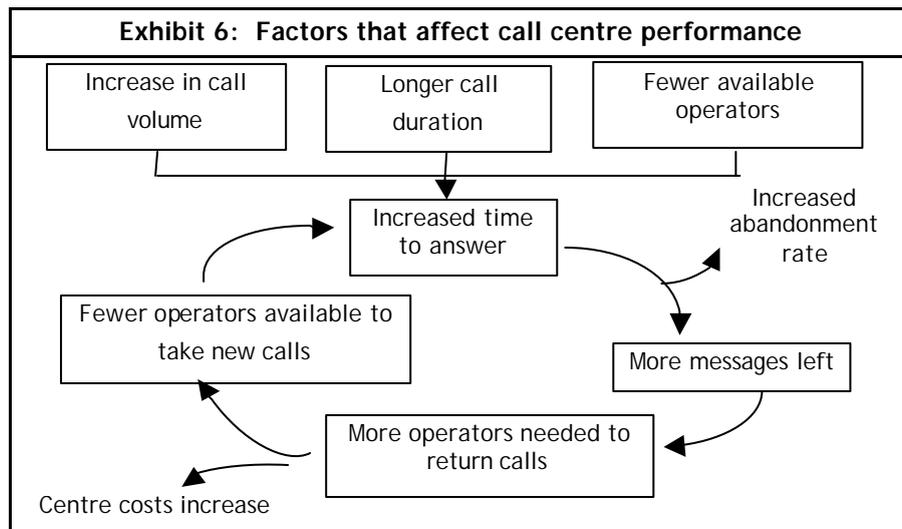
Source: The Audit Office 2003.

The Helpline's performance is affected by the same factors, although its role differs from a typical call centre in several ways.

Firstly, Helpline's primary role is not to provide service or advice, but to fulfil DoCS' statutory obligation to take child protection information. The assessment of whether a child is at risk is often more complex and time-consuming than tasks typically handled by call centres.

Secondly, callers to the Helpline are not customers in the traditional sense, but rather people who are concerned about the welfare of a child. Most callers to the Helpline have a legal obligation to report child protection information and may be tolerant of longer waiting times than users of a typical call centre.

Nevertheless, DoCS needs appropriate service standards for the Helpline in regard to taking calls. Before this audit commenced, DoCS had introduced service standards for its education team and an abandonment rate for the caseworker queue. During the audit, additional standards for call waiting times were implemented.

Exhibit 7: The Helpline service standards			
Indicator	**Definition**	**Caseworker queue standard**	**Education team standard**
Timeliness	How fast calls are answered	**Average waiting time 3 minutes** **Max waiting time 15 minutes**	**Average waiting times 1.5 minutes** **Max waiting time 3 minutes**
Grade of service	Percentage of calls answered within a target time	Not established	80 per cent of calls within 1.5 minutes
Abandoned calls	Percentage of callers who hang up before speaking to an operator	10%	4%
Voicemail messages	Time taken to respond to voicemail messages	Not established	Not established

Source: Department of Community Services.
Note: The education team is a group of caseworkers dedicated to handling information from mandatory reporters in the education sector (see page 22).

Recommendations   We recommend that DoCS further expand the service standards for the Helpline to include:

▪   grade of service for the caseworker queue; that is the proportion of calls which must be answered within a specified time

▪   time taken to respond to voicemail messages.

We also recommend that DoCS report publicly on the Helpline's performance against these standards in its annual report and on its website.

2.2 Performance to date

Helpline found it difficult to cope with demand at first

When the Helpline was first established, callers waited for more than twenty minutes on average to speak to a caseworker. Some callers waited for more than 90 minutes and many were unable to get through.

Helpline has since improved its performance

By September 2004 the Helpline had reduced the average call waiting time in the caseworker queue to less than 5 minutes. This has been achieved gradually through:

- more than doubling the number of caseworker positions from 54 to 142
- enabling mandatory reporters to fax information rather than call
- caseworkers using "queue management" or triage (see page 26)
- allowing callers using mobiles or who have waited for 10 minutes the option of leaving a voicemail message.

Current system limitations prevent the Helpline from measuring how long callers, who first speak to a CSO, wait to be answered by a caseworker.

Callers choose to leave a message when lines are busy

The number of voicemail messages fluctuated between 340 and 2,179 a month between July 2003 and September 2004.

Despite callers having the option to leave a message or fax a report, some callers will wait to be answered by a caseworker. At times, some callers face lengthy delays that can exceed 30 minutes. The Helpline has now established a service standard for maximum call waiting time of 15 minutes and will monitor performance against this.

Abandonment rates have improved but need to be reviewed

In 2003-04, 14,975 or just over 16 per cent of callers hung up while waiting to speak to a caseworker. The Helpline has reduced this rate to 9.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2004-05.

Even at less than ten per cent, this rate presents a risk that DoCS may not be collecting information about children at risk. The risk that information is lost is mitigated by the fact that most callers to the Helpline have a statutory duty to report. As a result callers who hang up are likely to ring again or fax their information, but there is a risk that they may not.

The abandonment rate for the caseworker queue is higher than the industry benchmark of four per cent and the 5.3 per cent achieved by the education team.

Call duration is not monitored

Estimates of call handling times were last used in 2003 to determine the number of caseworkers the Helpline would need to answer calls. At that time, a caseworker would take up to 52 minutes to take, assess and record a risk of harm report. DoCS advises that software upgrades of KiDS and Genesys in mid 2005 will allow the capture of valid data for monitoring.

Exhibit 8: Setting standards for the education team
In mid 2004 the Helpline established a dedicated team of caseworkers to receive and assess reports from the education sector. From the outset, the education team had service standards to meet. Performance is routinely monitored against these standards and team leaders ensure that sufficient staff are available to meet demand.

