

Northamptonshire County Council – Inspection of child protection

25-28 February 2013

Summary report for children and young people

The purpose of the inspection is to look at how well the council and other organisations help and protect children and young people to be safe from harm and to be well cared for.

Overall we rated Northamptonshire as **inadequate** for how effective child protection services are. All of our grades are explained in the table below:

Outstanding	A service that is significantly better than required at keeping children and young people safe
Good	A service that is better than required at keeping children and young people safe
Adequate	A service that is doing what is required to keep children and young people safe
Inadequate	A service that is not doing what is required to keep children and young people safe

Here is a summary of the things we found at the inspection that were generally **adequate or good** and the things we told the Director:

Most of the time, people whose job it is to keep children safe take action quickly when it is first clear that children are at risk of serious harm and need to be protected. They act quickly when it is clear that children are experiencing immediate harm.

Staff are committed to supporting children, young people and families to improve their lives. Some of the time, these agencies work well together to help children and families when their problems first appear and this can prevent problems becoming very serious. Some schools are particularly good at this. Some agencies are also good at involving parents at this early stage.

Staff sometimes produce good assessments of the needs of children and their families. These were mostly seen at the early stages when there are some risks to children. Some reports to meetings are also clear about the risks, strengths and

needs of children in their families.

Here is a summary of the things we found at the inspection that **needed improving** and the things we told the Director:

Social workers and others working with children need to get much better at listening to children and young people and understanding what they need. Children and young people's wishes, feelings and experiences should always be taken seriously by social workers and other adults when children need help. When children need support to talk about their experiences or to give their opinion, they should have an independent, trained person to do this. Children and families should also be asked regularly what they think about their services and use these ideas to make improvements.

Those working with children must get better at sharing information about risks to children so that there are no delays in keeping children safe. They have to work more closely to make sure those children and families get the right kind of help at the right time. When some children and families are not helped soon enough, their problems get worse and are then harder to sort out.

Social workers and other professionals must make sure they have all the information they need to make the best plans for helping and protecting children and young people. Inspectors saw too many plans that were not improving things for children. Some children are left too long in situations where they are not safe or protected, for some children things get worse, and for some improvements do not last.

More work needs to be done to make sure that children who go missing from home or care and those affected by domestic violence are kept safe and helped.

The council and other agencies must make sure that help and protection are available for children and families when they need it urgently, including in the evenings and at weekends. Young people should not be kept overnight in police custody when it is safe for them to leave. They should then have a suitable place to go to.

The most senior people in Northamptonshire County Council and in the other agencies responsible for helping and protecting children do not work together well enough to improve things for those children, young people and families with most needs. Inspectors have told those senior people to take action in all areas that need to improve. These include staff being fully trained and making sure that everyone knows exactly what to do to protect and help children, and that they do it well.

The full inspection report was published on 20 March 2013. The council will now prepare a plan to show how they will improve things. It will also say when they are going to talk to children and young people about what they are going to do and which groups they are going to talk to.

If you would like to look at the full inspection report you can find this at

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/northamptonshire>