

24 February 2010

Mr John Collings
Executive Director of Children's Services (Acting)
Children's Services
Newcastle City Council
Civic Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8PU

Dear Mr Collings

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Newcastle children's services

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Newcastle City Council which was conducted on 26 and 27 January 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- There is a prompt response to contacts and referrals. Risk of harm is managed effectively to promote good outcomes for children and young people.
- Child protection Section 47 enquiries meet requirements. They are timely and clearly recorded, and action is taken to ensure children and young people's safety.



- Timescales for completion of initial and core assessments have improved from previous performance which was below comparators. Most assessments are completed promptly and children are seen alone when required.
- Members of staff report that they are well supported by managers. They receive regular formal and informal supervision, with access to good quality training. Some supervision records seen were of excellent quality.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board undertakes regular monitoring and quality assurance audits of safeguarding and child protection services to improve practice.
- The cultural, religious and language needs of children and families are identified and responded to effectively. Social workers have easy access to translation, interpreters and a range of consultancy services to support assessments.
- The emergency duty service links effectively with day time services to ensure consistency of response to children and young people's needs. Both services are managed by the same service manager.
- The common assessment framework (CAF) is beginning to be routinely used by a range of agencies to provide preventative services to children and families. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of CAF work and evaluation of outcomes for children and families.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective and clear leadership has achieved demonstrable improvement to the service and promotes a culture of continuous improvement. There are clear priorities and plans. Managers and staff demonstrate good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and are motivated and positive about achievements to date. ▪ Staff and managers report that the electronic recording system supports them well in their work to safeguard children and families. Changes and improvements to the system are implemented promptly. ▪ A good range of accessible, detailed management information informs performance management and effective use is made of monitoring and evaluation to improve practice. ▪ Strong and effective links have been developed with a range of partner agencies to promote good information sharing. Prompt joint agency action is

undertaken to respond to the needs of children and families.

- Proactive joint working and liaison with the police, ensure that risk of harm is prioritised and managed promptly. Strategy discussions are timely, well recorded and result in prompt decision making to protect and safeguard children and young people.
- The service has developed a range of good ways to actively seek the views of parents and children to improve further quality and outcomes.

Areas for development

- The quality of initial and core assessments is variable. Some seen were of a satisfactory or good quality but others were repetitive, omitted key information and lacked analysis. This could result in children not receiving the services they need.
- While case file records seen were mostly up to date, some recording is insufficiently clear and fails to include key information and details.
- Work with families seeking asylum, with no recourse to public funds, has been primarily focused on financial support rather than a more holistic assessment of children's needs. This is recognised by the council and they are taking action to improve this.

Yours sincerely

Joan Dennis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Barry Rowland, Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council
Edwina Harrison, Chair of Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board
Nick Cott, Lead Member for Children's Services, Newcastle City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families