IMPROVING PRACTICE

Exhibit 9: Performance of the education team		
Indicator	**Standard**	**Result[1]**
Average call waiting time	90 seconds	81.7 seconds
Grade of service	80 per cent of calls answered in 90 seconds	Not available
Maximum call waiting time	3 minutes	14.5 minutes
Call abandonment rate	4 per cent	5.3 per cent

Source: Department of Community Services.
Note 1: Data for period July to September 2004.

Recommendations   We recommend that DoCS review the proportion of callers who hang up before speaking to a caseworker in light of the service levels achieved by its education team.

We also recommend that DoCS enhance Helpline's software to enable end-to-end monitoring of all calls.

2.3   Collecting and recording information about children at risk

DoCS has provided guidance to CSOs and caseworkers on how to answer calls and what information is needed through a number of procedures.

The format used for recording contacts in KiDS is the main control to ensure that sufficient information is collected to allow assessment and follow up.

However, staff do not always use KiDS during a call to make sure all fields are completed and many caseworkers enter data after the call has ended.

We also observed that staff practices varied and were not always the most efficient. For example, we observed staff collecting detailed information in relation to the child (such as the name and date of birth of all siblings) before ascertaining if there were grounds for concern that the child was at risk. What may be missing is a protocol that streamlines the process by guiding staff on which questions to ask first.

It is still possible for staff to enter incomplete records in KiDS and it is difficult to identify incomplete records due to the current system configuration. The Helpline is looking at introducing more mandatory fields to improve the completeness of its records.

Recommendation   We recommend that DoCS review and restate minimum requirements for taking and recording child protection information including decision or check points.

Calls to Helpline are not audio-recorded

Most call-centres review call content either by audio-recording or having a supervisor listen in to calls.

Audio-recording calls provides three benefits. It can:

▪ facilitate staff coaching on how to handle calls

▪ provide a basis for quality assurance testing for compliance and consistency

▪ provide a record of the transaction.

The Helpline does not currently record calls and supervisors do not listen in to calls. DoCS has advised that the technology used by the Helpline has the capacity to record calls.

GOOD PRACTICE

Exhibit 10: Audio-recording in New Zealand
In 2005, the NZ Department of Child, Youth and Family Services national call centre introduced the audio-recording of all calls following a review into the death of a child who had been reported to the service.
The review investigated why the service had failed to capture a child protection report made by the father prior to his child's death.
The review found that without an audio-record of all incoming calls it was not possible to determine why the intake officer had not made a record of this particular child. The review considered audio-recording essential for quality assurance and to establish an official record of all incoming calls.

Recommendations

We recommend that DoCS audio-record telephone calls to the Helpline in order to:

▪ ensure details of all calls are captured

▪ enhance staff coaching activities and quality assurance practices.

2.4 Working with mandatory reporters

There are further gains to be made through improving how the Helpline works with mandatory reporters, as they provide 76 per cent of child protection reports.

In 2000 the Government released the Interagency Guidelines to help mandatory reporters meet the requirements of the new Act. The Guidelines provide a framework for developing procedures for reporting risk of harm.

Despite this guidance, agencies do not use a standard format for making reports and the quality of information provided by mandatory reporters varies. Even within the same agency, staff use different forms for faxing reports and some reporters fail to adequately identify the child and the alleged risk of harm.

Helpline is working with reporters to improve the collection of information

The Helpline is working to improve the quality of reports from mandatory reporters through:

- further education of reporters
- working with agencies to develop a standard fax form
- piloting electronic reporting with the Department of Education and Training anticipated for July 2005. Interactive e-reporting can elicit relevant information in a structured way. For example, a reporter will be first asked to confirm that the child is in the State; if the child is bruised, the reporter will be asked to indicated the location, shape and colour of the bruising to assist the Helpline in assessing the risk.

Recommendations

We recommend that DoCS continue to work with mandatory reporters to:

- standardise forms for reporting risk of harm
- progress the option of interactive electronic reporting.

And has improved feedback

If the Helpline determines that the caller's information needs to be assessed for risk of harm, the caller is given a reference number. The reference number indicates that mandatory reporters have met their statutory obligation and can be used by reporters to follow up reports.

Following initial assessment, the Helpline provides the reporter with written acknowledgement of the report and advice as to whether and where it has been referred. The Helpline does not have a target response time for the acknowledgement.

Recommendation

We recommend that DoCS establish standards for the time taken to advise mandatory reporters of the referral of their information to a CSC or JIRT.

Although asked about their relationship with the Helpline, representatives from non-government agencies and the education, police and health sectors commented on matters more broadly such as:

- their need for timely advice on whether the Helpline has assessed that there is a risk of harm, whether DoCS is likely to intervene and, if not, what the reporter might do to support the child
- their tendency to re-report their concerns to the Helpline if they do not get feedback from DoCS (see page 26).

DoCS recognises the need to improve feedback. However, the CSCs are better placed than the Helpline to advise reporters of the likelihood that DoCS will intervene and the progress of investigations. To better do this, DoCS advises that it:

- is examining feedback as part of the review of the Interagency Guidelines due in 2006
- has appointed a contact officer to deal with teachers and principals at each CSC
- has made liaison with agencies working with children a more important part of a Manager Client Services responsibilities in CSCs.

The education team provides better, targeted service

In respect of the Helpline, the quality of feedback and level of service provided to reporters from the education sector has been improved through the introduction of a dedicated team of caseworkers.

GOOD PRACTICE

Exhibit 11: Helpline's education team
In 2004 the Helpline established a dedicated team of caseworkers to handle reports from the education sector. Many of the team members have worked as teachers and principals and have a good understanding of the sector.
The team's specialisation and knowledge make it better placed to provide continuity and feedback to teachers and schools. The caseworkers may also be able to provide advice and alternative strategies to callers with an ongoing concern about the welfare of a child who does not meet DoCS' threshold for intervention.

Recommendation

We recommend that DoCS explore opportunities to introduce dedicated teams at the Helpline to handle reports from police and health.

