

29 January 2010

Ms Alison Michalska  
Director of Children, Family and Adult Services  
East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
County Hall  
Cross Street  
Beverley  
HU17 9BA

Dear Ms Michalska

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within East Riding of Yorkshire 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 East Riding of Yorkshire Council which was conducted on 5 and 6 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 no areas for priority action but some 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; 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:

- Effective action is taken to ensure that children at risk of immediate harm are safeguarded.
- The social work practice seen by inspectors was adequate with some good features. Social workers engaged well with families and demonstrated an appropriate understanding of legislation and guidance.



- Work undertaken by social workers was child-centred. Children and young people were seen and involved in the work undertaken.
- Ethnic, cultural and language issues are appropriately considered and examples were seen of good consideration of communication and liaison issues with Portuguese and Polish migrant families.
- Partner agencies were routinely consulted when assessments were undertaken and their information included within the assessment, ensuring that relevant information on children and young people was considered.
- Clear systems are in place to enable information and work to be passed between the day time and the out of hours service, enabling a consistent approach for children and families.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Senior managers have reviewed duty, contact and assessment services, including the emergency duty team, and implemented change. Further change is underway aimed at delivering an improved and consistent response across the unitary authority. Additional staff have been appointed to respond to increasing demands for services.</li> <li>▪ New authority-wide arrangements for a single point of contact for children and family services provide a clarity and consistency of response. Contacts are dealt with promptly and recording is clear and well written. There is professional back-up to assist the customer services' staff and comprehensive training and systems are in place.</li> <li>▪ There is an immediate response by social work teams on work received from the Customer Services Centre and good management oversight; this enables visits to be undertaken on the day of referral with the police where necessary.</li> <li>▪ Morale is good. Committed and enthusiastic duty staff report good access to training and regular supervision. Caseloads are reasonable; newly qualified staff receive good induction and support arrangements are good.</li> <li>▪ Good multi-agency partnership arrangements, communication and planning are evident. There is close liaison with the police ensuring children are protected. Child protection planning meetings, with multi-agency involvement, occur appropriately and are well recorded with clearly outlined decisions.</li> </ul>

## Areas for development

- National guidance is not consistently followed on when to initiate assessments to identify a child and family's needs. Examples were seen of where the response was to a presenting problem alone rather than as a result of thorough consideration of underlying issues.
- Thresholds for children in need and child protection work are not clear. However, currently all referrals are responded to promptly and therefore no children were identified as at immediate risk. Lack of clarity on thresholds has been identified by the East Riding Safeguarding Children Board and work is being undertaken to deal with this.
- The local authority Integrated Children's System requires significant and lengthy input from workers to produce long documents which do not assist social workers in identifying children's needs and are therefore not consistently fully completed. Printed versions of documents are different to the electronic record and do not provide a record of all information gathered, analysis and decisions.
- Managerial decisions are not always clearly recorded. Staff and managers have developed alternative methods of recording essential information. However, this detracts from the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements to assess the quality and consistency of the work undertaken across the local authority. Senior managers are aware of these problems and have commissioned further work to ensure the immediate issues are resolved.
- Recent local authority data show a deterioration in performance, both on the percentage of assessments completed and those completed within national timescales. The new arrangements for contact, referral and assessment work have not yet had opportunity to impact on the current performance data.

Yours sincerely

**Neil Penswick**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Nigel Pearson, Chief Executive, East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
 Bron Sanders, Independent Chair, East Riding Safeguarding Children Board  
 Councillor Penny Peacock, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools, East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
 Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families