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Ms Cynthia Welbourn
Corporate Director of Children's Services
North Yorkshire County Council
County Hall
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
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Dear Ms Welbourn

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North Yorkshire 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 North Yorkshire County Council which was conducted on 25 and 26 January 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 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 of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in June 2009 have been considered in this inspection and progress noted in all areas.

The two areas of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in June 2009 have also been considered during this inspection. Appropriate immediate action was taken in the two cases brought to the attention of the authority at the time. Considerable unallocated work was previously identified; no unallocated work was identified during this inspection therefore all the areas of priority action have been fully addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint working arrangements with the Army Welfare Service and the authority are strong. The needs of children from army families for services and safeguarding are identified promptly with high quality responses. This results in proactive and comprehensive packages of support for these children and their families. ▪ Day-to-day support to staff is excellent with good management oversight. Opportunities for reflective practice such as peer group supervision and daily duty meetings develop practitioners' skills. Staff report that they are well supported in case planning and there is prompt and robust management decision making leading to manageable caseloads. There is a good level of professional scrutiny and as a result of this approach a high quality service is provided to children.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children including those with disabilities identified at risk of harm are responded to promptly by suitably experienced social workers. Child protection enquires and strategy meetings take place promptly, are well recorded with clear decision making and have a wide range of multi-agency professional involvement. ▪ The quality of initial and core assessments is generally good. Analysis is stronger where the Signs of Safety model is used as this guides practitioners to identify the areas of risk, protective factors and next steps providing a central focus on meeting the needs of children. There has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of initial and core assessments and there are performance information reporting arrangements in place to monitor consistency across the teams. Timeliness was an area for development from the previous inspection. ▪ Children and parents are seen and considerable work is done to engage children sensitively when assessing their needs. Their views are recorded and these inform assessments and planning. Outcomes of assessments are routinely shared with parents and their response is recorded. ▪ Electronic case recording is robust and up-to-date and includes the recording of management decision making demonstrating accountable practice. ▪ There is good partnership working between most agencies and the authority to ensure children are responded to and provided with the services that meet their needs. The common assessment framework is widely embedded and is used as a tool to assist the assessment process so that families do not have to

repeat their experiences.

- The emergency duty team (EDT) arrangements work well. EDT have access to children's electronic files out-of-hours and use this to inform action that they take. There is timely and effective two way communication with assessment and safeguarding teams.
- Clear senior management auditing arrangements are in place to improve practice. There is regular reporting to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Executive Board and members who provide appropriate challenge and scrutiny.

Areas for development

- While domestic abuse referrals from the police to the authority have increased overall, there is inconsistency in police referrals which means that the authority may not have all relevant information when considering the needs of children. Senior managers and the Local Safeguarding Children Board are aware of this concern and have been proactive in raising this with the police directly. A protocol is in the process of being drafted however the impact of this work has yet to be seen.
- The customer services team does not routinely obtain ethnicity at point of contact. Therefore, an ethnically sensitive response by the assessment and safeguarding service can be delayed and not considered as part of initial planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Pauline Turner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Richard Flinton, Chief Executive, North Yorkshire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education