3. Managing workflow through screening and triage

At a glance

> The Helpline manages the workflow by screening contacts to determine whether a risk of harm assessment is needed, and triaging reports to determine how and when assessments should be done.
>
> Currently, staff use a range of approaches to screen calls and conduct triage depending on how the Helpline receives the information.
>
> For example, Community Services Officers (CSOs) screen information from members of the public and distressed callers to determine whether or not to refer the call to a caseworker who will determine whether or not there is a risk of harm. There are no protocols to guide the screening decision and the Helpline does not monitor or review calls handled by CSOs.
>
> DoCS has recognised the need for procedures to guide CSO decision-making and is providing additional training.
>
> On the other hand, we found an absence of screening by caseworkers in regard to reports received from mandatory reporters. In these instances, caseworkers will complete an initial assessment of all reports regardless of content. However, some reports are triaged to determine how and when an initial assessment will be done.
>
> It would be more efficient to screen the information using agreed criteria to decide whether or not an initial assessment is warranted.

3.1 Is a risk assessment needed?

Helpline manages workflow through screening and triage

The Helpline manages its workflow by screening calls to determine whether a risk of harm assessment is needed, and triaging reports to determine how and when assessment should be done.

The screening and triage process used depends on how the information is received by the Helpline.

Exhibit 12: Contacts handled by the Helpline 2003-04		
Who answers?	**Number**	**Process**
CSO	86,172	All calls screened by CSOs. An estimated 46 per cent (39,000) of these calls are transferred to the caseworker queue
Caseworker queues		
▪ General	78,197	Includes calls screened by a CSO Caseworkers may triage reports using "queue-management"
▪ Voicemail	12,852	No screening
▪ Distressed	324	All calls screened by a CSO
▪ Faxes	66,654	Team leaders triage all faxes
Total (CSO and caseworkers)		
	205,000	Estimate. Total reduced to remove double counting of callers who spoke to both a CSO and a caseworker

Source: Department of Community Services.
Note: The data excludes 21,300 abandoned calls. The caseworker queues include calls and faxes handled by the education team.

CSOs screen urgent calls and general enquiries

Community Services Officers (CSOs) answered 86,172 callers who had indicated via the IVR system that they were distressed, reporting an urgent matter or were making some other enquiry. Most of these calls were from members of the public, not mandatory reporters.

CSOs are clerical officers who:

- provide information about DoCS and community services
- determine whether or not the caller's information may involve a child protection matter. In such cases, the CSO records the details in KiDS and transfers the call to the caseworker queue for risk assessment
- prioritise the transfer of distressed and urgent calls to caseworkers.

There is a need for further guidance

The Helpline does not:

- have documented criteria or procedures to guide CSOs in determining whether a call should be referred to a caseworker for assessment
- review the accuracy of the CSO's decision
- collect data on the content of calls and advice given by CSOs where calls are not referred to a caseworker
- monitor whether callers transferred to the caseworker queue hang-up before having their information assessed.

Exhibit 13: What happens to calls answered by CSOs

Although the Helpline does not routinely collect data on CSO calls, a three-week survey conducted in November 2004 indicated that CSOs concluded 54 per cent of 5,551 calls.

The remaining 2,531 calls were transferred to the caseworker queue.

DoCS has recognised the need for procedures to guide CSO decisions on whether callers should be transferred to a caseworker. The Helpline is developing a CSO training program that will include call-answering techniques and child protection issues.

In addition, DoCS has advised it will review a sample of calls answered by CSOs that are not referred to caseworkers to gain a better understanding of the nature of the inquiries.

We recommend that DoCS:

Recommendations

- review the criteria used by CSOs to determine whether a call should be referred to a caseworker
- monitor and review CSO decisions.

Caseworkers do a risk assessment on all information from mandatory reporters

In 2003-04 the Helpline took over 200,000 calls and faxes of which caseworkers handled 158,027. CSOs had screened around 39,000 of the calls going to caseworkers. All of the faxes and the majority of the other calls came directly from mandatory reporters.

Under established practice, caseworkers do not screen contacts from mandatory reporters to determine whether a risk assessment is needed. In these instances, caseworkers complete an initial assessment of all reports regardless of content.

We observed that:

- caseworkers conducted initial assessments even where information failed to identify a risk of harm
- some reporters routinely lodged information by both phone and fax while others re-reported if they are not satisfied with DoCS' response. Currently the Helpline can not use KiDS to monitor the level of duplicated reports, but a 15-day study in 2004 indicated that 20 per cent of faxes from teachers and schools were confirmations of matters already reported to the Helpline
- different people reported the same incident. For example, an incident involving two teenage girls was reported within hours by police, hospital emergency department staff and a doctor. The reports required six separate assessments and four referrals to a CSC and JIRT.

Duplicate reports about the same incident or situation add little value where it is the same person making it. On the other hand, multiple reports from different people in regard to the same incident may provide a different perspective or corroborating evidence. Good practice indicates that intake services should identify whether a report is information about a new risk of harm, a duplicate report from the same reporter or a corroborative report regarding the same incident and manage these records accordingly.

Recommendations   We recommend that DoCS:

- establish criteria for caseworkers to use in screening all contacts before proceeding to an initial risk of harm assessment
- continue to work with mandatory reporters to reduce the volume of duplicate reports
- develop procedures to manage duplicate and corroborative reports more efficiently.

DoCS advises it is considering improved screening processes for caseworkers as part of its current review of the initial assessment process (see 4.2).

3.2   Triage of initial assessments

Triage expedites urgent matters   The Helpline uses several screening mechanisms to determine how and when an initial assessment should be done. The triage and prioritising practices used by caseworkers and described below identify and expedite the assessment of information where the reporter has clearly identified serious risk and danger.

"Queue management" is a triage strategy used when there are too many in-coming calls for caseworkers to achieve the 5 minute call-waiting time. Caseworkers using "queue management" may take all the information required for an assessment or only sufficient information from the caller to triage contacts as either:

- urgent reports of actual harm or risk of serious harm requiring a DoCS response within 24 or 72 hours. These are referred immediately to a team leader for allocation to another caseworker for assessment
- non-urgent reports of risk of harm. A record of the call is printed out and another caseworker reviews the protection history and carries out the initial assessment later.

