

6 July 2011

Mr Gareth Williams
Director of Children's Services
Leicestershire County Council
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicestershire
LE3 8RA

Dear Mr Williams

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Leicestershire County 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 Leicestershire County Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 June 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, other practitioners and administrative staff.

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

Six of the eight areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2010 have been met. The quality of assessments and the variability of workloads between offices remain as areas for development.

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

Strengths

- The implementation of a highly effective centralised referral team which is co-located with the common assessment framework (CAF) team ensures that



thresholds are applied consistently across the county. Consequently, children and young people identified as at risk of significant harm receive a prompt, focused child protection response.

- Well developed multi-agency working arrangements with the police ensure timely and good quality safeguarding of children and young people. Joint visits to children and their families are immediate, well planned and focused promptly on the safeguarding needs of vulnerable children and young people.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Clear procedures and policies are in place to ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard children and young people are met.
- The relevance of equality and diversity issues appropriately inform casework assessment and planning to meet the safeguarding needs of children and young people.
- Prompt action is taken to ensure that the safety of children and young people is identified and that plans are implemented. Section 47 enquiries are conducted in a thorough and timely manner by suitably experienced and qualified social workers.
- Use of the CAF has increased significantly since the last unannounced inspection in August 2010 with high numbers now completed. This was an area for development in the previous inspection and the improved performance now provides opportunities for better preventative multi-agency support to children and young people.
- The council has taken appropriate action to agree and issue revised inter-agency thresholds to provide effective safeguarding to children and young people. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Out of hours duty arrangements are clear and robust. They link very well with the day referral services to enable a prompt, informed and effective response to safeguard children and young people.
- Effective steps are taken to improve performance in child protection. Regular internal audit leads to action by managers that has a positive impact on improving safeguarding practice. Performance development reviews are now in place and in most cases supervision is regular. The lessons learned from serious case reviews are contributing to improving practice.
- Management demonstrates sustained impact on improving practice through the implementation of effective plans that are based on clear and accurate self assessment.
- Staff report that training is accessible and relevant with good opportunities for

professional development.

Areas for development

- Although the council recognises that practitioner workloads remain too variable in size, effective remedial action is yet to be taken. In particular the caseloads of newly qualified social workers are too high.
- The quality of assessments remains too variable. Some are still largely descriptive, lacking analysis and assessment. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- The new computerised recording system is not yet fully effective or used consistently by staff. This leads to some inefficiency in working practices and use of resources.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Hunt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Sinnott, Chief Executive, Leicestershire County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education