

1 December 2010

Ms Jo Davidson
Strategic Director for Children and Young People (Interim)
Derby City Council
27 St Mary's Gate
Middleton House
Derby
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Dear Ms Davidson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Derby 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 Derby City Council which was conducted on 2 and 3 November 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 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 areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in January 2010 have been considered during this inspection. The local authority developed an action plan and significant progress has been made in many of these areas. Some areas for development continue to be addressed but a clear plan is in place.

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in January 2010 has been considered during this inspection. The integrated children's system continues to provide challenges for the reception team in undertaking contact, referral and assessment duties and while a corporate plan and investment is in place this is an area for ongoing development.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Considerable action has been taken since the last inspection to improve staff supervision. Supervision is regular, well recorded, and of good quality with examples of good reflective practice. Supervision also addresses personal and professional development well and monitors performance. ▪ Good and effective action has been taken to increase capacity with the investment of a third team to undertake contact, referral and assessment duties. This has resulted in reduction of caseloads that are now manageable. Staff report that they are listened to and morale is good.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where children are at risk of immediate harm prompt and appropriate action is taken to ensure they are safeguarded. This includes appropriate multi-agency involvement. ▪ Safeguarding responsibilities are undertaken by suitably experienced and qualified workers. ▪ Practice guidance and procedures are in place and used by staff. They are in the process of being updated. ▪ Plans reflect the individual needs of children, including those children with a disability. Staff have access to an appropriate range of interpreting facilities and are confident in working within a diverse community. ▪ The views of children and parents are consistently obtained, inform assessment and are clearly recorded within the assessment process. Children are routinely seen alone. ▪ Most records seen were up-to-date. They reflected the work undertaken in the case and there was evidence of consistent management oversight. ▪ An appropriate out-of-hours service is in place with effective two way communication between the service and the contact, referral and assessment teams. ▪ There has been a multi-agency city wide trial approach to responding to the large number of domestic violence referrals. This has improved information sharing amongst universal services and a timely response to those referrals. ▪ Staff report that they are well supported, have appropriate training opportunities and newly appointed staff experience good induction.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The quality of initial and core assessments is variable and some are poor and lacking in analysis. Key information is not always considered. In a number of assessments seen there was a lack of focus on fathers or male carers.

- The integrated children's recording system continues to present challenges in effectively supporting the work with children and families. This was an area for priority action at the previous inspection. Derby City Council has a corporate priority to review all information and communication technology systems as part of the current transformation programme. This is supported with considerable investment and the integrated children's system will be included in this review.
- The practice of undertaking 'focused assessments' is not in line with statutory guidance. Analysis of risk and rationale for decision making is not always clearly recorded.
- The recording by practitioners of the focus, contributions and action plans arising from strategy discussions is not complete. In addition the current electronic system requires aspects of a section 47 investigation to be recorded in different places fragmenting the known information. Therefore, outcomes in relation to significant harm are not clearly identified and not easily accessible to inform current or future practice.
- Thresholds are not clearly understood amongst partner agencies. As a result there are a high number of inappropriate referrals which causes unnecessary pressures in the reception team.
- While the common assessment framework is being used effectively to identify the need for services to children with disabilities, it is not established across the wider partnership. Children's needs are not always identified and assessed at an early stage.
- There are delays in progressing assessments for children who are not at immediate risk of harm. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. Decisions on contacts are not always made within 24 hours.
- There is some evidence of the development of auditing processes and systems. However, these are not undertaken consistently and themes are not yet used to improve practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Pauline Turner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Adam Wilkinson, Chief Executive, Derby City Council
Jo Davidson, Acting Chair of Derby City Safeguarding Children Board
Evonne Williams, Lead Member for Children's Services, Derby City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education