

Your Ref
Our Ref HG/SG/053
Please reply to Helen Ryan
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Date 2 June 2010



Children and Young People's Services

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Dear Colleagues

Service Update Children's Social Care

You will be aware from recent inspection reports and other sources that children's social care is currently facing significant challenges. The most significant of these being the lack of experienced social work capacity in front line child protection teams which has adversely affected our ability to carry out assessments within statutory timescales.

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on some specific service changes as follows:

Referrals to Reception and Assessment Service, Children's Social Care & Health and relationship with the Customer Service Centre (Nott's Connect)

I previously wrote to you in February 2010 to advise you of changes to the way referrals were to be received by Ashfield and Mansfield Children's Social Care. I am now writing to advise you how these arrangements will be further changing from Monday 7th June 2010.

It has been necessary to carefully consider the way Children's Social Care manage reception and assessment services which provide the initial response to children and families across the county. Due to continuing difficulties in recruiting and replacing experienced social work staff who have retired or left the service the current team at Meadow House has become less experienced. This is having a detrimental effect on the service's ability to respond in the most appropriate way to the needs of children and their families in Ashfield and Mansfield.

In order to improve the service it has been decided to temporarily reconfigure the way this is currently delivered. This will change from the 7th June 2010 and 2 duty points will be established across the county. The Ashfield Team will join the Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe Teams to form a South Reception and Assessment Service. This team will operate from Sir John Robinson Way at Daybrook in Nottingham.

The Mansfield team will join with the Bassetlaw and Newark teams to form the North Reception and Assessment Service. This service will be based at Bevercotes House, The E Village at Ollerton. The current Reception and Assessment staff and relevant managers will move to their new bases from Monday 7th June 2010.

These changes will provide a much wider group of experienced social work staff at each new Reception and Assessment site and provide further opportunities to enhance the service. The accommodation at Meadow House will still be used for meetings and the long term social work teams will also continue to be based at that location. Arrangements will be made to ensure service users who call at Meadow House are able to speak to a duty social worker without having to travel to the new locations.

The contact numbers for the new service will be as follows
Mansfield, Newark and Bassetlaw (Reception and Assessment Service-North

01623 520520

Ashfield, Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe (Reception and Assessment Service-South)
0115 8546371/8546181/8546182

I advised you in February 2010 that the relationship between the Customer Services Centre and the Children's Social Care service at Ashfield and Mansfield was subject to a full review. This is continuing. The temporary service arrangement as described in the previous letter is again changing. From 7th June 2010 the Customer Services Centre will revert back to operating as an additional switchboard service and will no longer take referrals for children's social care. They will take calls and put them straight through to the relevant Reception and Assessment Service who will deal with all referrals direct.

These service arrangements will be kept under formal and regular review. I will contact you again once the service has become established to ask you for your views on the interim changes to the service and whether you have experienced improvements in the referrals that you have made.

Temporary arrangements to address capacity in children's social care

The capacity issue includes both the actual number of social workers in the child protection teams as well as the limited supply of experienced social workers available to undertake child protection work. We are addressing this shortfall in a number of ways one of which is the increased use of agency staff to deal with the significant increase in referrals, numbers of children with protection plans and numbers of children in the care of the County Council.

At present there are approximately 20 agency workers dispersed across the county who are covering vacancies and sickness absence. In addition we have commissioned a provider known as Sanctuary to carry out some initial and core assessments on behalf of the Ashfield and Mansfield Reception and Assessment Service in order to reduce the backlog of unprocessed referrals. This has not been a successful strategy for a number of reasons and Sanctuary will be finishing their contract with Nottinghamshire by the end of June 2010 and will not be undertaking any further work on our behalf. You should not therefore be contacted by any staff from Sanctuary after that date.

We have commissioned a team of 10 social workers from another provider known as Outcomes UK with their own team manager. This team is based at Meadow House in Mansfield and until mid June they are dealing solely with cases in the backlog originating in Ashfield and Mansfield. After that date they will be working with long term cases for example children who are the subject of care proceedings and children with a protection plan. These cases may originate from any geographical part of the county.

It is important to note that the Outcomes UK workers and the other dispersed agency staff will announce themselves as Nottinghamshire County Council social workers for the duration of their placement. I can assure you that these workers are required to operate within the interagency procedures as well as Nottinghamshire County Council procedures and policies. The Outcomes UK team are likely to be working within children's social care for the next 12 months.

I hope this information is helpful and suggest that you share it with the relevant staff within your agency.

If you have any comments or points you wish to raise regarding this letter, please contact Julian Cunningham on any of the following:-

julian.cunningham@nottscc.gov.uk
Telephone 01623 433170
Mobile 07833 483003

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Ryan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Helen Ryan
Service Director
Children's Social Care and Health