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Ms Rachel Dickinson  
Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Leicester City Council  
New Walk Centre  
Welford Place  
Leicester  
LE1 6ZG

Dear Ms Dickinson

### **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Leicester City 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 Leicester City Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 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 areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2009 have been addressed in part or fully. Progress has been made with all of the areas of development, and most have been effectively addressed. Further improvements are still required in the quality of assessments and in the management oversight of those contacts and referrals that do not proceed to initial assessment or child protection enquiries.



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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The views, wishes and feelings of children are given significant priority. Substantial efforts are made to enable and ensure that all children are fully engaged in assessment processes. Examples of excellent practice were seen where practitioners sought the child's view in challenging circumstances and fully represented them even where the views were contrary to the professional assessment of risk.</li> <li>▪ Supervision is of a high standard being regular, assured, clearly recorded and supportive of practitioners' performance, enabling critically reflective consideration of practice. It is further linked to a wide range of other training and developmental opportunities including a strong focus on supporting the development of newly qualified social workers.</li> <li>▪ Very good, timely responses are made by experienced practitioners in the Disabled Children's Team to address child protection concerns. The service is further strengthened by practitioners regularly and effectively screening referrals across the duty and assessment service for any concerns regarding other disabled children.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child protection enquiries are prioritised, with effective action taken by the response team. Section 47 enquiries are always undertaken by qualified social workers in a timely way, resulting in clear outcomes, and urgent action is taken when required.</li> <li>▪ Inter-agency thresholds are applied appropriately resulting in a balanced provision of assessment and services through the common assessment framework and the children in need arrangements. The substantial increase in children with identified needs has impacted on all stages of intervention.</li> <li>▪ Procedures and practice to protect children and manage risks are appropriately established and implemented. Additionally there are specifically targeted procedures and approaches, for example in situations involving child trafficking, sexual exploitation and honour based violence.</li> <li>▪ The qualified and experienced practitioner workforce in the duty and assessment and disabled children's teams is well established and skilfully provides consistently effective outcomes. Staff have challenging but manageable workloads.</li> <li>▪ There are constructive and robust inter-agency relationships between social care and key partner agencies resulting in appropriate information sharing and</li> </ul>

contributions to assessments and plans.

- Senior managers use a range of quality audit, case monitoring and performance assessment mechanisms to identify and report on the effectiveness of service processes, arrangements and workforce related issues. These inform and support service improvement plans.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements are responsive and timely, addressing risks to children in an appropriate way. There are also good links to daytime services, although the emergency duty team does not have the facility to record outcomes of interventions directly into the central database.

### **Areas for development**

- There is still insufficient managerial oversight of those contacts and referrals that do not proceed to either initial assessment or to child protection enquiries. This was one aspect of an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- Assessments continue to be variable in quality. Many fail to sufficiently or clearly identify risk factors, or evaluate the impact on the safeguarding needs of children within an analysis of risks, strengths and needs. This was an area for development at the previous unannounced inspection.
- The ethnicity, religion and culture of children are well recorded and their importance is recognised by practitioners, resulting in some good examples of sensitive and insightful work. However, the specific impact of these factors on the strengths and vulnerabilities of individual children is not consistently considered in assessments.
- Child protection strategy discussions between social care and the police child abuse investigation unit are inappropriately used as a means of general information sharing outside of Section 47 enquiries. While records of these discussions are kept they are not routinely shared.
- There is an absence of an effective screening mechanism to address the many domestic violence notifications, adding unnecessary pressures to the duty and assessment service.
- There had been some delays in starting and completing a small number of child in need assessments. While not initially indicating a risk of harm, some initial assessments subsequently identified child protection concerns.

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

Yours sincerely

**Brendan Parkinson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Sheila Lock, Chief Executive, Leicester City Council  
David Jones, Chair of Leicester City Safeguarding Children Board  
Councillor Vi Dempster, Lead Member for Children's Services, Leicester City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education