

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 October 2018

Kevin Hall
East Riding of Yorkshire
Cross Street
Beverley
HU17 9BA

Dear Mr Hall,

Focused visit to East Riding of Yorkshire council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to East Riding of Yorkshire council children's services on 11 and 12 September 2018. The visit was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors, Rachel Holden and Brenda McInerney.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for the 'front door', the Early Help and Safeguarding Hub (EHaSH), which receives both single and multi-agency contacts and referrals, and the quality of assessments and interventions for children in need of help and protection.

Overview

Since the inspection of East Riding Council's children's services in December 2016, when the local authority was judged good overall, the senior management team have further developed the service's initial response to children. Recent developments include: increasing social work capacity in the EHaSH; establishing early help panels; holding threshold meetings with key partners; and integrating the out of hours service with the front door. These developments are promoting an effective multi-agency response to children at the earliest opportunity and are a service strength.

When children are at risk of significant harm, there is a timely and effective response in the majority of cases to help and protect them. Senior managers recognise that there is more to do to improve the quality of strategy discussions to ensure that information from all partners, including health, is routinely considered in decision-making, and in relation to their recording. Following the last inspection, senior managers have reiterated to health partners their expectation that they all contribute to strategy meetings. While some progress has been made to resolve the issue, at present there is limited success.

Managers at all levels have effective oversight, and there are plans to address areas for further improvement identified during this visit. Social workers and early help practitioners confidently and effectively use a recognised model of social work to inform their understanding of children's needs. East Riding council has recently been accepted as a partner in practice and is using this programme to drive its practice improvement and developments. A project board is in place to oversee progression.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice:

- The consideration of information from other agencies, including health professionals, within strategy discussions. In addition, case recording of strategy discussions to better identify information shared, defined risks, rationale for decision-making and timescales.
- The quality of children in need assessments to include better use of chronologies and an evaluation of the impact of life events on children.
- Case recording of social work engagement with children and families, including managers' decisions and rationale.
- The evaluation of all information available from quality assurance processes to inform service developments, including any recommendations for improving social work practice arising out of case file audits.

Findings

- Contacts and referrals are responded to without delay. There is effective management oversight of decisions and signposting to the appropriate services to meet children and family's needs.
- When social workers are busy, customer service agents will take contact information on their behalf to pass on for social workers to triage. Senior managers are taking steps to address the delay that this causes on occasion. More social workers are being allocated to this task.
- Decision-making about thresholds at the front door is timely, consistently applied and appropriate. Threshold meetings with partners promote a shared understanding of levels of risk and need.
- The model of social work practice in East Riding is well embedded across agencies and is effective in promoting a shared language and understanding of the concerns for a child. This supports good decision-making. The out of hours service works seamlessly with day services to provide children and families with an effective 24-hour service.

- Children and families receive an integrated early help service. Where appropriate, EHaSH refers children and families to an early help panel. The panel members, who are made up of manager from early help services, make informed decisions following information gathered from the relevant agencies and children and families. A broad range of universal and targeted interventions are available to support children and families.
- When children are at risk of immediate harm, there is a timely, multi-agency response to protect them. Safety plans are initiated without delay and are robust. However, strategy meetings do not consistently include health professionals. Routinely, it is the police and children's social care that are involved. In these cases, discussions and decision-making are less well-informed. This was a recommendation at the last inspection that has not been sufficiently addressed.
- Records of strategy meetings are too brief. In some cases, decisions about whether a child protection medical is needed are not consistently well considered despite the presenting issues indicating that this would be an appropriate course of action. This reduces the rigour of decision-making and focus for next steps. Section 47 enquiries are consistently timely but vary in quality. Inspectors saw examples in a very small number of cases where potential risks to other children in the household were not considered.
- Children in need assessments seen are dynamic and routinely include the wishes and feelings of all children in the family captured through direct work. Assessments draw on a wide range of information and identify strengths and needs, resulting in timely, proportionate interventions. Some assessments seen did not include an evaluation of chronologies and the impact of life events on children. In these cases, this did not promote a holistic assessment of children's needs.
- Interventions are based on a whole-family approach, and inspectors saw evidence of proactive social work and early help support from a range of agencies. This is a real strength. As a result, children's circumstances improved and risk was reduced.
- Social workers seen clearly knew the children and families well and understood their needs, but case file recording does not consistently demonstrate the richness of work that takes place with children and families.
- Social workers receive reflective case supervision and this supports appropriate and timely interventions. However, case decisions are not consistently recorded, and management decision-making and oversight is not always reflected well on the case records.
- There is a well-developed quality assurance framework, but there are missed opportunities to collate and analyse overall themes for learning and track impact

on practice more systematically. Senior managers are aware and are strengthening senior management oversight to address this.

- Managers at all levels have a tight grip on frontline practice. They have a comprehensive understanding of the 'social work experience' from a staff, family and child perspective. A recent 'practice week', where senior managers observed practice and sought the views of children and families, is further enhancing knowledge and understanding of how service improvements are embedding. All staff seen spoke positively about working for East Riding. Good levels of training are supporting their developments and equipping them well to work effectively with children and families.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector