

23 December 2009

Ms Nicola Bailey
Director of Child and Adult Services
Hartlepool Borough Council
Civic Centre
Hartlepool
TS24 8AY

Dear Ms Bailey

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Hartlepool 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 Hartlepool Borough Council, which was conducted on 24 and 25 November 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 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 risk of harm to children was managed appropriately in the cases seen by inspectors.
- Child protection (Section 47) investigations and strategy discussions are accurately recorded and demonstrate effective management of risk.
- Core assessments are generally satisfactory and support good planning for children.



- Practice policies and procedures seen are up-to-date, easily accessible and are well understood by staff.
- Senior staff and team managers have access to a good range of management information enabling them to monitor performance effectively.
- Thresholds for intervention are regularly reviewed and appropriately monitored through a variety of audit activities leading to effective action.
- There are no unallocated cases in the contact, referral and assessment work seen by inspectors.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board promotes effective partnership working which supports the development of multi-agency arrangements well.
- Children and family records are generally up-to-date and include a clear record of managers' decisions resulting in effective case management by front line social workers.
- Inspectors saw good case examples of services provided which were sensitive to the needs of families from ethnic minority groups and families with disabled children.
- There are good multi-agency services in place which support children subject to child protection plans.
- Staff benefit from regular formal supervision and report good day-to-day support from their managers.
- Arrangements for the out of hours service are robust and links with the daytime duty service are good.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective leadership and management are demonstrated at all levels challenging casework decision making, providing clear direction and driving improvements to service quality. ▪ Staff benefit significantly from good training and development. The sponsorship scheme for student social workers is very effective in creating committed, qualified social workers and providing a career path for unqualified staff.

- Multi-agency preventative work provides very good child-centred and co-ordinated services supporting children and families from their first point of contact with universal services.
- The introduction of social care Quality Standards, which specify clearly the expected standards of practice and recording, is leading to discernable improvements to practice.

Areas for development

- The number of qualified social workers available in the duty team is insufficient to manage the volume of work effectively and thresholds for access to children in need services are not applied consistently.
- The new process of transferring referrals between the duty team and the initial response team is not supported by clear and effective protocols to enable a smooth transition of work.
- The quality of initial assessments is variable and some lack sufficiently robust analysis; it was not always clearly recorded if children had been seen and spoken to alone as part of the assessment.
- Currently the electronic recording system does not create clear and concise chronologies so that workers have to read all of the previous case files to ensure that the history is appropriately considered.
- Caseloads for social workers in the Children with Disabilities team are too high making it difficult to undertake effective monitoring of children's progress.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Paul Walker, Chief Executive, Hartlepool Borough Council
Councillor Cath Hill, Lead Member for Children's Services, Hartlepool
Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families