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Ms Lisa Christensen  
The Director of Children's Services  
Norfolk County Council  
County Hall  
Martineau Lane  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR1 2DH

Dear Ms Christensen

### **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Norfolk 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 Norfolk County Council which was conducted on 30 and 31 March 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.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 5 and 6 May 2010 have led to an action plan being put in place. However, in the majority of areas for development there has been limited progress and the council have yet to demonstrate sufficient and sustained impact across all areas. The council have reduced the number of areas from five to three to improve consistency of practice. Progress has been slow due to the impact of the restructuring of children's services on management and staffing capacity.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council has a very good understanding of the needs of families in their local areas. A targeted multi-agency approach in one area with high levels of children and families in need has led to reduced levels of referrals and the need for statutory intervention.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is effective communication between the out-of-hours service and the duty team resulting in continuity of information sharing.</li> <li>▪ Decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are appropriate, risk assessed and made in accordance with statutory timescales.</li> <li>▪ There are good examples of effective support to children and young people and their families through the work undertaken by the Family intervention Project, County Adolescent Prevention Service and home based care.</li> <li>▪ The council have successfully prioritised safeguarding services within the overall council budget.</li> <li>▪ Good examples of partnership work include joint visits undertaken between the duty team and midwives and health visitors for unborn babies and children aged under five as part of the initial assessment. There is effective inter-agency working between the police child abuse and investigation team and the social care duty team, which promotes good and timely communication with regard to child protection enquiries.</li> <li>▪ Staff report that they receive regular good quality supervision and training and are well supported by managers. There is good support for the Post Qualifying Award for social workers and very good support for newly qualified social workers. This includes mentoring and developmental support through a tailored training plan and monthly workshops, in addition there are a range of opportunities for shadowing and joint working.</li> <li>▪ Improvements have been made to the accuracy and availability of data for performance monitoring and further improvements are in progress. Templates for assessment and planning are being redesigned so that they are more effective in supporting social work practice. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is significant variation in staffing capacity and quality of practice between the three area based duty and safeguarding teams. In two areas</li> </ul>

some caseloads are too high and there are a significant number of cases which are unallocated or waiting for closure or transfer. However, all unallocated cases have been risk assessed and are regularly reviewed by an operational manager.

- A very high number of initial assessments are not completed within statutory timescales and some are significantly overdue resulting in delay in the provision of services.
- The quality of assessments varies from good to inadequate. While a significant number are at least satisfactory too many are of poor quality with insufficient analysis and a lack of identification of risk and protective factors. Chronologies are not consistently in place and historical information is not always taken into account in assessments and decision making. The council have an action plan in place to address these issues which were identified as areas for development at the previous inspection.
- In some cases sampled, there was a lack of evidence of children and young people's views being taken into account within assessments.
- Some assessments are undertaken by unqualified staff which is not in accordance with statutory guidance.
- Culture and ethnicity are not consistently taken into account in assessment and planning. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Too few core assessments are initiated. Child protection processes do not fully operate in accordance with statutory guidance as core assessments are not routinely initiated when child protection enquiries are undertaken. This leads to the potential risk of harm to children and young people not being fully assessed.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is improving leading to children receiving appropriate support in the community. While use of the CAF is not fully embedded across all services there are plans in place to improve this, for example, with the recent development of CAF coordinator posts in each area. However, these developments have yet to result in a sustained significant increase in the use of the CAF. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Case recording is of variable quality and not always up-to-date. In some cases it is not possible for managers to identify from the records whether the appropriate action has been taken to protect children and young people.
- The effectiveness of management oversight is too variable. Management decisions are not consistently specific with clear timescales to ensure the timely completion of work to a satisfactory standard.
- Children in need and child protection plans do not always contain clear

measurable outcomes and timescales and some do not include individualised contingency plans. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

- There are established auditing systems in place which has led to dissemination of the findings and clear plans. However, this has not led to sustained improvement across all teams.

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

Yours sincerely

**Paul d'Inverno**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: David White, Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education