In respect of this process, we observed that:

- the triggers for starting and stopping "queue management" were not clear

- there was no assurance that callers who had already been screened by a CSO were not "queue managed". This may result in callers speaking to two or more staff members before their information is recorded and assessed

- reports requiring a response in less than 72 hours were not always referred immediately to a team leader

- staff used a variety of practices to refer less urgent contacts to other staff and there were not adequate controls to ensure the timely entry of information into KiDS

- staff who conduct the initial assessment may not have spoken to the reporter and may not necessarily have access to all of their information

- the Helpline is unable to determine how many calls were "queue managed" in 2003-04.

The Helpline has recognised the need to improve its triage practices and is reviewing its use of "queue management".

GOOD PRACTICE

Exhibit 14: First call resolution
Effective call centre practice indicates that where possible the staff member who first takes the call should deal with it. First call resolution provides continuity and minimises delay, double-handling and the loss of information.

Recommendation

We recommend that DoCS establish a service standard for first call resolution; that is the proportion of calls to be resolved by the staff member who first answers the call.

Since 2001, mandatory reporters can fax information instead of calling the Helpline. The Helpline receives over 1,200 faxes each week.

To fast track the assessment of critical information, a team leader reviews each fax on the day of its receipt. The team leader triages faxes on the basis of their contents using professional judgement. The urgency rating (less than 24 hours, less than 72 hours, less than 10 days and information only) refers to the time for reports to be assessed by the Helpline and responded to by a CSC or JIRT.

The team-leader's triage decision is not informed by a review of the child's protection history

DoCS should undertake further work in analysing risk factors and consider establishing a threshold for undertaking a review of a child's protection history.

Recommendations

We recommend that DoCS:

- introduce technologies that allow all contacts, including faxes, to be queued electronically

- continue its review of triage practices.

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4. Assessing and referring child protection reports

At a glance

Caseworkers assess reports to determine firstly whether the child is at risk and secondly to decide how urgently DoCS needs to respond.

DoCS has recognised the need to enhance the decision-making tools currently used by caseworkers conducting these assessments. DoCS is investigating tools to help weight risk and urgency and to improve the reliability and consistency of responses.

During the course of this audit, the Helpline introduced standards for, and started to monitor, the time taken to assess and refer reports to CSCs and JIRTs.

The Helpline ensures that reports about serious or immediate risk of harm, which require a DoCS response within 24 or 72 hours, are handled appropriately and referred promptly to CSCs and JIRTs. On average the Helpline receives 186 of these reports a day.

There have been delays in approving reports recorded on KiDS about lower levels of risk. Each day on average, the Helpline receives 129 reports, which it assesses to involve a moderate to low risk of harm, that DoCS should respond to within 10 days. By its own standards, the Helpline should refer these reports to a JIRT or CSC within 3 days. But in April 2005 there were 861 of these reports at the Helpline of which 742 were over 3 days old and 305 were over 10 weeks old.

DoCS also recognises that Helpline data can provide critical information for state-wide planning and has initiated a number of projects to improve data quality.

4.1 The process of risk assessment and referral

Caseworkers doing an initial assessment in KiDS first determine whether a child or young person is at risk of harm. In making this decision caseworkers:

- answer the 18 questions in Stage 1 of the initial assessment
- review the child's protection history
- use their professional judgement
- consult with a team leader who must approve all caseworker recommendations.

The Helpline closes 32 per cent of reports at this stage because it is assessed that:

- there are no current protective concerns
- there is not a risk of harm as defined by the Act
- the information is already known to DoCS.

If the caseworker judges a risk of harm exists, they move on to completing the 18 questions in Stage 2 to assess risk factors and recommend what further action is required.

A team leader reviews the assessment and may either refer the report to a CSC for further assessment or to a JIRT for investigation where there is evidence of criminality. The referral contains a timeframe for the CSC or JIRT to respond based on Helpline's assessment of safety, risk and urgency.

Exhibit 15: Helpline's assessment and referral process

171,783 Initial risk of harm assessments
Involving 89,711 children or young people

Is further action needed?

No → **54,800 (32 per cent) initial assessments closed at the Helpline**

Yes ↓

116,983 (68 per cent) initial assessments referred to CSC or JIRT
- 15,531 (9 per cent) with response required within 24 hours
- 52,471 (31 per cent) with response required within 72 hours
- 47,050 (27 per cent) with response required within 10 days
- 1,931 (1 per cent) with other response (greater than 10 days or not stated)

Source: Department of Community Services 2003-04.
Note: The 171,783 assessments refer to reports received by the Helpline and exclude 13,415 reports received directly by CSCs. The reports received by CSCs were included in DoCS Annual Report data.

The referral of a report by the Helpline does not necessarily guarantee that a CSC or JIRT will intervene. DoCS' policy requires the CSC or JIRT manager to review Helpline's assessment and determine the appropriate response, which may include taking no action.

4.2   Adequacy of the initial assessment

DoCS is currently reviewing its approach to initial risk assessment and is investigating ways to make the process more reliable and consistent.

As part of this review, due to be completed mid 2005, DoCS is considering the need for additional criteria and decision-making tools to further support staff in deciding how to weight risk and urgency.

These additional tools may provide greater assurance that the Helpline is assessing risk in an objective and reliable way.

The assessment of reports that clearly indicate serious and urgent risk is usually straightforward. It can be more difficult and often more time consuming to assess information, which at face value, indicates less serious concerns. For these lower risk cases, determining whether the information requires a DoCS response or can be closed (and recorded for information only) may vary according to the caseworker's experience and background.

In addition to better tools, the review of the child's protection history helps assess risk, but currently Helpline staff do not:

▪ conduct these reviews in the same way. Some staff examine previous reports and DoCS case notes for patterns and escalation of risk. Others use the number of previous reports and the issue last reported as an indicator of risk

▪ consistently record the extent of the history check to support team leader review.

