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Mr Paul Brennan
Interim Director of Children's Services
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Children and Young Peoples Services
Northgate House
Northgate
Halifax HX11UN

Dear Mr Brennan

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Calderdale Metropolitan Borough 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 Calderdale Metropolitan Borough 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:

- There has been an increase in the number of agencies using the common assessment framework. Children are being assessed for services which are then delivered through a multi-agency Team Around the Child model in a timely manner. A dedicated team has been established to support and monitor this increased usage and information on performance is available and monitored.



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- Senior managers are readily available to provide advice and guidance to support social workers in making appropriate decisions, particularly in relation to complex cases.
- The Calderdale Safeguarding Children Board has recently established sub-groups to focus on the quality of assessments undertaken on children in need and child protection cases, in order to support better quality and more timely initial and core assessments and to provide improved monitoring of practice.
- The Director of Children’s Services receives regular reports from the manager of the independent reviewing officers on the quality of assessments leading to initial child protection conferences. Elected members are informed of the key issues in the service and are supportive of the improvement plan.
- In the initial and core assessments for children with disabilities, seen by inspectors, social workers identified children’s needs appropriately. The quality of these assessments is satisfactory and supports effective service planning.
- The emergency duty team members are pro-active in sharing information effectively and promptly with the initial response team. This ensures continuity of support for children.
- Social work staff report that there is a good range of training available, which they can readily access.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement plans are being implemented, identifying immediate action, based on a comprehensive self-assessment. This recognises that practice and resources were insufficiently robust to offer a timely response and completed interventions to manage risk of harm. The need for additional management oversight and capacity has been identified and acted upon. From 13 July 2009, a senior manager is to be based with first line managers to oversee decision-making. ▪ Staff report that senior managers have listened to, and are responding to the concerns they have raised, by reducing workloads. For example, additional staff have been employed in order to ensure that all cases are allocated and the level of first line management support has been increased. ▪ Staff report feeling well supported. Supervision is regularly provided and of good quality. Good support is provided, both in terms of personal development and of individual case management.

Areas for development

- The number of initial assessments and core assessments undertaken is low compared with similar councils. As a result, not all children and young people who would benefit from an assessment are likely to receive one when needed. There is insufficient capacity, within the initial referral and assessment teams, to deal with the number of assessments that would be expected in comparison with similar councils.
- Initial and core assessments seen indicate that other agencies are consulted during the assessment process. However, the assessment records and analysis do not sufficiently reflect their contributions.
- Recording practice within the initial referral and assessment teams is inconsistent. Some case records are not up-to-date and information is not routinely entered on the electronic recording system.
- Some agencies provide insufficient referral information about the reasons for their concern. In these cases, staff do not routinely contact the referring agency to clarify the basis for their concern. The procedures in place around the common assessment framework are not sufficiently linked with the referral and assessment process. Common assessment framework documents are not routinely sent by agencies making a referral, nor are they requested once a referral is made by the assessment teams.
- Some initial and core assessments seen are not sufficiently analytical. This results in limited information being available to support effective planning for services to meet the needs of some children and their families
- Some initial assessments are overly focussed on the needs of parents, rather than the needs of the child or young person. There is a lack of evidence that children or young people are consistently seen or spoken with.
- The recent transfer of information to a new IT system has caused difficulties for staff in accessing historical records and recording assessments. Staff report that the forms produced by the system, although compliant with the integrated children's system, are not user-friendly for staff or families. Staff believe that this acts as a barrier to involving children and their parents in assessments and decisions.
- Managers do not have access to adequate electronic systems to record the progress of individual referrals and assessments and to aggregate performance information. Managers are therefore unable to track work effectively and, as a result, cannot ensure that risks faced by children and young people are managed effectively.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Areas for priority action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some casework seen during the inspection indicated that the safety of children had not been appropriately investigated. This was brought to the immediate attention of senior managers. The council accepted these concerns and acted promptly to ensure that the cases identified are further investigated to ensure the safety of these children.Joint investigations relating to child protection concerns, involving social workers and the police, are not always carried out effectively. As a result procedures in some cases are not followed, limiting the ability of both services to ensure children's safety.

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: Owen Williams, Chief Executive Calderdale, Metropolitan Borough Council
Mike Stow, Chair of Calderdale Safeguarding Children Board
Craig Whittaker Lead member for Children's Services, Calderdale
Metropolitan Borough Council
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