

19 January 2010

Mr Nigel Richardson  
Director of Children's Services  
Kingston upon Hull City Council  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Kingston upon Hull  
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Dear Mr Richardson

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Kingston upon Hull 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 which was conducted on 14 and 15 December 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.

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; 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:

- Senior managers have acted decisively to fund additional posts in the central duty team in response to increasing demands for service. This has the potential to increase the capacity of the team to meet future demands in delivering a city-wide service to children and families.
- Staff receive regular supervision which is reinforced through a clear record of the ensuing actions that are expected. Staff skills and knowledge are



regularly reviewed and workers are able to access appropriate training and development to maintain their professional expertise.

- Most assessments seen by inspectors provide evidence that information is routinely shared with children and their families, so that they are clear about the outcomes.
- The recent location of a permanent co-ordinator for the Common Assessment Framework in the central duty team enables more children and families to receive a good range of preventive services in a timely manner.
- An agreed protocol to support the transfer of cases to the family resource teams has increased the capacity in the central duty team to undertake incoming work in a timely manner.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All staff interviewed are enthusiastic about the work of the central duty team and highly motivated to provide a good quality service to children and families. Their views are listened to by managers and have influenced the development of the service.</li> <li>▪ Staff state that they are very well supported by managers who are accessible and provide prompt support and advice.</li> <li>▪ Good co-ordination and communication between the emergency duty team and the central duty team result from a shared management oversight of both teams. This provides continuity in the investigation and assessment of the needs of children and families.</li> <li>▪ Joint working on the investigation and assessment of cases to protect and support children with the police public protection unit is good. The police value the accessibility of the small number of social work managers who make prompt and appropriate decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some aspects of partnership working are weak. The establishment of a single duty team has improved some areas of inter-agency communication, particularly with schools. However, referrals seen by inspectors from the Neighbourhood Policing Team provide insufficient information to inform assessments and a few general practitioners are reluctant to share information needed to inform investigations to safeguard children. This has been recognised by the Hull Children’s Trust Board and the Local Safeguarding</li> </ul>

Children Board who have already put in place a programme of training. The partnership has yet to ensure that there is always access to an appropriate paediatrician outside office hours to support investigations to safeguard children. The adequacy of these arrangements is being reviewed and monitored by Hull and East Yorkshire Hospital Trust and NHS Hull and will be overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

- A minority of assessments do not record the child's ethnicity and not all assessments record whether the child was seen alone. This could result in some assessments being insufficiently child focused.
- Records of investigations and assessments do not always contain complete information and are of variable quality; incomplete records on four cases raised concerns and were brought to the attention of senior managers to ensure appropriate action had been taken to safeguard children. The council has recognised the need to improve recording and has recently revised the initial assessment form. Plans for further improvements to the child protection investigation and core assessment forms are at an advanced stage, but are yet to be fully implemented.
- Management information indicates a significant rise in the number of referrals to the council's duty team since August 2009. There has been a corresponding decline in the council's performance in achieving target timescales for completion of initial and core assessments.
- Management involvement in decision making is not always recorded in investigations and assessments. Supervision records seen consider the timeliness of completion of assessments, but do not consistently evaluate the quality of this work.
- Senior managers have recently introduced a case auditing system of investigations and assessments. This has yet to develop into a robust process for systematic monitoring and improvement of the quality of practice.

Yours sincerely



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Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Nicola Yates, Chief Executive, Hull City Council  
Nigel Richardson, Chair of Hull Children Safeguarding Board  
Christine Randall, Lead Member for Children's Services, Hull City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families