The ability of the Helpline to use protection history as a valid indicator of risk relies on CSCs and JIRTs recording their decisions and interventions and the risk and protective factors which they have identified first-hand.

Recommendations   We recommend that DoCS continue its work to:

▪ improve decision-making tools to support a more objective and consistent weighting of risk and urgency

▪ review and restate minimum requirements for conducting and recording the review of a child's protection history.

KiDS could provide better support to caseworkers   Caseworkers use KiDS for initial assessments. KiDS is a comprehensive and flexible client information system used across DoCS but it was not designed to meet the specific needs of the Helpline. KiDS would provide more support for assessing and documenting risk of harm if it:

▪ linked policies, procedures and rules to the assessment process

▪ automatically populated fields from previous screens or records. For example, the contact record could populate relevant fields in the initial assessment such as the reporter's narrative and the child's age, address and school

▪ provided an easy and efficient platform for staff to enter information, check child protection history and assess risk of harm.

DoCS advises that KiDS has the capacity to support initial assessment more effectively and that ongoing upgrades are planned.

Recommendation   We recommend that DoCS enhance KiDS to better support Helpline's assessment of risk and the recording of decisions.

4.3   Timeliness of Helpline's assessments and referrals for further action

In September 2004, DoCS endorsed standards for Helpline's processing of faxes. The standards specify the length of time the Helpline should take to assess, approve and refer faxed reports to a CSC or JIRT. The Helpline adopted the same standards for reports received by telephone in January 2005.

Exhibit 16: Helpline's standards for handling reports	
Helpline's assessment of urgency which is expressed as the recommended timeframe for a CSC or JIRT to respond	**Helpline's timeframe to assess and refer report to a CSC or JIRT**
24 hours	Immediate
72 hours	Within 24 hours
10 days	Within 72 hours
No need for intervention; information only	7 days

Source: Department of Community Services.
Note: All timeframes are measured from the time the Helpline receives the information.

The Helpline ensures that reports about immediate or serious risk of harm, which require a DoCS response within 24 or 72 hours, are handled appropriately and referred promptly to CSCs and JIRTs. On average the Helpline receives 186 of these reports a day.

There have been delays in approving reports recorded on KiDS about lower levels of risk. Each day on average, the Helpline receives 129 reports, which it assesses to involve a moderate to low risk of harm, that DoCS should respond to within 10 days. By its own standards, the Helpline should refer these reports to a JIRT or CSC within 3 days. But in April 2005 there were 861 of these reports at the Helpline of which 742 were over 3 days old and 305 were over 10 weeks old.

The delay in processing reports puts at risk DoCS' ability to meet its own standards for responding to children at risk. Although these reports about less urgent risks may be viewed on KiDS, they are not assigned to a particular CSC or JIRT until signed off at the Helpline.

These delays may in part be due to current practices that require a team leader to approve all caseworker recommendations.

Recommendations We recommend that DoCS:

- continue to monitor and report performance against the standards for referring reports to a CSC or JIRT
- review current approval practices to determine if the approval process can be streamlined
- consider reporting publicly on the timeliness of referrals in its annual report and on its website.

4.4 Completeness and accuracy of Helpline's assessments and referrals

A pilot review of Helpline records to check completeness in 2004 found errors in recording information about the child's name, immediate safety and cultural background.

KiDS could better support caseworkers As discussed earlier, the current configuration of KiDS does not support complete record keeping and Helpline's staff do not document the risk of harm assessments in a consistent way. For example, although DoCS' procedures require staff to record the age, sex, address and nature of the risk, these fields are not mandatory although the field identifying aboriginality was made mandatory in 2004.

15 per cent of assessments were not complete	**Exhibit 17: Problems with incomplete records** In 2004 DoCS tested initial assessments for completeness of three fields relating to the type of abuse or neglect to which the child was exposed. Of the 49,840 records checked, 7,868 (15.8 per cent) had data missing from at least one of the fields checked. Although DoCS advise that not all of these records were entered by the Helpline, the Helpline has commenced correcting these records.

Although the Helpline receives feedback from CSCs and JIRTs, the Helpline does not routinely review the acceptance rate by CSCs and JIRTs as an indicator of reliability.

The acceptance rate was low at JIRTs

NSW Police data indicates that DoCS (Helpline and CSCs) referred 4,770 reports to JIRTs in 2004, but that only 46 per cent of these matters were accepted by JIRTs for criminal investigation (down from 62 per cent in 2003). Although matters rejected for investigation were transferred to a CSC for assessment, the rejection rate raises an issue about the quality of assessments conducted by the Helpline.

In response, the Helpline developed a checklist for JIRT referrals in November 2004 and advises that it is introducing targeted training for Team Leaders and new caseworkers in how to assess reports to meet JIRT requirements.

Problems with data integrity may limit its value

There have been problems with the quality of KiDS data as a result of data integrity issues, for example:
- in 2003-04 DoCS was unable to provide benchmark data on child protection to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Productivity Commission
- DoCS is using 2002-03 data from earlier client information systems to inform current projects on early intervention, case closure, after-hours casework and initial assessment.

DoCS is working to improve its data quality

DoCS recognises the critical intelligence value of KiDS data and advises that the data will be used for planning purposes as its quality improves. In this regard, DoCS has commenced action to:
- upgrade Genesys and KiDS in 2005 to enhance Helpline's ability to review its performance
- develop a program at the Helpline to improve the accuracy and completeness of reports and initial assessments.

Recommendations

We recommended that DoCS:
- increase the number of mandatory fields in KiDS to promote data integrity
- routinely monitor the acceptance rate of Helpline assessments by CSCs and JIRTs.

Appendices

Appendix 1   About the Audit

Objective

The audit's objective was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the DoCS Helpline in receiving and assessing information and making appropriate referrals to protect children from risk of harm.

Criteria

We used the following criteria and standards to assess the adequacy and performance of the Helpline.

