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Mr Peter Duxbury
Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mr Duxbury

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Lincolnshire 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 Lincolnshire 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 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 two areas for development.

The two areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 4 and 5 August 2009 have both demonstrated satisfactory improvement. The council has implemented a development programme to change the electronic case recording system and work is continuing to ensure the system provides staff with effective support. Since the last inspection, although there has been a continuing rise in referrals for children in need, these are responded to effectively and case recording is completed within required timescales.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A robust performance management culture, well led by senior managers and involving all staff, is driving improvements in outcomes for children and young people. Performance management information is shared with staff at all levels enabling them to monitor their work closely and ensure it is completed within timescales. ▪ The diverse needs of children, young people and their families are dealt with sensitively and actively incorporated into plans for safeguarding. Social workers are proactive and imaginative in devising approaches that respond to issues of equality and diversity. Good examples seen by inspectors included work with travelling families; intervention based on research evidence and assessments for children with disabilities.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff consistently implement agreed policies and procedures to manage risk of harm and ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Initial contacts are effectively screened with explicit reference to thresholds. Risk of harm is assessed and managed appropriately. ▪ Decision making on contact and referrals is made in accordance with timescales set out in statutory guidelines. Outcomes are recorded clearly and consistent and effective management oversight provides supportive guidance for social workers. ▪ The common assessment framework (CAF) is used to assist in providing early intervention to children and families. When the CAF identifies a need for statutory intervention, this is supported by the effective sharing of information from the other agencies involved with preventative work such as the Team Around the Child. ▪ All initial and core assessments seen by inspectors are of at least a satisfactory standard and some are good. Assessments are based on the identification and analysis of all the circumstances relevant to the case. ▪ Children are routinely seen as part of the assessment process and their views inform subsequent plans to meet their needs. ▪ Child protection enquiries are timely and are always carried out by suitably qualified workers. Social workers and police work together to ensure timely and effective responses to identified needs. ▪ Record keeping is up-to-date and evidences effective management of the risk of harm, sound decision making and good planning. Management oversight is

consistently provided and supports staff to ensure that actions to safeguard children and young people are clear and appropriate.

- The experience and views of children and parents are gathered systematically and used to influence service delivery and development. For example, a recent survey of parents involved in initial assessments has resulted in specific recommendations for improvement in practice.
- Casework supervision is regular, consistently recorded and results in clear decisions and actions for staff in safeguarding children.
- Staff have good access to training and development opportunities to update their knowledge and promote their development. Learning from serious case reviews is actively promoted and informs the development of practice.

Areas for development

- Although agencies work well together to safeguard children and young people, the records of strategy discussions do not routinely identify actions, responsibilities and timescales for those involved in the child protection investigation.
- Some unqualified staff are involved, with oversight from qualified managers, in initial and core assessments of children in need. However the exact nature of their role and responsibilities, particularly in relation to their role as lead officers, is not clear from case records.

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

Yours sincerely

Jeff Banham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Tony McArdle, Chief Executive, Lincolnshire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education