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Mr Nigel Richardson
Director of Children's Services
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Merrion House
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Dear Mr Richardson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Leeds City 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 Leeds City Council which was conducted on 18 and 19 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 advanced 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 and other practitioners.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Due to the poor performance of children's services identified at the last inspection, the Secretary of State issued an improvement notice. An Improvement Board was established to provide effective challenge to drive swift and sustainable progress through a robust improvement plan. The areas of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 21 and 22 July 2009 have been addressed. The areas of development identified at the previous inspection have been mostly met with firm arrangements in place to deliver on the remaining issues.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been considerable progress to improve the contact, referral and assessment arrangements from the time of the last inspection, when there had been significant variations in the consistency and practice of these services and children had been identified as having been left at potential risk of significant harm. Senior managers provide a strong leadership for children's services and this has resulted in a remarkable and impressive improvement in the quality of the services inspected and the safety of children in the city. This was an area for priority action in the last unannounced inspection.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leeds City Council has made a significant investment and commitment to continue to provide additional resources to this area of work. This has ensured that front line assessment services are now fit for purpose and with the capacity to continue to improve. This was an area for priority action in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ Inspectors did not identify any cases where children had been left at risk. This was an area for priority action in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ In all cases examined by inspectors, children were visited and seen alone where appropriate. This was an area for priority action in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ Thresholds for the referral of cases of concern to children's services have been clarified and this has resulted in a better identification and response to need. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ The quality of contact, referral and assessments work undertaken by children's social care is much improved and now meets statutory guidance. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ Inspectors saw consistent practice in the teams visited, especially concerning the quality and timeliness of the completion of assessments. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ The city council contact centre receives all referrals and passes these on to the assessment teams in a timely manner. The quality of information recorded and passed on to relevant services is much improved. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection. ▪ Referring agencies are routinely contacted to inform them of the decisions made by children's social care at the completion of assessments. In most cases assessment records are also shared with the families. This was an area for

development in the last unannounced inspection.

- Child Protection procedures are up-to-date. New on-line internal procedures for social care have been produced and Leeds City Council is part of the West Yorkshire Consortium which produces a set of procedures for four Local Safeguarding Children Board areas. Each set of procedures is updated on a six monthly basis, most recently in January 2011. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- Systems have been introduced to ensure effective performance management. This includes a process where service managers review team managers' decisions on all contacts, referrals and assessments. Examples were also seen of good quality assurance and case recording audits. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- Performance indicators show an improving performance across the teams in the completion of assessments in a timely manner. The management recording of when an assessment is concluded is consistent with national guidance. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- Social work staff have manageable caseloads, regular supervision and access to appropriate training. Newly qualified social workers receive a comprehensive support package. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- The ethnic, cultural and disability needs of children are responded to in a sensitive manner, acknowledging their individual needs.

Areas for development

- The electronic social care record system does not meet the requirements of the service. There are a number of different systems for recording casework information which prevents a clear audit trail of actions taken and decisions made. This has been recognised by the authority and a new computer system is to be commissioned. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- The quality of assessments has much improved. However, the quality of recording still varies. The local authority is aware of these issues, having been identified through their own performance management systems, and this is a focus of an improvement programme. This was an area for development in the last unannounced inspection.
- In most cases strategy discussions take place with the West Yorkshire Police in a timely and planned manner. Single agency visits are undertaken and children are protected. However, in some cases seen by inspectors this did not meet the agreed protocol for when joint visits should be undertaken by those agencies. The local authority and the West Yorkshire Police are aware of these

issues and are reviewing at a senior management level the deficits in practice.

- Arrangements for out-of-hours service do not effectively link with the daytime service. This has been recognised by the authority and a review is being undertaken.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Penswick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education