

24 November 2010

Ms Barbara Hughes
Interim Executive Director of Children and Family Services
North East Lincolnshire Council
The Municipal Offices
Town Hall Square
Grimsby
North East Lincolnshire
DN31 1HU

Dear Ms Hughes

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North East Lincolnshire 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 East Lincolnshire Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 October 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 and other practitioners.

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 January 2010 have not been addressed in full. Areas for development that remain to be addressed:

- Some initial contacts are identified as requiring 'no further action' without sufficient evaluation of the range of possible risks and issues that might affect all the children and young people in the household.
- Chronologies are not used consistently to inform current assessments.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The funding to secure additional social worker and supervisory posts has had a positive impact in reducing the levels of social worker caseloads leading to sufficient capacity to undertake the range of contact, referral and assessment tasks. ▪ The service is fully staffed and the staff group are well informed, suitably trained and operate within a strong learning culture leading to a developing quality of service. Staff training and development opportunities are good and readily available.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessments of children and their families take account of their culture, language, ethnic origin and personal identity. Their individual needs are identified and services are put in place to address them. ▪ Staff report good levels of support from managers and are highly motivated and strongly committed to the development of the service. ▪ Partner agencies report a shared understanding of thresholds and work well together. The development of a multi-agency co-located domestic violence team has led to earlier identification of children potentially at risk of harm. ▪ Assessments are clear and detailed. Children and families are routinely seen and involved in assessments and the quality of analysis is adequate. Many assessments produce good plans that lead to children and their families being provided with appropriate services and the reduction of risk and harm. ▪ Section 47 enquiries are carried out by suitably qualified and experienced staff. Outcomes and decision making are clearly evidenced in case records. When formal child protection investigations are undertaken they are well managed and children are appropriately protected. ▪ Supervision of social workers is supportive, occurs regularly in most cases and staff find it a helpful process. Evidence of line management sign off and decision making was seen on a range of case records. ▪ The out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear. Following a screening process suitably qualified social work staff assess thresholds of risk to children and young people and make appropriate decisions within 24 hours of a contact being received.

Areas for development

- Some initial contacts are identified as requiring 'no further action' without sufficient evaluation of the range of possible risks and issues that might affect all the children and young people in the household. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. Some contacts do not progress to the referral and assessment team in a timely way.
- Senior managers systematically audit and challenge the quality of work in open cases but management scrutiny of contacts requiring closure or progress to assessment is insufficiently robust which at times leads to unnecessary drift.
- Initial checks made to partner agencies by the contact service are too often incomplete and contacts are closed by managers with no response being recorded or followed up by duty team staff. This may result in risk to children and young people being insufficiently or incompletely assessed.
- Chronologies are not used consistently to inform current assessments. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Redevelopment of the common assessment framework (CAF) is at an early stage. However, the recently expanded CAF service is designed to impact positively on the quality of work in the initial contact service.
- The quality and timeliness of record keeping on ICS are variable. This could lead to a lack of information being available for the out-of-hours service leading to inaccurate assessments of risk.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynn Radley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Tony Hunter, Chief Executive, North East Lincolnshire Council
Martin Wright, Chair of North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Tony McCabe, Lead Member for Children's Services, North East Lincolnshire Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education