

13 July 2011

Mr Ian Anderson
Director of Community Well-Being and Social Care
Isle of Wight Council
County Hall
High Street
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1UD

Dear Mr Anderson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Isle of Wight 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 Isle of Wight Council which was conducted on 14 and 15 June 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 two areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in June 2010 have been mainly addressed.

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

Strengths

- An effective protocol that addresses the needs of children who go missing from home or care is well supported by strong working relationships between children's social care and the police. As a result of direct work with individual



children and young people who are at risk of going missing together with training for their carers, there has been a significant decline in the numbers who have been reported missing in the last year.

- The common assessment framework is well integrated within the continuum of services offered to children, young people and their families. As a result, it is routinely used to support families who no longer need social work involvement as well as those whose needs do not reach thresholds for statutory services.

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

- An effective recruitment and retention strategy has resulted in a significant reduction in the vacancy rate for social workers from 41% in 2010 to just 4% at the time of the inspection.
- Workers are well motivated and have manageable caseloads. They are supported to undertake their roles through regular and consistent formal supervision and ready access to managers on an informal basis. This was an area of development at the last inspection.
- Newly qualified social workers are well supported to take up their role and develop appropriate skills through an established development programme.
- Contacts and referrals are dealt with in a timely manner. Management decision-making about the progress of referrals is prompt.
- Good joint working arrangements between the police and children's social care result in timely strategy meetings and investigations. All child protection cases are allocated immediately to suitably qualified social workers. Child protection plans have clear targets, timescales and contingency plans.
- Transfer arrangements of cases between teams are clear and timely.
- The views of children, young people and their parents are clearly considered as part of the assessment and planning process. This was an area of development at the last inspection.
- Practice audits are undertaken on a regular basis and social workers are given specific feedback about the quality of their case work. Wider service audits are undertaken by senior managers and the learning from these audits inform training plans.
- Effective partnership working between health professionals and children's social care results in timely pre-birth assessments and planning.
- Good communication between out of hours and daytime services ensure that information is shared in a timely manner and action is appropriately taken to

safeguard children.

- Ethnicity and the cultural needs of the children and young people are recorded appropriately and used to inform assessments. Translation and interpretation services are easily accessible to staff when needed. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Successful work with the police in reviewing procedures for making domestic abuse referrals has resulted in a reduction of referrals that do not meet the threshold for services. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

Areas for development

- The quality of initial and core assessments is variable. Risk factors are not always identified, understood, analysed and recorded. A programme has been implemented to address this deficit, which includes training for social workers and improved scrutiny by team managers of assessments prior to their approval. However this has yet to show a consistent impact. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Although work is being undertaken to improve the quality of the integrated children's electronic system (ICS), the inputting and retrieval of information remains difficult and time-consuming. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- In some cases the quality of case recording is not sufficiently detailed and the electronic recording of contacts and assessments are not always timely. Although relevant information is recorded in notebooks held by social workers, these are not accessible to others who may need ready access to information about the progress of the case.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Steve Beynon, Chief Executive, Isle of Wight Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education