

10 November 2010

Ms Judith Harwood
Interim Director of Children's Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council
Alfred Gelder Street
Kingston upon Hull
HU1 2AA

Dear Ms Harwood

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Kingston upon Hull 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 Kingston upon Hull City Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 October 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.

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

Strengths

- The arrangements for early intervention in respect of families affected by domestic abuse are underpinned by good multi-agency intervention. The weekly multi-agency forum routinely screens all referrals, which ensures timely support to families affected by domestic violence and highlights the local authority's commitment to the early identification and management of risk.
- Inspectors found evidence that children and families were routinely seen and involved in assessments and reports provided to parents were user-friendly and



enabled parents to endorse core assessments and comment on the quality of the social work practice.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Kingston upon Hull Children and Young People’s Plan 2010 – 2013 incorporates the findings of the last Ofsted inspection in 2009. As a result, the service development plan for the central duty team focused explicitly on areas for development that were identified in the inspection to ensure that services to children are strengthened. For example, there is now better engagement with health in the provision of out-of-hours services.
- Training for staff who undertake joint child protection investigations is of a high standard, resulting in a strong working relationship between the police and social care in achieving best evidence.
- In most cases seen by inspectors, effective social work practice was evident and assessments were underpinned by a sound theoretical and analytical base.
- The assessment of children and their families takes into account their language, culture and personal identity. The personalised needs of each child and family are considered and appropriate services made available. For example, interpreters are provided for families where English is not their first language and a range of communication approaches are used to support children and young people with communication difficulties.
- The timeliness of the response to contact and referrals is generally prompt and thorough and agencies are consistently notified of the outcome of referrals.
- Children at immediate risk of significant harm are responded to appropriately and in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Effective use is made of the common assessment framework which provides for appropriate and early multi-agency intervention.
- The management arrangements for the emergency duty team ensures close collaboration with the central duty team and the timely follow up on referred cases.
- Child protection enquires are routinely carried out by qualified and suitable experienced social workers.

Areas for development

- The arrangements for allocation of cases do not ensure that all children assessed as children in need of a service have an allocated social worker. In addition the allocation of work to non-qualified workers is insufficiently risk assessed.

- In the past 18 months the central duty team has experienced an unprecedented increase in the number of referrals. While the council reports strong working relationships with partner agencies, particularly the police, the increase in demand has proven difficult to manage in the absence of written guidance in relation to thresholds for referrals.
- Since the last inspection senior managers have implemented a revised quality audit procedure, which aims to provide a clear structure within which audit and quality assurance takes place. Nevertheless, the quality of audits seen by inspectors was too variable and the arrangements have yet to be fully embedded across the whole management group.
- The caseloads of social care staff in the central duty team are manageable. However, the workloads in the longer term teams exceeds staff resources and cases that cannot be allocated to a named worker are managed on a duty basis and overseen by managers.
- While inspectors found evidence of good quality initial and core assessments, this was not consistent in all cases, resulting in ineffective case planning. The premature closure of initial assessments and their conversion into core assessments leads to delays in the support and delivery of services to children and families.
- Inspectors found partial records held on the electronic system, leading to an absence of clarity regarding the progress of cases.
- The lack of a current supervision policy results in an inconsistent approach to the provision and recording of supervision. While social workers report they receive good quality and regular supervision, the absence of information on the majority of manual supervision files audited did not reflect this. Inspectors found in some cases supervision was not regularly held, recording was inconsistent and did not routinely cover training and development issues.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Candlin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Nicola Yates, Chief Executive, Kingston upon Hull City Council
Paul Dyson, Chair of Kingston upon Hull City Council Safeguarding Children Board
Christine Randall, Lead Member for Children's Services, Kingston upon Hull City Council
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