Helpline's performance as a contact centre

The Helpline answers contacts (by telephone, fax or other channels) in a timely manner and in accordance with established, policies, procedures and standards.

- Clear, robust and documented policies, procedures, timeframes and performance standards guide the timely, effective and efficient answering of calls and contacts

- The Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

- Contacts are answered in accordance with policies, procedures, timeframes and performance standards

- Contacts to the Helpline are answered by trained staff

- Data regarding callers is accurately and completely recorded by the Helpline

- Reporters are provided with appropriate feedback

- The Helpline reviews its performance in regard to the above criteria and performance standards.

Helpline's provision of a central intake function

The Helpline records accurate and complete information received from reporters and identifies matters that require further attention.

- Clear, documented policies, procedures and timeframes guide the recording of information and identification of matters requiring further attention

- The roles and responsibilities of the Helpline and the CSCs and JIRTs relating to child protection are clearly understood

- Clear guidelines inform mandatory reporters about when, how and to whom to report current concerns about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child

- The Helpline identifies matters needing further action following an assessment of risk

- Helpline's IT systems and other resources support the identification of matters needing further attention

- The Helpline consistently records accurate and complete details of children at risk and intake decisions

- The Helpline reviews its performance in regard to the above criteria

- Data from the Helpline informs DoCS' strategic planning and helps promote the safety and welfare of children

- The Helpline is an effective central intake system for managing risk of harm in child protection.

Helpline's assessment and referral of reports

The Helpline assesses, prioritises and refers matters requiring further attention in accordance with policies, procedures and standards.

- Policies and procedures guide decisions and include standards for risk assessment, prioritisation and referral

- Assessment decisions are made in accordance with policies, procedures and standards
- The Helpline makes accurate, timely and appropriate referrals for child protection intervention and family support in accordance with policies, procedures and standards
- The Helpline consistently records accurate and complete details of assessment and referral decisions
- Helpline's team leaders, managers and child protection specialists review decisions and provide clinical supervision and support for caseworkers
- Reporters are provided with feedback on assessments and referrals
- The Helpline reviews its performance in regard to the above criteria.

Exclusions The audit did not examine:

- the merit of government policy objectives
- the adequacy of decision-making and case management following referral from the Helpline to CSCs and JIRTs.

Audit Approach The audit collected evidence through:

- research, review and analysis of relevant literature and studies of child protection intake practices in other jurisdictions
- review of DoCS' policies, procedures, performance data and management reports
- interviews with relevant DoCS' staff, representatives of NSW Treasury, Ombudsman, mandatory reporters and peak bodies
- observation of Helpline's operations and a review of a sample of contacts and initial assessments to assess the appropriateness of process, risk assessment, timeliness and feedback
- five forums with NGOs, Department of Health staff and public and private sector teachers and principals to obtain views about Helpline's performance
- visits to NSW Police, 3 metropolitan CSCs and a private sector intake and referral service for mental health clients.

Cost of the Audit The cost of the audit was $293,000, which includes printing costs of around $6,000.

Acknowledgement We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by the Department of Community Services and particularly the staff and managers of the Helpline.

We were also assisted by a broad cross section of stakeholders in child protection including: the NSW Office of the Ombudsman, the NSW Police, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Health, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Primary Principals Association, Catholic Education, Eastern Sydney Area Health Service, Public Schools Principals Forum and the New York State Central Register.

Audit Team Our team leader for this performance audit was Michael Johnston, who was assisted by Jennifer Mitchell.

Jane Tebbatt provided direction and quality assurance.

Appendix 2   Glossary

Act	*The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988.*
After hours	When CSCs are closed – outside 9am- 5pm Monday to Friday.
Caseworker (CW)	A qualified child protection worker at the Helpline who carries out initial assessments of risk of harm.
Contact	1.) Communication by telephone or fax with the Helpline by members of the public or mandatory reporters. Includes reports of concern about a child or young person, requests for assistance and general enquiries. 2.) A record in KiDS of a contact with the Helpline.
Community Services Centre (CSC)	Local DoCS office with qualified child protection workers who receive Helpline's referrals to respond to child protection reports.
Community Services Officer (CSO)	Helpline staff who are not qualified child protection workers. CSOs answer callers who have indicated through the IVR that they are: ▪ not making a risk of harm report, or ▪ have a serious and urgent matter, or ▪ are extremely distressed. If the CSO determines that the information needs a risk of harm assessment, the caller is transferred to the caseworker queue.
DoCS	NSW Department of Community Services.
Genesys	Computer Telephony Integration software that manages Helpline's telephone system and provides management information, data and statistics.
Initial assessment	An assessment by a caseworker of whether information received by the Helpline: ▪ constitutes a report that a child is at risk of harm report (Stage 1) and, if it is, ▪ what is the level of urgency and the recommended response time for intervention by a CSC or JIRT (Stage 2). A team leader must approve all initial assessments.
Interactive voice recognition (IVR)	Genesys software that directs incoming calls to a queue according to the option selected by the caller.
JIRT	Joint Investigative Response Team that receives Helpline's referrals to respond to child protection reports that require investigation of criminality. A JIRT is staffed by DoCS' child protection caseworkers and NSW Police with assistance from NSW Health.
KiDS	Key Information and Directory System. It is DoCS system for keeping records of its clients and was introduced in October 2003.
Mandatory Reporter	A person who is obliged by s. 27 of the Act to report concerns about a risk of harm to a child, which he or she becomes aware of while delivering health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement as part of their paid work. The Act imposes a $22,000 penalty for failing to report.
Report	1.) A report made to DoCS usually via the Helpline conveying concern that a child or young person may be at risk of harm as outlined in ss. 23, 24, 25, or 27, 120, 121 and 122 of the Act. 2.) A Helpline contact that needs an initial assessment of risk of harm.
Risk of harm	In general terms, a risk of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. See s. 23 of the Act for a full definition.
Team leader	A qualified child protection worker who supervises other Helpline staff and approves all caseworker decisions.

