

8 December 2010

Ms Denise Hyde
Director of Children's Services
North Lincolnshire Council Children and Young People's Services
Hewson House
Station Road
Brigg
DN20 8XB

Dear Ms Hyde

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North Lincolnshire 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 Lincolnshire 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 area of priority action and areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 have been addressed.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Staff valued and spoke highly about the many routes available to aid professional development and career progression. This has helped the council to retain their social work staff and create stability within teams.



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

- The council has taken appropriate action to address the area of priority action identified at the last unannounced inspection. Senior managers have developed robust monitoring strategies which have led to improvement in practice in child protection investigations.
- Improved daily management oversight of contact and referrals has ensured a prompt, risk assessed response to safeguard children. Social workers have manageable caseloads, and this has enabled them to spend more time on direct work with children and young people and their families.
- Child protection investigations seen by inspectors were timely, thorough and focused and carried out by a qualified social worker. Recording of strategy discussions are clear and include contributions from relevant agencies.
- Good quality joint working between the police and social work staff in the integrated duty team ensures prompt and well coordinated multi-agency responses to safeguard children.
- Good arrangements are in place to respond to domestic abuse referrals. This has strengthened safeguarding arrangements for children and families affected by domestic abuse.
- Children and their families are routinely and sensitively involved in assessments, children are seen alone where appropriate and their views taken into account in case planning. Work has been undertaken to capture the views of children who have been subject to child protection enquires although the impact in terms of service delivery is yet to be evaluated.
- Initial and core assessments include good quality analysis and demonstrate clear evidence of risk and protective factors and actions required to safeguard children. The development of the managers briefing provides clear guidance and direction on the actions to be taken by social workers when conducting assessments.
- Evidence was seen on individual case files to demonstrate that issues regarding equality and diversity are acknowledged and responded to in assessments. This includes consideration of the impact of cultural and community factors, ongoing health needs and disability. The use of interpreters to support families where English is not a first language is also available.
- A range of performance management strategies are used effectively within the duty and assessment team by managers at all levels to identify and improve practice and to inform the action planning for the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- Social workers receive good support and regular supervision from managers

who are visible and easily accessible on a daily basis to provide advice and guidance to staff, particularly when dealing with complex child protection cases. There are good training opportunities.

- Newly qualified social workers have protected caseloads and are supported through a good induction programme, regular supervision and good mentorship arrangements. They benefit from working alongside more experienced social workers and shadowing complex child protection cases.
- Record keeping is up-to-date and of good quality and most assessments are now being completed within timescales. The rationale for management decisions are fully recorded in the assessment document on the Integrated Children's System.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is well established, but the council has recognised the need to raise the profile to ensure that CAF is used more widely as an effective early intervention tool. Training has been prioritised to ensure that team managers within partner agencies are trained to evaluate the CAF assessments and support practitioners.
- The out-of-hours duty team provide a proactive response and consistent service outside of office hours, linking well with day services. The team are supported by the inclusion of a specialist children with disability social worker.

Areas for development

- Service user surveys have highlighted dissatisfaction with the service at the first point of contact, due to delays in timely responses to some telephone calls.
- Although social workers receive regular supervision, and there is evidence of challenge, supervision is not always critically reflective.
- Senior managers use surveys of children, families and professionals to inform the development of its services. However, the outcomes of the user specific surveys are not separately evaluated so it is not clear how user views are informing and shaping front line service delivery.

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

Yours sincerely

Lolly Rascagneres
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Simon Driver, Chief Executive, North Lincolnshire Council
Edwina Harrison, Chair of North Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board
Tony Gosling, Lead Member for Children's Services, North Lincolnshire Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education