

24 February 2010

Mr Mike Dillon  
Director of Children's Services  
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council  
Seafield House  
Kirkleatham Street  
Redcar  
TS10 1SP

Dear Mr Dillon

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council children's services**

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 January 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records and hard copy files; 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 and social workers. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- There is prompt response to safeguarding concerns across the assessment social work teams. Actions are taken to ensure children and young people identified as being at risk of immediate harm are appropriately safeguarded.
- Senior managers have commissioned a new computer system built around the specific needs of the authority. Social workers and managers have been



consulted and their views have ensured the development of a system to enable improved recording practices.

- Substance misuse services for adults are readily available and are well-utilised in undertaking assessments on relevant families.
- The children and families teams, who carry out assessments, are staffed by suitably qualified and experienced workers. Agency workers have been employed to cover for vacant posts and staff on maternity leave.
- Committed and enthusiastic staff report that they have access to relevant training and regular formal supervision and support. Managers are also readily available for consultation on a daily basis.
- Use of the common assessment framework has led to increasing multi-agency involvement and numbers of children and young people being supported. The Redcar and Cleveland Children and Young People's Trust is providing strong leadership to take forward further improvements in this area.
- The out of hours social work service provides a timely response to contacts about the safety and well-being of children and young people and has good communication with the daytime services.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

### **Strengths**

- Senior managers have a good awareness of the strengths and areas which need further development to improve the current arrangements for contact, referral and assessment. This has resulted in additional staff being appointed to respond to service pressures and clear improvement plans, including a further organisation change due in February 2010.
- Good collaborative work between the social work teams and other agencies is evident throughout all contact, referral and assessment work, ensuring a focus on education and health outcomes in addition to the protection needs of children and young people.
- Trained and experienced staff provide a good assessment service for children with a disability. There is good and meaningful contact with these children and young people using a variety of tools and methods to communicate.
- Social workers benefit from regular high quality supervision; this identifies the professional needs of staff in order to support them effectively in their work.

### Areas for development

- All referrals are considered and prioritised, and additional work is undertaken. However, this work is not always in the form of an initial assessment. This practice does not meet national guidance.
- Although some good initial and core assessments were seen, others were of poor quality and descriptive rather than analytical. Full consideration of all factors and planning for future actions were not thoroughly identified.
- Some contacts from other agencies to share information on families lack clarity in the details and in the expectations of the desired response from children's services. Due to this, further work is needed by social workers to gain a fuller understanding and to allow prioritisation of these cases.
- In some cases, the views of children are inadequately recorded and it is not always clear how much weighting is given to their views in assessments.
- The current format used to record assessments does not identify adequately managerial decision making and plans for further actions.
- Due to the volume of recording required for electronic records and hard copy files, social workers spend too long completing forms and documents which have some significant duplication. Delays are evident in completing this recording.
- The local authority performance management system highlights a recent deterioration in the numbers of assessments undertaken and those completed within timescale.

Yours sincerely

**Neil Penswick**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Amanda Skelton, Chief Executive, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council  
Barbara Shaw, Chair of South Tees Safeguarding Children's Board  
Ian Jeffrey, Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families