

7 July 2010

Mr Colin Peak
Director of Children's Services
Isle of Wight Council
County Hall
High Street
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1UD

Dear Mr Peak

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Isle of Wight 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 the Isle of Wight Council which was conducted on 8 and 9 June 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The new senior management team are providing strong leadership and structure leading to improvements in front line services.



Satisfactory practice

- Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales. All contacts are seen by a manager within 24-hours and appropriate decisions about incoming work are being made.
- Section 47 enquiries are undertaken in a timely manner by appropriately qualified and trained social workers.
- Child protection work is prioritised. At the time of inspection there was no unallocated work within the duty and assessment service.
- Thresholds for the provision of safeguarding services are the subject of multi-agency agreements and consistently applied.
- Use of the common assessment framework is increasing leading to early intervention to meet the needs of children through a range of family support services.
- Despite capacity issues caseloads are of manageable proportions. Newly qualified staff receive support and undertake work in accordance with their level of experience.
- Case records are up-to-date. However, the quality of the content of records is variable.
- Clear working arrangements between the Intervention and Assessment team and Children with Disabilities teams on complex cases helps to ensure that the assessed needs of children and young people are fully understood and responded to appropriately.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board ensures that lessons from serious case reviews and research to improve the quality of front line practice are communicated to all staff.

Areas for development

- Due to limited social worker capacity, children in need work is not always allocated in a timely manner. Some assessments are out of timescales before the assessment commences.
- Performance indicators are generally satisfactory in comparison with statistical neighbours although in relation to the timeliness of completion of core assessments performance is significantly lower.
- Initial and core assessments are of variable quality and management oversight of the quality and timeliness of assessments is not consistently rigorous. In some cases analysis is of a low standard with insufficient use of historical

information. Risk and protective factors are not always clearly identified.

- Some assessments contain insufficient information to make effective decisions or plans. For example, some assessments were closed prematurely leading to further contacts being made soon after case closure.
- Information regarding the ethnicity of families is not consistently gathered at the point of contact. Case recording does not always demonstrate how cultural, linguistic, religious or disability needs are addressed.
- Although children and young people are seen routinely, recording and plans do not consistently evidence that their wishes or those of their parents and/or carers are taken into account in assessment and planning processes.
- The frequency and quality of recording of supervision are inconsistent. Supervision is not providing appropriate challenge of the quality of casework and the professional development of some staff.
- Decision-making and effective planning is not sufficiently well evidenced in case records.
- There is no effective protocol between partner agencies to screen and consider the best response to the large numbers of incidents of domestic abuse that are referred to the council. Consequently, resources in the contact, referral and assessment team are not used in the most efficient way.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynne Staines
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Steve Benyon, Chief Executive, Isle of Wight Council
Pam Robinson, Chair of Isle of Wight Safeguarding Children Board
Dawn Cousins, Lead Member for Children's Services, Isle of Wight
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education