

17 June 2010

Dr Carole Tozer  
Director for Children's Services  
Torbay Council  
Union House  
Union Street  
Torquay  
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Dear Dr Tozer

### **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Torbay 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 Torbay Council which was conducted on 18 and 19 May. 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. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

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.

The inspection identified areas for priority action alongside areas of satisfactory practice and areas for development.

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

#### **Satisfactory practice**

- There are good systems for receiving contacts and referrals. Administrative processes function well to support work within the team.
- Links between the out of hours service and the contact and referral service are effective. Appropriate information is promptly shared.



- Practitioners have been actively involved in designing improvements to the social care electronic recording system in order to reduce unnecessary recording duplication, ensure that core standards are adhered to and professional judgements and decisions are more clearly set out.
- The local authority is aware of the challenges facing the referral and assessment services, such as social work and management capacity, clearly understood and embedded core professional standards, continuing professional development needs and effective quality assurance systems. Clear priorities for action for improvement have been set by the Director of Children's Services, endorsed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board, are being implemented and are underpinned by additional resources from the council into Children's Services; however these have yet to have an impact.

### **Areas for development**

- Senior managers have commissioned audits of the service, which have been used to focus service development. However, despite fortnightly tracking of some cases, regular systematic audit of cases by operational managers has yet to be established.
- Equality and diversity issues are not sufficiently addressed in casework assessment and planning.
- Clear thresholds for access to social care services are in place but are not always appropriately applied within the team.
- Some child protection cases are allocated to, or assessed by, staff who are not qualified social workers.
- Children are routinely seen during assessments. However children's views and needs are not consistently reflected in the assessment process.
- Communication with partner agencies on the progress of assessments is inconsistent.
- The quality of assessments and subsequent care planning are inconsistent and lack a clear focus on outcomes for children and young people. Some assessments are of a satisfactory standard. In most cases seen assessments lacked sufficient detail or analysis.
- There is significant delay in the transfer of some cases between the referral and assessment service and other social care teams, which results in a drift in the work with some cases and severely limits the capacity within the team.
- Most social workers are currently carrying excessive caseloads. A significant number of cases are awaiting completion of assessments, recording of information, or management decision.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

#### **Areas for priority action**

- Managerial oversight and case planning, including the recording of management decision-making on case files, are of poor quality, insufficiently robust, and are not consistent.
- Staff supervision at all levels within the service is not compliant with council requirements. Supervision is not sufficiently regular, clearly documented, or providing appropriate professional challenge.
- In some cases the response to child protection referrals does not meet statutory guidance and does not ensure that some children are adequately safeguarded. Timescales for the completion of some assessments are poor. Some assessments do not demonstrate a clear analysis or evaluation of risk to the welfare and safety of children. The outcome of assessments and managerial oversight on some child protection cases are not recorded on case electronic records or in case supervision. It is therefore not always possible to establish whether those children are safe.

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

In addition, it is considered by Ofsted that the findings of this inspection and the identified areas for priority action are likely to become a limiting judgement of the annual performance rating for your council's children's services when considered with other evidence. This means the annual rating is likely to be limited to 'performs poorly'.

Yours sincerely

**Pietro Battista**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Elizabeth Raikes, Chief Executive, Torbay Council  
Bob Spencer, Chair of Torbay Safeguarding Children Board  
Cllr Anna Tolchard, Lead Member for Children's Services, Torbay Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department of Education