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Mr Steve Rutland  
Interim Strategic Director  
Children, Young people and Learning Directorate  
North Tyneside Council  
Quadrant  
The Silverlink North  
Cobalt Business Park  
NE27 0BY

Dear Mr Rutland

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North Tyneside 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 North Tyneside Council which was conducted on 15 and 16 September 2010. 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.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Staff morale is high and there is good commitment and loyalty to the local community; the service is almost fully staffed and no use is made of agency staff.</li><li>▪ The externally commissioned out-of-hours team provides a high quality service</li></ul>

with effective action to safeguard children, good quality recording and robust links to the daytime service. The ability of the team to undertake 'safe and well' visits to children on child protection plans and to support families with disabled children strengthens safeguarding arrangements.

- Partnership working on domestic violence is well established with good sources of therapeutic and practical support for children and families from both statutory and voluntary services.
- Good policies and procedures are available to assist staff and professionals from across the partnership to manage risk effectively; in particular, the Indicators of Need threshold agreement and the North Tyneside Framework for Assessment and Referrals are helping to embed thresholds and support the consistency of response to assessed need across agencies.

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

- Overall the First Call team respond promptly and effectively to contacts and referrals from families and other agencies.
- All cases are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers and there is no unallocated work.
- Where children are assessed as being at risk of harm, including disabled children, appropriate and prompt action is taken to safeguard them.
- Children are routinely seen during assessments and their views and those of their families are taken into account when making decisions and planning services to support them.
- Most initial assessments are satisfactory with some of a good standard and include a clear analysis of the information gathered to inform decision-making.
- In all cases seen, core assessments and Section 47 enquiries include risk assessment, protective factors and good quality analysis which support effective service planning.
- Effective arrangements are in place between the First Call team and the Area teams to encourage and enable families to access children in need support.
- Consideration of equality and diversity is well evidenced in case recordings and lessons from a serious case review are also helping to shape further development in this area.
- Record-keeping is generally up-to-date and of a satisfactory quality.
- Social workers receive good support, management oversight and supervision from easily accessible managers who are available to provide advice and

guidance to staff to make appropriate decisions, particularly in complex cases. There is a good range and take-up of training opportunities, in particular those provided by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), helping social workers to develop their professional knowledge and expertise.

- A range of performance management activity, including case file audits, is undertaken by managers at all levels on a regular basis. Appropriate action is taken to address any shortfalls in practice. Staff seen by inspectors state they find the file audit activity helps their professional development.
- Manageable workloads in the First Call and Safeguarding teams enable staff to deliver an effective service.
- Newly qualified social workers receive appropriate induction, have protected caseloads and are provided with intensive support and supervision to facilitate their professional development.
- A pro-active approach is taken to seek the views of parents and professionals about their experience of the service which leads to improvements in practice and service delivery.
- Nearly all performance indicators are in line or better than statistical neighbours.
- Good quality partnership working reinforces safeguarding arrangements well.
- Senior managers and partner agencies have a strong focus on and commitment to improving services and there is considerable evidence of monitoring, action planning and reviewing which have resulted in progress.
- The LSCB receives and acts effectively on regular management information provided by the First Call team and the Safeguarding team, which supports improvements well.

### **Areas for development**

- In a small number of cases seen by inspectors, families contacted the First Call service or were referred by agencies several times before action was taken to assess and provide the necessary support for them.
- The use of both paper and electronic case files in the First Call team is very time-consuming and therefore reduces the time available to work with families.
- Although regular supervision takes place, and social workers feel appropriately supported, the supervision records seen by inspectors are inconsistent, and do not always reflect the challenges to practice.

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

Yours sincerely

**Lolly Rascagneres**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: John Marsden, Chief Executive, North Tyneside Council  
Barbara Williams, Chair of Safeguarding Children Board, North Tyneside Council  
David Lilly, Lead Member for Children's Services, North Tyneside Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education