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Mr Ian Curryer
Corporate Director Children and Families
Nottingham City Council
Loxley House
Station Street
Nottingham
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Dear Mr Curryer

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Nottingham City Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Nottingham City Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 August 2011. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any 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 and other practitioners.

The inspection identified an area of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The recommendations from the safeguarding and looked after children inspection of 29 November to 10 December 2010 have been delivered or are on track to be completed within timescale. Most areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 1 and 2 December 2009 have been met.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-working between social work, occupational therapy and family support workers within the multi-disciplinary children with disabilities team is highly effective, resulting in assessments and plans which focus exceptionally well on children and young people's needs.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since the last inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements the duty and assessment service has been re-organised on a single site with additional management support. Senior managers are clearly focused on developing services which has resulted in clear improvements in the quality and consistency of the work and in the experience of service users. ▪ Most initial and core assessments are of good quality. They are timely, appropriately consult with a wide range of agencies and contain an analysis that considers well the risk and protective factors to all the children in the household. This was an area of development at the last inspection. ▪ During assessments children are seen and, when age appropriate, seen alone. There is clear evidence of their views contributing to the assessments and decisions made in how best to meet their needs. ▪ The majority of child protection investigations are conducted and recorded well. There are clear multi-agency communications, focused assessments and good reports to child protection conferences. ▪ Management oversight and decision making of assessments is regular, ensuring suitable support and challenge to workers carrying out this work. ▪ Cases are transferred in a timely manner to longer terms teams and, when appropriate, to specialist services. ▪ The out of hours service provides an appropriate response to crisis situations and links in well with daytime services. ▪ The common assessment framework is used well by agencies in the city. Work is ongoing to further embed this work. ▪ There is a strong culture of team work among staff in the duty and assessment team. Social workers report that they receive good support from managers and have manageable caseloads. ▪ Supervision in the duty team is regular and considers the development and

support needs of the workers as well as identified casework issues. Supervision is generally well recorded.

- Training is readily available to support workers in their development of skills and knowledge.
- Recently qualified workers receive additional support from their managers along with mentoring from more experienced workers and benefit from protected caseloads.
- Social work vacancy levels are minimal as a result of senior managers ensuring the recruitment of suitably qualified workers to permanent positions.
- Audit and performance monitoring arrangements are in place and these are satisfactory. However these had not identified, prior to the inspection, some of the areas for development identified by the inspectors during this inspection.
- Issues of ethnicity, culture and diversity are appropriately recorded and considered during assessments. Interpreter and translator services are readily available. This was an area of development at the last inspection.

Areas for development

- The arrangements for signing off and recording decision making on initial contacts are not robust.
- The sharing of information from the police in respect of incidents of domestic abuse is not always timely. This is an area that the police and children's services are aware of and have identified that further improvements need to be made.
- In the minority of strategy meeting records seen by inspectors there was a lack of consideration of the needs of all the children in the household.
- In a few of the cases seen by inspectors, social work managers had made decisions which did not follow local inter-agency protocols. For example, despite a protocol, managers were not always initiating an assessment following notification from the prison service that an offender had requested to see their children.
- Two separate electronic systems are used for recording case work information. Whilst there have been significant improvements, since the last inspection, social workers continue to express frustration on the amount of time needed to complete this element of their work. Work is ongoing to fully resolve these issues. This was an area for development at the last inspection.

Any areas for development identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

Neil Penswick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Jane Todd, Chief Executive, Nottingham City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education