

8 February 2010

Mr Andrew Flack  
Corporate Director for Children and Young People and Chair of Derby Safeguarding  
Children Board  
Derby City Council  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Norman House  
Friargate, Derby  
DE1 3NU

Dear Mr Flack

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Derby City 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 Derby City Council which was conducted on 13 and 14 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:

- Procedures for dealing with contact, referral and assessment work comply with statutory requirements.



- Equality and diversity issues are appropriately identified and the responses given to the identified needs of children and young people are satisfactory.
- There is a satisfactory level of multi-agency and partnership working led by the children's trust and the Derby Safeguarding Children Board.
- Children have opportunities to influence service development and delivery.
- There is substantial management oversight of referral and assessment processes to ensure that frontline staff are appropriately identifying, assessing and managing child protection risk.
- Performance indicators are generally satisfactory in comparison with statistical neighbours although in relation to initial assessments improvement is very recent.
- Senior managers challenge casework and decision making effectively through established audit processes which are overseen by the Derby Safeguarding Children Board.
- Thresholds for the provision of services are the subject of multi-agency agreements and ensure children are safeguarded.
- Use of the common assessment framework is providing early intervention to meet the needs of children supported by a range of family support services.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children at risk of, or suffering, significant harm are identified promptly and are dealt with appropriately. Child protection investigations are comprehensive, timely and always carried out by qualified social workers who are well supported by the police child abuse unit.</li> <li>▪ The council has a good in-house service which provides high quality direct work with children who have been sexually abused. It also raises awareness of abuse and helps other agencies, especially schools, to identify and support abused children.</li> <li>▪ Staff involved in providing services for children, young people and families, ranging from administrative through to community care workers and social workers, demonstrate a high level of team commitment and morale.</li> </ul>

- There is good evidence that children, young people, and their parents and carers are appropriately involved in the assessment and planning process to meet their needs.

#### **Areas for development**

- Some newly-qualified social workers undertaking child protection investigations, although well supported by their immediate line managers, are insufficiently experienced to undertake the task.
- Although child protection investigations are completed promptly, there is evidence that referrals for lower priority assessments are delayed as is the final provision of services. There is also a significant delay in providing information by some key partner agencies which protracts the assessment of need and in turn can delay the provision of a service.
- The quality of some assessments of children in need is poor and lacks sufficient focus and analysis to enable clear and workable recommendations.
- The frequency and quality of recording of supervision are inconsistent and not compliant with the council's policies and procedures. Supervision is not providing appropriate challenge of the quality of casework and the professional development of some staff.

This visit has identified the following area for priority action.

#### **Area for priority action**

- There are significant difficulties with the integrated children's system which have a substantial impact on the council meeting its statutory duties in this area of work. In particular, these system issues result in social work staff using alternative forms of recording for children in need cases, including handwritten records which are often absent, not up to date, or of limited quality. The absence or inaccuracy of these records could potentially put children at risk of harm although no evidence was found to that effect. These system issues also significantly impact on the timely completion of initial assessments. While senior managers have a robust action plan to address and compensate for these difficulties, including the purchase of modifications to the recording system and the provision of additional social workers, evidence of significant impact is not yet available.

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

**Jenny Gwilt**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Adam Wilkinson, Chief Executive, Derby City Council  
Councillor Les Allen, Lead Member for Children's Services, Derby City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families