

11 November 2009

Ms Alison O'Sullivan
Director for Children and Young People
Kirklees Council
Oldgate House
2 Oldgate
Huddersfield
HD1 6QW

Dear Ms O'Sullivan

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Kirklees 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 Kirklees council which was conducted on 13 and 14 October 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 a number of 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 performance indicators for initial and core assessments show satisfactory performance against the local authority's own targets for completion within timescale at approximately 70%.
- Thresholds for delivery of services are applied consistently by children's social care staff.



- Most referrals demonstrate clear evidence of management supervision and record checks on whether there had been previous children’s services involvement. Decisions on actions to be taken are made in a timely manner.
- The attention given to equality and diversity in case management is adequate with good access to interpreters.
- Capacity is adequate enabling a timely response to referrals and acceptable workloads.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All of the staff interviewed, as part of this inspection, report good support including a thorough induction to the council, regular supervision, and high quality and appropriate training. ▪ Assessment records show good communications between agencies. Referrals seen from other agencies are handled well and in a timely way. ▪ Good engagement with families as part of all assessments was seen by the inspectors. ▪ There has been effective implementation of the recommendations from serious case reviews. For instance, evidence was seen by the inspectors of improvements to the work undertaken around pre-birth assessments, with the introduction of a good template to guide staff to deliver best practice. ▪ There are good arrangements to respond to domestic abuse. This includes the police prioritisation of these cases, the arrangements for passing the details to children’s services and the scrutiny and actions taken by the council. ▪ In the children with disability service, good practice and recording were evident in all of the assessments seen by inspectors. Child protection investigations are handled well with good recording. ▪ Co-operation between teams is good and enables the council to respond flexibly and promptly to changing patterns of demand and transfer of cases when needed.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Common Assessment Framework is under utilised by all partner agencies and thus the benefits, in terms of prevention and early intervention, have not been felt by children and families. The demands

made on social care are greater as a result.

- The client management system has major weaknesses. The system has to close down regularly, meaning that workers and managers cannot access vital information in a timely manner to assess the welfare and safety of children.
- Supervision of practice and case auditing systems in duty and assessment teams are not consistently applied, with too much emphasis on compliance with processes rather than on the quality of practice and little evidence of improvement in practice following casework audits.
- Five cases seen by inspectors involving child protection concerns, in one team, had been subject to significant delay in ensuring that potential risk to the children concerned was minimised. Each case also demonstrated poor recording and a lack of management supervision. A senior manager acknowledged weaknesses in the work of this team and reported that action was ongoing to ensure that the work undertaken in this team was of an acceptable standard.
- Most assessments lacked adequate recording, clarity of purpose, the actions required, analysis and the decisions taken. Few assessments were effective as stand alone documents. Some assessments demonstrated an over-reliance on assertions by parents that they would protect their children, without an adequate investigation of their ability to do so or of the risks. Some good quality initial and core assessments were seen, with actions taken clearly recorded.
- The views of children are not consistently made explicit in assessments and case records, although there is consistent recording of assessment of need.
- Some initial assessments seen by the inspectors had been closed before completion. Deficits included incomplete checks and a lack of feedback or assessment from other agencies. No children were seen to have been placed at risk in these cases but this practice is not sufficiently robust to ensure that children are adequately protected.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Rob Vincent, Chief Executive, Kirklees Council
Alison O'Sullivan, Chair of Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Ken Smith, Lead Member for Children's Services, Kirklees Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families