

24 August 2022

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Dear Pauline

Monitoring visit to Kingston upon Hull City Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Kingston upon Hull City Council's children's services on 20 and 21 July 2022. This was the sixth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in May 2019. Her Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Vicky Metherringham and Louise Walker.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- Contacts and referrals.
- Strategy discussions and section 47 enquiries.
- Child in need assessments.
- The quality and effectiveness of management oversight of frontline practice.
- The impact of leaders and managers.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors were on site for the visit.

Inspectors considered a range of evidence including children's electronic case records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior leaders. In addition, inspectors spoke to a range of staff, partners, elected members and social workers.

Headline findings

Children and families in Hull now receive a timely and appropriate response when they are referred to children's social care. When children are in need of help and/or protection, there is a clear understanding of thresholds to access children's social care services by partner agencies and social work teams. Safeguarding and supporting vulnerable children now involves a whole council and wider partnership

collaboration. Highly effective information-sharing helps deliver timely and proportionate help and protection services. Social workers are increasingly skilled at understanding the risks and the needs of children who are referred to children's social care. Strong management oversight of social work practice ensures that children receive the right help at the right time.

Corporate financial investment has been provided to the front door and assessment teams. Through an increase in permanent staff, and an embedded practice model, families experience more meaningful relationships with social workers. The lived experience of children is well considered by social workers and informs interventions. Staff spoken to during the visit feel valued and well supported by leaders.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Children and families in Hull now benefit from effective front door services that ensure they get the right help at the right time. Thresholds for statutory services are clearly understood by partner agencies. Contacts to the front door contain relevant information and provide a detailed picture of the child and the presenting concerns. Contacts are screened and risk assessed by experienced team managers before allocation to a social worker. Managers make well-informed decisions about the required next steps. They use live systems to track and monitor the timeliness of contacts, which is significantly improving the early identification of children's needs. Contacts which go beyond the required timescales are reviewed and risk assessed to mitigate risks to children.

When further information is required from other agencies, parental consent to share information is routinely sought, or appropriately overridden. Where consent is overridden, the rationale for doing so is appropriately and clearly recorded. Management oversight and direction given to social workers is much improved, ensuring robust analysis of risk and harm.

Timely and proportionate responses are provided to children who experience domestic abuse within their family. Detailed multi-agency information-sharing is facilitated through daily 'pitstop' meetings.

Children at risk of immediate harm receive a swift and effective response. Strategy meetings are quickly convened to consider if child protection enquiries are required. These are well attended by the agencies involved with children and their families. Effective information-sharing enables immediate risks about children to be understood within the wider context of current and historical information. Immediate safety planning and next steps are clearly recorded with a detailed rationale about how the decision is reached. Timebound actions are recorded for the work to be completed. Appropriate joint enquiries with the police are carried out when necessary.

Child protection enquiries are completed promptly, and records are detailed and clear. Children are seen swiftly and, where appropriate, on their own by social

workers, who complete good-quality direct work with children. This provides social workers with a good understanding of immediate harm and any future risks to all children within the family. Social workers have open and honest communication with parents about the concerns, which is a real strength. When an initial child protection conference is required, or where it is deemed unnecessary, the decision and rationale are clearly recorded and communicated to parents.

The allocation of work from the front door to assessment teams is timely and appropriate, ensuring that children's needs are quickly identified and begin to be addressed. Immediate safety planning is completed alongside families by their social worker so that they are clear about worries and harm, and have an understanding about what is required of them and what support will be provided. As a result, families are developing meaningful and effective relationships with their children's social workers.

Children and families benefit from timely and evaluative assessments of need by child-centred social workers. Social workers routinely consider the family history, partner agency information and the views of children and their families. Good-quality direct work with children, using a range of creative approaches, elicits children's views and provides insight into their lived experience. Social workers persevere to see families so that they can contribute their views. Social workers demonstrate an understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on children, and assessments reflect that this is well understood and addressed. Frequent and thorough management oversight is provided to social workers, appropriately informing the next steps.

Social workers report that their caseloads are manageable and that they have the time to complete their work and see children frequently. This has been greatly assisted by the effective duty arrangements of social workers and managers at the front door, augmented by improvements to early information-sharing and identification of children's needs. Social workers build early relationships with children and families. Developing effective relationships with families is a key priority for social workers and they are greatly supported by leaders in achieving this.

Effective partnerships at the front door are leading to a multi-agency commitment to provide children and families with proportionate help and protection services. Improved governance arrangements of the front door service have been strengthened. Collaborative partners and local authority managers monitor and scrutinise performance data. This helps senior managers to understand children's experiences and to inform improvement activity.

The local authority's much-improved self-assessment, together with accurate performance data, means that senior leaders know their service very well. Greatly improved performance management systems and the development of an effective dashboard provide managers in the front door and assessment teams with a live tool which they use to manage performance and monitor children's progress.

Scrutiny of performance and improvement activity is driven through robust and independently chaired improvement board meetings. Elected members challenge and scrutinise performance data and information, and hold the leadership team to account for the quality of practice to families. As a result of this challenge, multi-agency dip sampling of practice is now contributing to the improvements to children and families.

Further adaptations to the current audit tool are providing leaders and elected members with a greater understanding of the quality of relationships between social workers and children and families. It provides them with a detailed understanding of children's lived experience and the impact of the work done by their social worker. The recent decision to consult with families during the audit process intends to improve and enhance leaders' understanding about the quality and impact of practice for children and their families. While this approach is in its infancy, feedback from families is providing leaders with an understanding about the quality of the relational social work practice and the impact for the family.

Staff are well supported by highly visible and approachable senior leaders and managers. They feel invested in and valued. Staff experience regular supervision and much-improved management support which offers them reflection and clear direction. Staff morale is high, and they are very positive about the progress the local authority is making.

Staff spoken to during the visit are positive about the wide range of training and learning opportunities available to them. This is informing their interventions with families and is improving the quality of their practice. The chosen practice model is embedding in the work with children and families, and social workers say that they are more confident in its use. Inspectors identified greater consistency in decision-making and in the relationships social workers have with partners and children and families. Social workers are rightly very proud of their work with families.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Metheringham
Her Majesty's Inspector