

3 November 2010

Mr Bruce Buckley
Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Children and Young People
Derbyshire County Council
County Hall
Matlock
DE4 3AG

Dear Mr Buckley

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Derbyshire County 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 Derbyshire County Council which was conducted on 5 and 6 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. The majority of areas for development identified in the last inspection in October 2009 have been addressed.

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

Strengths

- The children's rapid response team provides a good and proactive out-of-hours service. This enables a high level of flexible support to district teams in ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded.
- Contact, referral and assessment services for disabled children are highly effective and comprehensive. There is evidence of excellent assessments of



need and safeguarding risks. The team is co-located with child development professionals and they work well together to meet the needs of children.

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

- The Contact Derbyshire call centre provides an efficient and effective service for referrers and members of the public and ensures that child protection concerns are promptly directed to appropriate staff. Contacts are routinely signed off by managers.
- Senior management have taken positive steps to address the high volume of referrals and re-referrals to district teams, and this has contributed to the high morale of staff. Changes include extending the capacity of the call centre through the creation of two senior practitioner posts to screen all contacts, co-locating child protection officers within the police domestic abuse team, and revising threshold guidance.
- The quality of core assessments in the majority of cases seen by inspectors is good, with rigorous analysis informing the planning of service provision.
- Children and family members are seen during assessments and their views are being appropriately recorded and contribute to case planning.
- Staff report that managers are accessible and ensure that decision making when children are at risk of harm is prompt and effective.
- Performance management systems deliver timely and good quality management information to managers which is used to inform service planning.
- Newly qualified staff report that they receive satisfactory induction and good quality training and support.
- Experienced and well informed administrative staff placed within district duty teams provide valuable support to operational colleagues.

Areas for development

- While most child protection cases are allocated to a suitably experienced and qualified social worker, due to the high volumes of work within teams newly qualified staff are required on occasions to undertake highly complex child protection work. The limited capacity to provide co-work opportunities with an experienced colleague for such cases is being addressed by the council through the re-designation of 21 existing social work posts as senior practitioners.
- The key findings from core assessments are not always recorded promptly which delays both authorisation by managers and effective inter-agency intervention. However, cases seen demonstrated that on-going and appropriate

social work support is being provided.

- Not all staff undertaking referral and assessment work are suitably qualified and experienced.
- Section 47 child protection enquiries do not routinely lead to the undertaking of a Core Assessment. This is not in line with statutory guidance within *Working Together*. The council is aware of this and is taking steps to address the issue.
- Initial child protection conferences are frequently held outside of statutory timescales. This delays prompt multi-agency planning to protect children.
- Inspectors did not find any evidence of regular case file auditing taking place, leading to team and senior managers not being sufficiently informed about the quality of practice being delivered to children and young people.
- The quality of supervision varies. Most staff feel supported through the supervision process, however inspectors saw some evidence of infrequent supervision sessions, of poor supervisory practice, and of files not being accessible to staff.
- Case records do not consistently reflect the impact and relevance of culture, ethnicity or beliefs when assessing the needs of children and their families.
- The common assessment framework is not sufficiently embedded within inter-agency practice across all of the council districts in order for it to be an effective early intervention strategy.

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

Yours sincerely

David Asher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Nick Hodgson, Chief Executive, Derbyshire County Council
Lynn Harris, Chair of Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board
Barry Lewis, Lead Member for Children's Services, Derbyshire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education