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Mr John Richards
Director of Children's Services
Peterborough City Council
Bayard Place
Broadway
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Dear Mr Richards

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Peterborough City 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 Peterborough City Council which was conducted on 28 and 29 July 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 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 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:

- The response to referrals of children at risk of significant harm is timely, consistent with agreed thresholds and appropriate helping children to remain safe.
- Initial assessments are allocated promptly and are generally completed within timescales.
- All cases where children are subject to a child protection plan are allocated to qualified social workers.



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- Staff are regularly supervised.
- Services for disabled children are appropriate and meet identified need.
- There is robust management information to facilitate the monitoring of performance against indicators.
- Systems for responding to domestic abuse referrals where there is a risk to children are sound.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The cultural needs of the very diverse population are addressed well and this diversity is reflected within the staff group. ▪ The staff within the referral and assessment service are working extremely hard to try and meet the additional demands placed upon them by shortfalls in staffing. ▪ Partnership working with the police on child protection investigations is reported by social work staff to be very good. ▪ The decisions and outline child protection plans following case conferences are produced and distributed within a day of the conference ensuring all concerned know which child is in need of protection.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As a result of vacancies within the service, the caseloads of the qualified social workers are too high. This affects the quality of their work and their ability to keep up to date with recording and other essential tasks. ▪ The quality of assessments is variable. One core assessment was judged to be outstanding but many initial assessments did not record whether agency checks had taken place or whether the child was seen. There was little evidence of analysis and conclusions lacked focus. Some core assessments did not result in a plan or refer to any other relevant plan. This finding mirrored those of a recent internal audit. ▪ Many child protection case conference reports did not include a chronology, despite this being a clear requirement on the relevant form. ▪ There is currently no routine auditing of the quality of casework, although there had been a recent case file audit resulting in the identification of a number of significant issues. This had been recognised as a weakness and a comprehensive modular quality assurance programme is being introduced. ▪ Management oversight and direction is inconsistent and not evident in some case records.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Areas for priority action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is an ongoing recruitment and retention problem within the referral and assessment service at both practitioner and first line manager level. The situation had deteriorated further in the weeks prior to this inspection, resulting in the service operating with a substantial staffing deficit. The council has already recognised this and an improvement plan has recently been agreed by the chief executive and is about to be implemented ▪ The documentary records which underpin child protection work do not support effective risk management. The 'report to conference' is in fact a record of the child protection enquiry. It omits vital information, most importantly any history of previous involvement. The absence of this information compromises the conference's ability to assess the risk of significant harm. In addition, there is no dedicated child protection plan. Specific information is not effectively recorded, setting out what the risks are to the child and how they are to be managed; this potentially compromises the ability of the core group to keep the child safe.

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: Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council
Prity Patel, Chair of Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board
Sheila Scott, Lead Member for Children's Services, Peterborough City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families

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