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2 September 2009

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

Dear Ms Dickinson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Leicester City Council 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 Leicester City Council which was conducted on 11 and 12 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, managers and professionals from some partner agencies. 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:

- Action needed to ensure children's safety is identified and implemented promptly. Practice and procedures comply with statutory requirements.
- Children suffering or at risk of significant harm are identified and receive a prompt response.



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- Management overview of assessments and interventions by workers is timely, focused and relevant.
- Referrals are allocated in a timely way, inspectors found no unallocated work within the duty and assessment service.
- Work identified as requiring a child protection response is allocated to qualified and, mostly, experienced social workers.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child centred work, with an effective focus on the protection of children, is evident. Direct work with children is often good, leading to their wishes and feelings being identified and taken seriously within assessments. ▪ The diverse and individual needs of children and their families are identified and contribute demonstrably to assessments of risk and need. ▪ Child protection enquiries are thorough and include a sustained focus on the child, particularly where their parent or carer also need support or are vulnerable. ▪ Workers reported very good support, guidance and direction given by their team managers. Reflective professional practice and continuous staff development are evident throughout the service. ▪ Staff have good access to a wide range of training from internal and external providers. The training undertaken is relevant and focuses well on improving service delivery. ▪ Operational and senior managers focus effectively on performance management and quality assurance. The recently enhanced audit programme aims to ensure that the service focuses on risks and needs of children and young people. ▪ Support services, notably legal services and the emergency duty team, are timely and provide clear and robust support in delivering safeguarding objectives. ▪ Child protection enquiries in relation to disabled children are sensitive to their additional vulnerabilities.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial responses by social care staff are inconsistent in identifying the needs of children who do not meet the threshold for child protection enquiries. Thresholds are not clearly or consistently articulated between referrals within the common assessment framework and those requiring an initial social care assessment.

- Workforce capacity is sufficient overall to meet the demand for service but the proportion of qualified social workers is too low. The duty team currently has no qualified social workers, although the team manager provides active oversight and appropriate prioritising and allocating of child protection work to qualified social workers in other teams.
- The arrangements for transferring cases between teams are not sufficiently efficient to support continuity in services experienced by children and young people.
- Record keeping overall was insufficiently focused and analytical although some excellent examples of timely case recording of purposeful practice were seen by inspectors.
- While supervision records demonstrate timely case management, guidance and direction, recording of the individual, professional development of staff is poor.

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: Sheila Lock, Chief Executive, Leicester City Council
Glenys Johnston, Chair of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Vi Dempster, Lead Member for Children's Services, Leicester City
Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families