

17 December 2009

Ms Denise Hyde
Executive Director Children's Services
North Lincolnshire Council
Hewson House
Station Road
Brigg
DN20 8XB

Dear Ms Hyde

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North Lincolnshire 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 North Lincolnshire council which was conducted on 18 and 19 November 2009. 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 one area for priority action and a number of 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; 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. 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:

- All cases were allocated on the duty and assessment team and caseloads are well managed which ensures initial visits to children are promptly carried out.



- Managers are readily accessible to staff for guidance on cases. Regular formal supervision focuses on individual cases enabling social workers to review activity effectively; recording of supervision is up to date.
- Relevant training and professional development for social workers are provided and regarded as a positive benefit.
- Initial assessments are appropriately informed by relevant background information and all necessary checks are undertaken. Assessments are child focused and show a satisfactory level of analysis based on relevant evidence, including the views of families and children. Recommendations resulting from assessments are clear.
- The ethnic, cultural and identity needs of children and families are suitably taken into account in assessments.
- Inter-agency work was effective in most cases seen by inspectors. This included timely Section 47 strategy discussions in cases where there were child protection concerns.
- The Extended Duty Team is integrated well into arrangements that provide a responsive and consistent 24 hour service and ensure children stay safe.
- A large amount of management information is collated from regular performance reporting processes. Some of this usefully informs managers about trends in the service, for example trends in repeat referrals.
- Service user feedback is sampled by managers from cases chosen at random, and is widely disseminated to staff on a monthly basis to help improve services.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning to improve the quality and performance of the Duty and Intake Teams includes good use of contemporary benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of local practice, for example, recent inspection reports and the national findings of the evaluation of serious case reviews. ▪ The separation of duty and statutory work with looked after children from intake and initial assessment activity is effective. This enables workers to concentrate well on their core professional task. ▪ Private fostering arrangements are appropriately identified. Robust intervention takes place which ensures that children are safe and that assessments are commenced in good time.

Areas for development

- In some cases seen by inspectors, decision making by managers whether to accept a referral had not taken place within the prescribed 24 hours.
- Hospital staff do not always ensure that information supplied to the duty team about safeguarding concerns about children is clearly referred and confirmed promptly in writing.
- Inspectors saw some cases relating to safeguarding concerns, where evidence to support the threshold decision that determines whether a case is that of a child in need rather than a child in need of a protection plan, was insufficiently clear. In these cases, it was not always evident that the primary focus of case planning was on safeguarding the child.
- A significant number of initial assessments, approximately 60, have not been fully recorded or endorsed by managers within the prescribed timescale of seven days. Many are outstanding from October, and a few from September 2009, resulting in key information about children and families in need being unavailable.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Areas for priority action

- Statutory guidance is not routinely followed in cases where child protection concerns are identified. Investigations under Children Act 1989, Section 47 are not being carried out in line with the prescribed framework for core assessments which is intended to ensure a primary focus on safeguarding.

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

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mr S Driver, Chief Executive, North Lincolnshire Council and
Chair of North Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board
Tony Gosling, Lead Member for Children’s Services, North Lincolnshire
Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families