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Mr John Richards
Director of Children's Services
Peterborough City Council
Bayard Place
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Dear Mr Richards

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Peterborough City 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 Peterborough City Council which was conducted on 2 and 3 February 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 areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Three areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2009 have been addressed. Inconsistency of management oversight and variability of assessments remain areas for development.

The two areas of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2009 have been addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a strong commitment across the service to ensuring that issues of equality and diversity are well addressed when assessing the needs of children and young people. For example there is excellent access to interpreting and translation services and casework consistently demonstrates good consideration of cultural issues.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council has been effective in recruitment and retention of staff and this continues to improve. Capacity and stability of staff have improved significantly within the referral and assessment service and there are now no unallocated cases. This was an area for priority action at the last inspection. ▪ Social work reports to child protection conferences have improved and enable more effective identification of risk. Appropriate child protection plans are in place and core groups are held within timescales, and are well attended by partner agencies. This was a priority action at the last inspection. ▪ Performance monitoring, and a systematic approach to audit are leading to good improvements in some areas, from a very low base, for example the quality and timeliness of initial assessments for children in need has improved. Partner agencies report a significant improvement in the referral and assessment service and state that the service is now more responsive. This was an area for development in the last inspection. ▪ Morale of staff has improved. Staff have access to good training and learning opportunities. Newly qualified staff are well supported and more experienced social workers are undertaking post qualification awards. Regular workshops focusing on practice development are now in place for social workers and these are valued by staff. ▪ Thresholds for referrals are better understood across agencies and are now more consistently applied. Decisions about contacts and referrals are robust and are made in accordance with statutory timescales, with good evidence of management decision making. ▪ Child protection enquiries are undertaken by suitably qualified social workers and there is evidence of some good and improving joint working with the police. ▪ Initial strategy discussions with the police are within timescales and where children are identified as being at immediate risk of harm the initial response is timely.

- All children with child protection plans are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers.
- Good performance management information is available to front line managers and senior managers. This has led to a significant improvement in the timeliness of completion of initial assessments and core assessments for children in need.
- The common assessment framework is being utilised well. There are now quality assurance mechanisms in place and work is commencing on evaluating impact.
- The monitoring of front line social care practice by the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board is improved. Performance data is now monitored by the board as well as qualitative information from audits.

Areas for development

- Child protection processes are not fully operating in accordance with statutory guidance and in some cases managers are unable to readily access information from case files to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to safeguard children. Core assessments are not routinely initiated when section 47 enquiries are undertaken. Some section 47 enquiries have been allowed to drift without a clear conclusion. The lack of clarity of decision making and the absence of core assessments lead to delay and a failure to fully assess the potential risk of harm to the child.
- Assessments are of variable quality, and are not consistently explicit with regard to risk and protective factors. While some assessments are good others are not sufficiently comprehensive and lack clear analysis. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Evidence of management oversight is variable. In some cases reasons for decisions made are unclear. This was an area for development at the last inspection.
- The frequency and quality of supervision are inadequate. The council previously identified this issue and is taking robust action to improve supervision practice. Staff report good access to managers, who provide ongoing advice and support.
- In the majority of cases seen by inspectors, chronologies were not in place which makes it difficult to ensure that historical information is taken into account in assessments and decision making. The council previously identified this issue and has issued guidance to staff.
- Some initial assessments of children in need are undertaken by unqualified staff. This is not compliant with statutory guidance. The council had recognised that a different role was needed for unqualified staff and had made alternative

arrangements.

- There are delays in the recording and sharing of outcomes of strategy discussions and meetings.
- The quality of case recording is too variable. In some cases seen recording was of poor quality for example there was no evidence of when children were seen.
- Some cases are not closed in a timely way and there are delays in transferring cases. Children in need plans are not put in place until the case reaches the longer term team. The combination of these factors results in delays in progressing some children in need cases. The council is taking action to address this issue.
- Some case files do not demonstrate that full statutory checks are undertaken during child protection enquiries.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul d'Inverno
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive, Peterborough City council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education