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Mr Gordon Jeyes
Deputy Chief Executive
Cambridgeshire County Council
Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP

Dear Mr Jeyes

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Cambridgeshire County Council 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 Cambridgeshire County Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 July 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 areas for priority action and a number of 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 response to referrals of children at risk of significant harm is timely and appropriate, which helps children to remain safe.
- The child protection duty system ensures that Section 47 enquiries are undertaken by appropriately qualified and trained social workers.



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- All cases where children are subject to a child protection plan are allocated to qualified social workers.
- Managers provide staff with good day-to-day advice and support

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council has a strong commitment to improving children’s services and undertakes robust self-assessments. External independent audits have analysed services and recommended improvements. Managers have identified and prioritised key areas of concern and taken immediate action where appropriate. ▪ The council has recognised the need for additional resources and has made funding available, which has led to an increase in the establishment of social workers. ▪ Staff and managers involved in front-line referral and assessment services report improved senior management support. They are working flexibly to sustain core services and to compensate for capacity problems. ▪ Good judgement is generally demonstrated in the decisions concerning individual children and the quality of the casework delivered is good.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The electronic case recording arrangements do not provide an effective mechanism to support staff in their operational duties and, while the system enables managers to monitor caseloads and activity, it does not offer a means to monitor the quality of the work undertaken. ▪ More effective management oversight and quality assurance arrangements have been introduced recently. Some prompt and necessary action has been taken but there is limited evidence of systemic impact. ▪ Too many initial and core assessments are not completed within the required timescales, reducing the effectiveness of the assessments and delaying the provision of services.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Areas for priority action

- A lack of capacity in one team including high turnover of staff and historical recruitment difficulties in another leads, in both cases, to some delays in allocating lower priority cases for initial assessment. As a result, front-line managers are left to manage a degree of risk and to continually adjust social workers' priorities. Capacity issues also result in high caseloads and work being held in short-term teams because it cannot be transferred. There are delays in completing lower priority work and maintaining up-to-date electronic records.
- The referral and assessment arrangements in one area office are not sufficiently robust. This is due to high staff turnover, high caseloads and a history of insufficient management oversight and intervention, which has only recently been rectified. Managers are taking appropriate and effective action to address the problems and to ensure that children are safeguarded, but their interventions are not fully established and will take time to impact.

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

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire County Council
Jane Held, Interim Chair of Cambridgeshire Safeguarding Children Board
Martin Curtis, Lead member for Children's Services, Cambridgeshire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families