

11 November 2009

Mr John Dixon  
Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services  
West Sussex County Council  
County Hall  
West Street  
Chichester  
PO19 1QT

Dear Mr Dixon

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within West Sussex County 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 in West Sussex County Council which was conducted on 13 and 14 October 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, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection identified two areas for priority action and a number of 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:

- Decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales and are appropriate.
- Inter-agency thresholds for referral, assessment and service provision are clear and are applied consistently by staff and partner agencies.



- Children and young people are involved appropriately in assessments and their views are taken into account when making plans for their future.
- Consideration of equality and diversity is effective and well reflected in casework practice and planning, in accordance with statutory guidance.
- The Common Assessment Framework is well established overall and there are good examples of the involvement of children and young people in care planning.
- Effective partnership working following referral and assessment ensures that families receive appropriate support when needed from statutory and voluntary sector of services.
- Child protection strategy meetings, conference and core group meetings are held within timescale and conform to guidance.
- Local Safeguarding Children Board meetings are regular and well attended by partner agencies, with good focus on improving safeguarding of children and young people.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Joint working at operational level is effective. For example, co-location of staff from children's social care, health and education contributes effectively to the identification of children at risk of harm. Strong and effective working relationships between children's social care and police child protection staff result in well-conducted child protection investigations.</li> <li>▪ The council has made a significant financial investment to improve children's social care capacity and performance, including additional training programmes, a new scheme for newly qualified social workers and recruitment and retention packages.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The current lack of capacity in the Intensive Family Support Service limits the timely transfer of cases from the duty and assessment service and adversely affects the capacity to respond to incoming assessments.</li> <li>▪ Case files do not consistently show evidence of appropriate management involvement in decision making.</li> <li>▪ The quality of assessments is satisfactory overall and some are good, but the depth of analysis is too variable.</li> </ul>

- The very recently introduced quarterly assurance monitoring system has yet to be consistently applied to ensure a robust system is in place.
- Arrangements to notify referrers of the outcomes of referrals are inconsistent and there is no standard procedure for notification.
- Emergency duty service management arrangements lack capacity and are insufficiently robust.
- Caseloads are generally high, and in some instances excessive, which lead to reduced service quality to families.
- Arrangements for the training and development of social workers are well regarded by staff, however due to workload pressures, not all social workers are able to access these resources.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action.

<b>Areas for priority action</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The frequency and quality of supervision arrangements for social workers, including those who are newly qualified, are inconsistent. Recording of social work supervision is not consistently maintained by managers.</li> <li>▪ Performance on the timeliness of completion of initial and core assessments continues to be significantly below that of similar authorities and arrangements for robust tracking by managers are not systematically applied.</li> </ul>

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

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown  
 Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mark Hammond, Chief Executive, West Sussex County Council  
 Terry Bamford, Chair of West Sussex County Council Safeguarding Children Board  
 Pat Arculus, Lead Member for Children’s Services, West Sussex County Council  
 Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families