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Mr Simon White  
Director for Children's and Young People's Services  
Suffolk County Council  
Endeavour House  
8 Russell Road  
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Suffolk  
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Dear Mr White

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Suffolk 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 Suffolk County Council which was conducted on 13 and 14 July 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. 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 of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The eight areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010 have been addressed, other than the quality of initial assessments and the recording of ethnicity, which remain areas for development.

The area for priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010 has been fully addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Core assessments are of a high quality and relevant research informs the analysis well. This ensures that the risk and protective factors that impact on a child's safety are assessed to a consistently high standard.</li> <li>▪ Service users' views are taken into consideration in both assessments of their needs and service planning. The culture of participation is supported by highly effective advocacy arrangements, with targeted schemes in place in partnership with the voluntary sector, for both children and adults with a learning difficulty. The recording of children and young people's views in assessments was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Area teams are fully staffed by qualified social workers and there is a good balance of practice experience. This enables the prompt allocation of assessments; there is no unallocated work and caseloads are manageable. This was an area for priority action at the previous unannounced inspection.</li> <li>▪ Timely action is taken to ensure that children are safe. This includes prompt strategy discussions with the police, who are co-located and an effective child protection conferencing system, which is outcome focused and sets measurable performance requirements.</li> <li>▪ Supervision of social workers is regular and recorded and decision making can be read across on to case files. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.</li> <li>▪ The common assessment framework is fully embedded across agencies and leads to positive outcomes for children and young people. Decisions to step up to and down from statutory assessment processes are clear and appropriate.</li> <li>▪ Newly qualified social workers receive a comprehensive induction programme, which includes additional supervision and the opportunity to network with peers. This significantly enhances the quality of services to the children that they work with. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.</li> <li>▪ The multi-disciplinary access team works effectively in partnership to process contacts and referrals and ensure that they are promptly and appropriately allocated; for example, to the children with additional needs team for an assessment of children with a disability. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.</li> </ul>

- A programme of auditing by managers ensures that practice issues are accurately identified and corrective action is taken; for example the planned reduction in the rate of re-referrals to the service through greater clarity over the definition of a referral.
- The out of hours service is effectively linked to daytime services and has the capacity to call upon additional resources to protect children, such as emergency residential and fostering placements.

#### **Areas for development**

- The completion of initial assessments is variable; some seen by inspectors were of good quality but others were out of time and the quality was poor. For example, they failed to draw upon information previously known to the service. Too many resulted in re-referrals and thus impeded prompt and effective access to services for children and their families. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- The ethnicity of children is not always appropriately recorded. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Access for social workers to the electronic recording system at outreach offices is unreliable, and this impedes prompt and accurate recording of direct work with children.

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

Yours sincerely

**Ian G Young**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Lucy Robinson, Interim Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education