

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol
BS1 6NL

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 9456293
Direct F 0117 9456554
Susan.wootton@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Peter Duxbury
Director of Children's Services and
Chair of Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board
County Offices
Lincolnshire County Council
Newland
Lincoln
LN1 1YQ

Dear Mr Duxbury

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Lincolnshire 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 Lincolnshire County Council which was conducted on 4 and 5 August 2009. 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, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

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:

- The response to referrals of children at risk of significant harm is timely and appropriate which helps children to remain safe.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Arrangements within the Customer Service Centre to quality assure referrals made to social care are effective.
- The child protection duty system ensures that Section 47 enquiries are undertaken by appropriately qualified and trained social workers.
- All cases where children are subject to a child protection plan are allocated to qualified workers.
- Timely and effective support for social workers by frontline managers helps to maintain the quality of the work undertaken.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The strong professional commitment of frontline staff helps to ensure that effective work is done to safeguard children. ▪ The council has clear ambitions for children’s services and senior managers offer strong leadership which has led to improvements in frontline services. ▪ A culture of performance management is led by senior managers, embedded and owned at a local level. Robust case auditing and detailed performance monitoring identify areas for development at an early stage and there were examples of appropriate and effective action taken to address quality. ▪ Many examples of casework seen were good and all were of at least a satisfactory standard. ▪ The rates of initial and core assessments completed within timescales are high and the number of repeat referrals is low. Performance in all of these is better than both national averages and comparable authorities.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The electronic system for recording and managing casework does not support staff effectively enough and this results in delays in completing lower priority work and duplications in recording. Some records are only held in paper files, posing a potential risk of information being overlooked. Managers are aware of this issue and taking action to remedy it. ▪ A steady rise in referrals and the increasingly complex cases referred to social care have led to higher caseloads and staff working to capacity. The increased demand is being effectively managed in relation to children

at significant risk and other higher priority cases but contributes to the delay in completing lower priority casework and in maintaining up to date records.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Tony McArdle, Chief Executive, Lincolnshire County Council
Martin Hill, Leader of the County Council, Lincolnshire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families
Patricia Bradwell, Lead Member for Children's Services