

20 July 2011

Ms Marion Davis
Strategic Director for Children and Young People and Families
Warwickshire County Council
Saltisford Office Park
Ansell Way
Warwick
CV34 4UL

Dear Ms Davis

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Warwickshire County Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Warwickshire County Council which was conducted on 21 and 22 June 2011. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and senior practitioners undertaking referral and assessment duties; and other information provided by staff and managers. Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff. I am grateful to you and your staff for the help and time given during this inspection.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Six of the eight areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in June 2010 have been addressed. Two areas require further development; variation in practice and consistency between teams and the quality of initial assessments remains variable.

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

| Strengths |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Children and young people are consistently seen and where appropriate seen alone and their views and that of their parents or carers are considered well in |



the assessment of need process and this influences decisions made and services received. The council uses the 'Hear by Right' standards framework for promoting the participation of children and young people in the development of services and uses a range of innovative approaches including questionnaires, email, text that encourages take-up.

- Risk and protective factors in core assessments are effectively underpinned by the use of the council's risk assessment tool which has been integrated into the assessment form and has been shared with other local authorities as a best practice tool.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Child protection enquires are always carried out by suitably experienced social workers. Joint working arrangements with the police are effective in ensuring that child protection investigations are undertaken in a timely way. Strategy meetings are well attended by the relevant key partners.
- Clear arrangements are in place between the district teams and the Integrated Disability Service for undertaking child protection investigations. This provides for an efficient joint approach, which ensures both risk and the specialist needs of children and young people with a disability are appropriately investigated and assessed in accordance with safeguarding procedures.
- The timeliness of the response to contact and referrals is good and thresholds were applied consistently in cases seen by inspectors.
- The relevance of equality and diversity issues are appropriately identified and included in the assessment process. This was an area of development at the last inspection.
- The common assessment framework is well embedded which enable appropriate and early multi-agency intervention.
- Effective communication and information sharing takes place between the emergency duty team and the daytime service, resulting in timely referrals and follow up action to safeguard children and young people.
- Direct work with families is linked to the care planning process and this provides for appropriate and additional support by non-social work qualified staff to families with complex needs.
- Social workers reported to inspectors that they have good access to their managers and receive regular supervision. Management oversight on allocated work is good and provides direction and focus in care planning.
- Managers in the district teams audit all cases prior to transfer to the Integrated Disability Service and long term children's teams, to ensure work is

up to date and of a good standard.

Areas for development

- Some children in need cases are held by non-social work qualified staff. In some instances cases seen by inspectors were not appropriately risk assessed resulting in non qualified workers inappropriately working on complex children in need cases.
- A number of children in need cases without a named social worker are held by managers. In a small number of cases, inspectors found this resulted in delay in families receiving services. Also monitoring arrangements were found to be insufficient and this could result in potential risk not being identified on unallocated cases.
- The quality of initial assessments seen is too variable and remains an area for development from the last inspection. Although some assessments are of a good standard there are instances where the risk assessment is insufficient leading to inappropriate closure and re-referral.
- The council is making considerable effort to address the variation in practice across district teams and has strengthened the peer auditing arrangements, which has improved consistency in practice and assessments. However variation in practice and consistency between the offices visited was seen by inspectors and remains an area for development.

Any areas for development identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

Mary Candlin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Jim Graham, Chief Executive, Warwickshire county Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education