Performance Audits by the Audit Office of New South Wales

Performance Auditing

What are performance audits?

Performance audits are reviews designed to determine how efficiently and effectively an agency is carrying out its functions.

Performance audits may review a government program, all or part of a government agency or consider particular issues which affect the whole public sector.

Where appropriate, performance audits make recommendations for improvements relating to those functions.

Why do we conduct performance audits?

Performance audits provide independent assurance to Parliament and the public that government funds are being spent efficiently and effectively, and in accordance with the law.

They seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government agencies and ensure that the community receives value for money from government services.

Performance audits also assist the accountability process by holding agencies accountable for their performance.

What is the legislative basis for Performance Audits?

The legislative basis for performance audits is contained within the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, Part 3 Division 2A*, (the Act) which differentiates such work from the Office's financial statements audit function.

Performance audits are not entitled to question the merits of policy objectives of the Government.

What conducts performance audits?

Performance audits are conducted by specialist performance auditors who are drawn from a wide range of professional disciplines.

How do we choose our topics?

Topics for performance audits are chosen from a variety of sources including:
▪ our own research on emerging issues
▪ suggestions from Parliamentarians, agency Chief Executive Officers (CEO) and members of the public
▪ complaints about waste of pubic money
▪ referrals from Parliament.

Each potential audit topic is considered and evaluated in terms of possible benefits including cost savings, impact and improvements in public administration.

The Audit Office has no jurisdiction over local government and cannot review issues relating to council activities.

If you wish to find out what performance audits are currently in progress just visit our website at <www.audit.nsw.gov.au>.

How do we conduct performance audits?

Performance audits are conducted in compliance with relevant Australian standards for performance auditing and operate under a quality management system certified under international quality standard ISO 9001.

Our policy is to conduct these audits on a "no surprise" basis.

Operational managers, and where necessary executive officers, are informed of the progress with the audit on a continuous basis.

What are the phases in performance auditing?

Performance audits have three key phases: planning, fieldwork and report writing.

During the planning phase, the audit team will develop audit criteria and define the audit field work.

At the completion of field work an exit interview is held with agency management to discuss all significant matters arising out of the audit. The basis for the exit interview is generally a draft performance audit report.

The exit interview serves to ensure that facts presented I in the report are accurate and that recommendations are appropriate. Following the exit interview, a format draft report is provided to the CEO for comment. The relevant Minister is also provided with a copy of the draft report. The final report, which is tabled in Parliament, includes any comment made by the CEO on the conclusion and the recommendations of the audit.

Depending on the scope of an audit, performance audits can take from several months to a year to complete.

Copies of our performance audit reports can be obtained from our website or by contacting our publications unit.

How do we measure an agency's performance?

During the planning stage of an audit the team develops the audit criteria. These are standards of performance against which an agency is assessed. Criteria may be based on government targets or benchmarks, comparative data, published guidelines, agencies corporate objectives or examples of best practice.

Performance audits look at:
- processes
- results
- costs
- due process and accountability.

Do we check to see if recommendations have been implemented?

Every few years we conduct a follow-up audit of past performance audit reports. These follow-up audits look at the extent to which recommendations have been implemented and whether problems have been addressed.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) may also conduct reviews or hold inquiries into matters raised in performance audit reports. Agencies are also required to report actions taken against each recommendation in their annual report.

To assist agencies to monitor and report on the implementation of recommendations, the Audit Office has prepared a Guide for that purpose. The Guide, *Monitoring and Reporting on Performance Audits Recommendations*, is on the Internet at <www.audit.nsw.gov.au/guides-bp/bpglist.htm>

Who audits the auditors?

Our performance audits are subject to internal and external quality reviews against relevant Australian and international standards. This includes ongoing independent certification of our ISO 9001 quality management system.

The PAC is also responsible for overseeing the activities of the Adit Office and conducts reviews of our operations every three years.

Who pays for performance audits?

No fee is charged for performance audits. Our performance audit services are funded by the NSW Parliament and from internal sources.

For further information relating to performance auditing contact:

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Performance Audit Reports

No	Agency or Issues Examined	Title of Performance Audit Report or Publication	Date Tabled in Parliament or Published
65	Attorney General's Department	*Management of Court Waiting Times*	3 September 1999
66	Office of the Protective Commissioner Office of the Public Guardian	*Complaints and Review Processes*	28 September 1999
67	University of Western Sydney	*Administrative Arrangements*	17 November 1999
68	NSW Police Service	*Enforcement of Street Parking*	24 November 1999
69	Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW	*Planning for Road Maintenance*	1 December 1999
70	NSW Police Service	*Staff Rostering, Tasking and Allocation*	31 January 2000
71*	Academics' Paid Outside Work	*Administrative Procedures Protection of Intellectual Property Minimum Standard Checklists Better Practice Examples*	7 February 2000
72	Hospital Emergency Departments	*Delivering Services to Patients*	15 March 2000
73	Department of Education and Training	*Using Computers in Schools for Teaching and Learning*	7 June 2000
74	Ageing and Disability Department	*Group Homes for People with Disabilities in NSW*	27 June 2000
75	NSW Department of Transport	*Management of Road Passenger Transport Regulation*	6 September 2000
76	Judging Performance from Annual Reports	*Review of Eight Agencies' Annual Reports*	29 November 2000
77*	Reporting Performance	*Better Practice Guide A guide to preparing performance information for annual reports*	29 November 2000
78	State Rail Authority (CityRail) State Transit Authority	*Fare Evasion on Public Transport*	6 December 2000
79	TAFE NSW	*Review of Administration*	6 February 2001
80	Ambulance Service of New South Wales	*Readiness to Respond*	7 March 2001
81	Department of Housing	*Maintenance of Public Housing*	11 April 2001
82	Environment Protection Authority	*Controlling and Reducing Pollution from Industry*	18 April 2001
83	Department of Corrective Services	*NSW Correctional Industries*	13 June 2001
84	Follow-up of Performance Audits	*Police Response to Calls for Assistance The Levying and Collection of Land Tax Coordination of Bushfire Fighting Activities*	20 June 2001

