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Ms Carol Chambers
Strategic Director for Services to People
Rutland County Council
Council Offices
Catmose Street
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Rutland
LE15 6HP

Dear Ms Chambers

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Rutland 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 Rutland County Council which was conducted on 10 and 11 May 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 practice that met requirements and areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in September 2010 have been considered during this inspection. Improvement has been made in three areas of development identified in the last inspection but two areas for development from the last inspection have not been sufficiently addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

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

- The views of children and young people are consistently sought and recorded during assessments. Children and young people are appropriately seen alone and their views are taken into account in informing planning and evaluating outcomes.
- There is good evidence of a strong and mutually supportive working relationship between the duty and longer term teams. A recently introduced flexible working arrangement between the teams ensures that qualified and suitably experienced social workers are available to undertake child protection investigations when required.
- The co-location of the common assessment framework (CAF) co-ordinator within the duty team is leading to a more effective and appropriate use of the CAF. Increasing numbers of CAFs are being undertaken with good participation from partner agencies, children and families. Managers recognise that further work is needed to ensure the CAF is fully embedded.
- Social workers routinely consult with other agencies when undertaking assessments of need and risk. There is evidence of a strong working relationship between children's social care and Leicestershire Police.
- Out of hours duty arrangements are robust and linked well to the day contact, referral and assessment services.
- In most cases seen by inspectors the ethnicity of children and young people was recorded. There are appropriate arrangements in place for access to more specialised services, including agencies that provide interpretation and translation facilities, when these are required to meet the diverse needs of children, young people and their families.
- Case discussion between social workers and their managers are suitably recorded on case files. Staff report that they are well supported by their managers who are accessible and provide advice.
- Social workers have manageable caseloads and the majority of work is allocated in a timely manner.
- A system for the transfer of cases to the long term team is supported by a clear protocol that is effectively and rigorously applied and supports timely continuity of service provision.
- The employment of a Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager who established a routine case file auditing process has resulted in some improvements in both practice and procedure. Examples of this include the

introduction of a risk assessment matrix to be used in child protection cases and new procedures in relation to the use of chronologies on case files.

- Performance management information is routinely available to team managers. This enables managers to have a clear overview of caseloads, to track the timeliness of assessments, and identify ongoing patterns and trends in the performance of their teams.
- Effective action to recruit permanent staff has reduced reliance on agency workers and increased workforce stability. Children's social care staffing levels have been protected in the recent budget decisions. The council is developing a register of social workers in order to ensure there is access to a pool of appropriately qualified additional staff when needed.
- Social workers receive regular supervision, evidenced on case files seen by inspectors. Team managers and their staff have undertaken joint training on supervision and a new template has been introduced to facilitate critical reflective supervision.

Areas for development

- In some cases seen by inspectors there were significant weaknesses in the decision making and practice to effectively respond to and investigate child protection referrals. This has left children and young people exposed to potential risk of harm. Immediate action is being taken by the council to review all cases identified by inspectors, and to audit a range of referrals through increased scrutiny by senior managers.
- Rates of repeat referrals remain high and in some cases, decisions are being made to close cases before all the necessary work has been completed.
- Although most case records are up to date there are gaps in recording in some, which reduces capacity for the effective oversight of progress and clarity that children and young people are appropriately safeguarded.
- The quality of assessments is too variable. In some risk and protective factors are clearly identified, inform actions and ensure that children and young people are suitably protected. However, in other initial and core assessments the analysis of risk is insufficiently robust and does not consistently address all issues identified at the point of referral.
- Most initial and core assessments are completed within timescale but in some cases there are delays in the commencement and completion of work. This is reducing the effectiveness of assessments in determining the full range of needs and risks and the timely provision of appropriate services.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ghaffar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Helen Briggs, Chief Executive, Rutland County Council.
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education