

17 February 2010

Ms D Jones
Corporate Director, Children and Learning
Unity House
111 Stuart Street
Luton
LU1 5NP

Dear Ms Jones

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Luton 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 Luton Borough Council which was conducted on 19 and 20 January 2010. 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.

The inspection identified one area 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:

- Systems for receiving referrals into the initial assessment team operate well and managers undertake effectively the screening of referrals and decisions on action to be taken.
- Cases where child protection issues are clearly identified are responded to promptly and appropriately.



- Eligibility and threshold criteria for assessment and services are clearly set out and adhered to by partner agencies.
- Arrangements for the transfer of cases from the initial assessment team to long-term teams are satisfactory.
- Use of the common assessment framework is well established across most partner agencies.
- Managers provide accessible support, advice and guidance to the initial assessment team.
- Social workers' training and development needs are clearly identified in supervision and employee appraisals, and are met through appropriate training courses.
- Regular auditing by a senior manager of referrals, assessments, case files, strategy meeting minutes and child protection conferences is in place.
- The emergency duty team provides a satisfactory out of office hours service and effective liaison with the managers of the initial assessment team.

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

| Strengths |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategy meetings are well attended by partner agencies and capably chaired by managers and result in effective planning. ▪ A clear protocol with the police ensures that the risk to children resulting from domestic violence incidents is screened, monitored, and referred. Cases are then subject to effective evaluation and follow-up action by the council. ▪ Forced Marriage Protection Orders are used effectively to protect young people. In one case seen by inspectors, the council acted promptly and appropriately as the relevant third party in making an application on behalf of a young person. |
| Areas for development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is not evident from individual casework or supervision files that staff supervision includes effective challenge and reflection on casework issues. |

- Core and initial assessments are of variable quality. Too many lack adequate analysis and in many cases do not include plans or timely outcome measures.
- Service users' views are not routinely recorded in assessment template forms.
- Significant delays in the allocation and completion of assessments result in delays in the delivery of services to some families. This is not identified by management information systems.
- Performance against the national indicator relating to the proportion of cases re-referred indicates that the rate is too high.
- Auditing of data on unallocated cases and assessments which are outside the timescales, is insufficiently robust.
- The failure of the electronic recording and management information system to reflect accurately caseload activity does not enable managers to monitor performance in a timely manner.

This visit has identified the following area for priority action.

Area for priority action

- Significant delays in completing some initial assessments and ineffective risk assessment and monitoring of the progress of this work result in potential risk to children and young people.

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

Yours sincerely

Geoff Corre
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Kevin Crompton, Chief Executive, Luton Borough Council
Michael Preston-Shoot, Chair of Luton Safeguarding Children Board
Tahir Khan, Lead Member for Children's Services, Luton Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families