No	Agency or Issues Examined	Title of Performance Audit Report or Publication	Date Tabled in Parliament or Published
85*	Internal Financial Reporting	*Internal Financial Reporting including a Better Practice Guide*	27 June 2001
86	Follow-up of Performance Audits	*The School Accountability and Improvement Model (May 1999) The Management of Court Waiting Times (September 1999)*	14 September 2001
87	E-government	*Use of the Internet and Related Technologies to Improve Public Sector Performance*	19 September 2001
88*	E-government	*e-ready, e-steady, e-government: e-government readiness assessment guide*	19 September 2001
89	Intellectual Property	*Management of Intellectual Property*	17 October 2001
90*	Intellectual Property	*Better Practice Guide Management of Intellectual Property*	17 October 2001
91	University of New South Wales	*Educational Testing Centre*	21 November 2001
92	Department of Urban Affairs and Planning	*Environmental Impact Assessment of Major Projects*	28 November 2001
93	Department of Information Technology and Management	*Government Property Register*	31 January 2002
94	State Debt Recovery Office	*Collecting Outstanding Fines and Penalties*	17 April 2002
95	Roads and Traffic Authority	*Managing Environmental Issues*	29 April 2002
96	NSW Agriculture	*Managing Animal Disease Emergencies*	8 May 2002
97	State Transit Authority Department of Transport	*Bus Maintenance and Bus Contracts*	29 May 2002
98	Risk Management	*Managing Risk in the NSW Public Sector*	19 June 2002
99	E-Government	*User-friendliness of Websites*	26 June 2002
100	NSW Police Department of Corrective Services	*Managing Sick Leave*	23 July 2002
101	Department of Land and Water Conservation	*Regulating the Clearing of Native Vegetation*	20 August 2002
102	E-government	*Electronic Procurement of Hospital Supplies*	25 September 2002
103	NSW Public Sector	*Outsourcing Information Technology*	23 October 2002
104	Ministry for the Arts Department of Community Services Department of Sport and Recreation	*Managing Grants*	4 December 2002

No	Agency or Issues Examined	Title of Performance Audit Report or Publication	Date Tabled in Parliament or Published
105	Department of Health Including Area Health Services and Hospitals	*Managing Hospital Waste*	10 December 2002
106	State Rail Authority	*CityRail Passenger Security*	12 February 2003
107	NSW Agriculture	*Implementing the Ovine Johne's Disease Program*	26 February 2003
108	Department of Sustainable Natural Resources Environment Protection Authority	*Protecting Our Rivers*	7 May 2003
109	Department of Education and Training	*Managing Teacher Performance*	14 May 2003
110	NSW Police	*The Police Assistance Line*	5 June 2003
111	E-Government	*Roads and Traffic Authority Delivering Services Online*	11 June 2003
112	State Rail Authority	*The Millennium Train Project*	17 June 2003
113	Sydney Water Corporation	*Northside Storage Tunnel Project*	24 July 2003
114	Ministry of Transport Premier's Department Department of Education and Training	*Freedom of Information*	28 August 2003
115	NSW Police NSW Roads and Traffic Authority	*Dealing with Unlicensed and Unregistered Driving*	4 September 2003
116	NSW Department of Health	*Waiting Times for Elective Surgery in Public Hospitals*	18 September 2003
117	Follow-up of Performance Audits	*Complaints and Review Processes (September 1999) Provision of Industry Assistance (December 1998)*	24 September 2003
118	Judging Performance from Annual Reports	*Review of Eight Agencies' Annual Reports*	1 October 2003
119	Asset Disposal	*Disposal of Sydney Harbour Foreshore Land*	26 November 2003
120	Follow-up of Performance Audits NSW Police	*Enforcement of Street Parking (1999) Staff Rostering, Tasking and Allocation (2000)*	10 December 2003
121	Department of Health NSW Ambulance Service	*Code Red: Hospital Emergency Departments*	15 December 2003
122	Follow-up of Performance Audit	*Controlling and Reducing Pollution from Industry (April 2001)*	12 May 2004
123	National Parks and Wildlife Service	*Managing Natural and Cultural Heritage in Parks and Reserves*	16 June 2004
124	Fleet Management	*Meeting Business Needs*	30 June 2004

No	Agency or Issues Examined	Title of Performance Audit Report or Publication	Date Tabled in Parliament or Published
125	Department of Health NSW Ambulance Service	*Transporting and Treating Emergency Patients*	28 July 2004
126	Department of Education and Training	*School Annual Reports*	15 September 2004
127	Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care	*Home Care Service*	13 October 2004
128*	Department of Commerce	*Shared Corporate Services: Realising the Benefit including guidance on better practice*	3 November 2004
129	Follow-up of Performance Audit	*Environmental Impact Assessment of Major Projects (2001)*	1 February 2005
130*	Fraud Control	*Current Progress and Future Directions including guidance on better practice*	9 February 2005
131	Follow-up of Performance Audit Department of Housing	*Maintenance of Public Housing (2001)*	2 March 2005
132	Follow-up of Performance Audit State Debt Recovery Office	*Collecting Outstanding Fines and Penalties (2002)*	17 March 2005
133	Follow-up of Performance Audit Premier's Department	*Management of Intellectual Property (2001)*	March 2005
134	Department of Environment and Conservation	*Managing Air Quality*	6 April 2005
135	Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Sydney Water Corporation Sydney Catchment Authority	*Planning for Sydney's Water Needs*	4 May 2005
136	Department of Health	*Emergency Mental Health Services*	26 May 2005
137	Department of Community Services	*Helpline*	June 2005

* Better Practice Guides

Performance Audits on our website

A list of performance audits tabled or published since March 1997, as well as those currently in progress, can be found on our website <www.audit.nsw.gov.au>

If you have any problems accessing these Reports, or are seeking older Reports, please contact our Executive Officer on 9275 7220.