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Ms Barbara Shaw
Acting Director of Adult and Children's Services
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Seafield House
Kirkleatham Street
Redcar
TS10 1SP

Dear Ms Shaw

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Redcar and Cleveland Borough 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 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council which was conducted on 9 and 10 November 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.

The areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in January 2010 have been considered during this inspection. The local authority developed an action plan and significant progress has been made in most of these areas. Two areas for development continue to be addressed in the plan but the measures taken are yet to have sufficient impact.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is strong multi-agency working to protect children identified to be at risk of harm. Strategy discussions are given high priority by statutory agencies and they are used very effectively to enhance the quality of investigations.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a positive commitment at all levels of management to improve further the quality of work with children and families. The auditing of cases is now more sharply focused, and both social workers and managers report the new arrangements to be robust and constructive. ▪ Most case records seen were up-to-date and included evidence of management decision making. Staff report that recording has been significantly improved through the council's investment in a new electronic system. ▪ The majority of assessments are undertaken in a timely manner. The council's own figures evidence a significant improvement in the timeliness of core assessments from July 2010 following the management decision to undertake all initial assessments in the access team enabling the locality teams to focus on core assessments. ▪ A new initiative with the police has improved multi-agency investigations of concerns about children in families experiencing domestic violence. The daily meetings between the police and children's services have improved the ability to prioritise and respond promptly to referrals, and have also enhanced information sharing with other agencies. ▪ Staff are very positive about the accessibility and support of managers. Workers spoken to consider their suggestions for improvements are listened to and influence the development of the service. ▪ Staff, including those who are newly qualified, are well supported through regular supervision and good quality training. Newly qualified workers speak highly of the mentoring provided to support reflective practice. ▪ In the cases seen by inspectors children were safeguarded through an appropriate and prompt response to concerns. All child protection enquiries are undertaken by suitably experienced and qualified social workers. ▪ The children with disabilities team undertakes holistic assessments of the needs of children and families. This ensures that accessibility to services is not overly reliant on the medical diagnosis.

- Most social workers have manageable caseloads, which enables work to be allocated in a timely manner.
- There is effective liaison with the emergency duty team, which acts appropriately to safeguard children outside of normal working hours.

Areas for development

- There is a lack of clarity within the access team as to when a contact becomes a referral, and sometimes contacts are closed inappropriately.
- The current arrangements for transferring telephone calls from the main switchboard to the access team do not facilitate a prompt response to the public or other professionals.
- The quality of initial and core assessments is inconsistent; this was an area for development at the last inspection. The council has recognised the need to improve this through staff training and the recently revised system of auditing.
- While there is an action plan arising from the previous unannounced inspection to improve the recording of children's views, overall practice in this area remains variable.
- The rate of referrals is rising and early preventative work is not sufficiently embedded. As a result, agencies are still making referrals which could otherwise be dealt with through the common assessment framework, thus increasing pressure on the access team.

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

Yours sincerely

Ralph Trevelyan-Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Amanda Skelton, Chief Executive, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Patti Summerfield, Chair of Redcar and Cleveland Safeguarding Children Board
Ian Jeffrey, Lead Member for Children's Services, Redcar and Cleveland
Borough Council
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