

17 March 2011

Mr Adrian Loades  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Castle Hill  
Cambridge  
CB3 0AP

Dear Mr Loades

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Cambridgeshire 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 Cambridgeshire County Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 February 2011. 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.

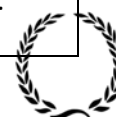
The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and 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 an area of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Most areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2009 have been addressed. The two areas for priority action have been addressed.

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

| <b>Strength</b>  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Considerable and effective action has been taken, since the last inspection, to improve recruitment and retention of staff which has resulted in a stable and appropriately qualified workforce and increased capacity within the service. Staff morale is now good and staff report that they are well supported by</li></ul> |



managers.

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

- Arrangements for responding to contacts have improved significantly since the previous inspection in August 2009 and the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in October 2009, through the council establishing an integrated access team.
- Thresholds for access to children's services are clearly defined.
- Good partnership and collaborative working with partner agencies is in place, in particular with the police.
- All children subject to child protection enquiries are allocated to suitably experienced and qualified social workers.
- Children are routinely involved in case planning, where appropriate, and their views are taken into account.
- Regular supervision provided by managers is well regarded by staff.
- Good support is provided to newly qualified social workers.
- Staff are well motivated and report good access to managers at all levels.
- Relevant training and development opportunities are readily accessible for staff.
- Robust arrangements enable prompt communication and liaison between daytime services and the out-of-hours services.
- Serious case review findings have been widely disseminated and staff are aware of the lessons learnt.
- Robust leadership and management of the service results in managers and staff having good awareness of the effectiveness of practice and those areas that require improvement.
- Well established audit arrangements inform practice and service development.

**Areas for development**

- The introduction of an integrated access team within the council's contact centre has significantly improved the filtering of contacts which do not require assessment. However, in some cases, which are passed to the intake teams for assessment, delays are caused by further screening and information gathering. As the role of the contact centre continues to develop, there needs to be more clarity on decision making and in the level of work it undertakes

prior to passing work to the intake teams.

- Whilst there has been some improvement in the timeliness of assessment, too many assessments are not completed within required timescales reducing the effectiveness of the assessments and delaying the provision of services. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. In some cases there is delay in allocating cases and in the recording of assessments. Too often the quality of recording does not sufficiently evidence the work that has been undertaken. Assessments do not always sufficiently identify risk and protective factors, although in some cases the quality of assessment and analysis is good.
- Within two areas child protection enquiries are often commenced by one worker and subsequently completed by another worker. This negatively impacts on continuity for the family, the social worker and the management of the case, and in some cases results in unnecessary delay. A pilot child protection team in the third area enables child protection enquiries to be completed by one worker, which maintains consistency.
- Information shared in strategy discussions is often too limited and there are delays in the recording and sharing of their outcomes. However, within the pilot child protection team, reasons for strategy decisions and actions to be undertaken are recorded more clearly.
- Unqualified social workers are undertaking some initial and core assessments, which is not in accordance with statutory guidance.
- Some children in need plans and child protection plans are not sufficiently specific, and do not have clear, measurable outcomes.
- Managers within the service have regular access to a wide range of performance information, which has significantly improved since the last inspection. However, some performance management information on the service provided by the council for this inspection was not accurate, or was not sufficiently specific or clearly structured to enable them to effectively performance manage the service.
- Whilst there has been some improvement in its performance, the electronic recording system does not effectively support social work practice. Staff report significant delay in accessing and recording information, which negatively impacts on their time management and ability to promptly exchange information with colleagues and partner agencies. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

**Pietro Battista**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education