

9 September 2010

Ms Carol Chambers  
Director of Children and Young People's Service  
Rutland County Council  
Catmose  
Oakham  
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 August 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

**Strengths**

- There is strong involvement with partner agencies in relation to the work of the duty team at both individual case level and in strategic planning and discussions; in particular, the relationship with the police is strong and supportive.
- There are good management information systems and up-to-date data about contact, referral and assessment services for children provided by a dedicated



member of staff who is readily available to inform planning, to keep a clear focus on increase in demand and to inform members and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

- The supervised contact arrangements undertaken by child and family workers are good providing clear evidence for court proceedings; these arrangements, which are shared with the case-holding social workers, are very effective in providing consistent high quality care for children under stress.
- Despite the overwhelmingly White British nature of the area, the ethnic and cultural needs of families and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are very well identified and respected and services are targeted appropriately. Where necessary more specialised services are obtained from a nearby area with a more diverse population.

### **Satisfactory practice**

- Children at risk of or suffering significant harm are identified promptly and dealt with appropriately. Child protection investigations are comprehensive, timely and always carried out by qualified social workers.
- Most social work practice and all procedures seen meet statutory requirements.
- Initial and core assessments are at least satisfactory and often good. They are clear, comprehensive and analytical with risk and protective factors identified and mostly responded to appropriately. The timeliness of core assessments is now better than comparator authorities.
- Children are routinely seen during assessments and seen alone where appropriate; parents have good involvement in assessments and the development of care plans and assessments are routinely signed by parents.
- The new Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board is developing well with work progressing on multi-agency file audits and a new core data set for the board to monitor contact, referral and assessment work.
- Regular file audits take place using a format which concentrates on the quality and safety of casework with clear corrective actions identified and undertaken.
- The children and families team who deal with both duty and longer term work are mutually supportive and new members of staff have good access to more experienced colleagues and managers.
- Performance indicators are overall at least in line with and sometimes better than comparator authorities.
- The council seeks systematic feedback on the work of the children and families team through the use of customer satisfaction surveys and uses this information to improve the service.
- Satisfactory procedures are in place to raise awareness of and deal with any private fostering arrangements.

### Areas for development

- Record-keeping is not consistently up-to-date and in some cases seen the absence of a record had the potential to compromise safe planning for children; the management rationale for decisions taken is not always evidenced on the case record.
- The rate of repeat referrals is too high. Evidence was seen of decisions to close cases being made without reference to historical information or concerns.
- The implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) is at an early stage of development; inspectors were unclear about how the CAF fitted into the pattern of early intervention in families and whether its current method of usage is always appropriate.
- While staff report that supervision is supportive and regular, there is evidence on some supervision files of significant gaps and appraisals not always being timely. Some files show a lack of reflective supervision and constructive challenge. This is particularly significant for the majority of the social workers in the team who are newly or more recently qualified.
- Some staff report they find it hard to manage the range and volume of work undertaken by the team and short term and emergency tasks sometimes conflict with longer term work. Recruitment and retention difficulties have placed significant pressures on the team and its managers.

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

Yours sincerely

**Jenny Gwilt**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Helen Briggs, Chief Executive, Rutland County Council  
Mary Robertson, Chair of Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Board  
Heather Wells, Lead Member for Children's Services, Rutland County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education