

10 February 2017

Ms Frances Craven  
Strategic Director  
Children's Services  
Leicester City Council  
City Hall, Rutland Wing, Floor 3  
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Dear Ms Craven

### **Monitoring visit of Leicester City children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Leicester City children's services on 11 and 12 January 2017. The visit was the third visit under Ofsted's revised monitoring arrangements that came into operation in June 2016. Prior to this, three visits had been undertaken under the previous arrangements following the inspection of March 2015, when the overall effectiveness of services was judged inadequate. The inspectors were Carolyn Spray HMI and Dawn Godfrey HMI.

Inspectors found progress in most of the areas identified in the inspection in March, 2015 and significant progress in some aspects of work to support children in need and children in need of protection.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in areas of help and protection, with a particular focus on contact, referral and assessment arrangements, and the quality of assessments and plans concerning children in need (CIN) or children in need of protection.

Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including electronic case file records, performance data, the outcome of case file audits and examples of good practice provided by the local authority. In addition, they spoke to a variety of staff, including social workers, other practitioners, team and service managers, and senior leaders.

### **Summary of findings**

- The local authority has maintained the progress identified in previous monitoring visits with regard to its application of an effective performance

management framework. This now includes regular performance meetings, with statutory partners and a quality assurance manager working alongside practitioners and their managers to enhance learning from audits. This continues to support managers' understanding of both the strengths and the areas requiring further development in their respective service areas.

- Policies and procedures have been reviewed and revised. Changes have been disseminated to staff and compliance evaluated through audits. Both these audits and the cases seen by inspectors indicate that there is improved compliance with agreed procedures.
- A multi-agency child sexual exploitation hub, joint with Leicestershire and Rutland, became operational in October 2016 and will be co-located in January 2017. This aims to strengthen prevention, identification and support to victims of child sexual exploitation, but it is too recent to evaluate its impact.
- The workforce continues to stabilise, which is providing children with greater continuity of social worker and enabling more meaningful direct work with children.
- Social workers are benefiting from greater continuity of manager and more manageable caseloads (there is an average of 17 children in the CIN teams), which are monitored by senior managers. They receive regular supervision. Five social work teams and one early help team are piloting a reflective supervision tool developed jointly with De Montford University.
- Management oversight is evident on case file records, but it is too task focused, lacks timescales, and does not sufficiently consider how to improve the quality of assessments and plans.
- Effective arrangements are in place with regard to contact and referrals. Access to local authority children's services has been streamlined and professionals now have a single point of contact for referrals. This promotes ease of access and timely responses when children are in need of social care or early help services.
- Most strategy meetings are timely. They are multi-agency and routinely involve social care, education, health and the police. This supports good-quality information sharing and appropriate decision making about children.
- Children in need of a social work assessment are allocated promptly to a social worker in the recently established single assessment team, who swiftly makes contact with the child and their family.
- Children are visited by their social worker, are seen alone and, when they are sufficiently verbal, their views are secured and taken into account. More needs to be done to secure the views of non-verbal and less verbal children.
- When children missing from home return, return home interviews are completed and a record is placed on the case file record. This informs the

weekly missing from home and care meetings and supports the gathering of intelligence.

- Chronologies are routinely completed on a new template in the electronic case file record, and most are up to date and of good quality. However, they are not being used to inform assessments as they should.
- Timely single assessments are undertaken by the single assessment teams. Those leading to a CIN or child protection plan are not sufficiently comprehensive or in depth, neither are they informed by social work theory or research findings. This is leading to superficial analyses and poor-quality plans.
- Plans are not SMART, and too many do not detail what needs to happen to effect change and improve outcomes for children.
- When children transfer to the CIN teams, the new worker attends the initial child protection conference or child in need planning meeting prior to transfer. This is a strength as it provides a helpful opportunity to meet the child (if present), their parent/carers and other involved professionals, and to become familiar with the current assessment and plan.
- Child protection and child in need plans are regularly reviewed. However, progress in achieving the objectives of the plan is not always clear in the reports prepared for the review meeting, nor in the subsequent updating of the plan.
- Good practice examples identified by the local authority provided evidence of some good-quality assessments. However, these reflect only a small minority of assessments seen, and most are only adequate and some weak.

### **Evaluation of progress**

Based on the evidence gathered during the visit, inspectors identified areas of strength, areas where improvement is occurring, and some areas where inspectors considered that the progress has not yet fully met the expectations outlined in the local authority's action plan.

A permanent and committed senior management team has maintained the pace of change, and this is ensuring compliance with policies and procedures which support good practice. There is an efficient and effective response to referrals and, when children are in need of assessment, these are completed without delay. Strategy discussions are multi-agency, which has improved the quality of decision making. When children transfer to the CIN teams, the process is supported by the new social worker's attendance at the relevant planning meeting. Plans are regularly reviewed. Children are seen regularly, and their wishes and feelings are ascertained. More needs to be done to ascertain the views of non-verbal or less verbal children.

Assessments and plans are not yet of a consistently good quality, and some are weak. Those completed by the single assessment team are not sufficiently comprehensive or in depth, and almost all of the assessments reviewed by inspectors were not informed by either social work theory or research findings. Chronologies are now routinely completed, but the child's history is not yet informing assessments as it should. Most plans are not SMART. Timescales for agreed actions are often lacking, and many lack clarity about how change will be effected. When plans are reviewed, it is not always clear what has changed or been achieved since the last meeting, and whether the plan has been amended to reflect the current situation. Managers acknowledge these issues and, having achieved compliance, are clear about the need to focus on improving quality.

Social workers receive regular supervision, and the local authority is aware of the need for this to become more reflective. To this end, a reflective tool is currently being trialled, and its impact upon practice will be jointly evaluated with De Montford University. Caseloads are better managed and more manageable. Senior managers are visible, and routinely obtain feedback from practitioners and first line managers. Management oversight is improving, but it does not have a consistent focus on improving the quality of assessment and planning. This is a key area to be addressed as the local authority continues its drive to improve outcomes for children.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Spray  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**