

20 May 2025

Julie Jenkins  
Director of Children and Young People's Services  
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Dear Ms Jenkins

### **Focused visit to Calderdale children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Calderdale children's services on 14 and 15 April 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Gareth Dakin and Jo Warburton.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial risk.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors were on site for the duration of this visit.

### **Headline findings**

For most children's and care leavers' records seen during this focused visit, there are effective arrangements in place to identify and comprehensively assess their needs. When exploitation is an identified risk, children's cases are swiftly allocated to the child exploitation team. The delivery of consistent and robust services to children and care leavers at risk of extra-familial harm is enhanced by close working relationships across the multi-agency safeguarding partnership. Partnership working is a strength in Calderdale and the range of support and interventions available are contributing to a reduction in risk for many children and care leavers.

### **What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?**

- The quality of child exploitation plans and safety planning for children who are vulnerable to extra-familial risk.

### **Main findings**

Senior leaders in Calderdale have set the vision and culture relating to how services respond to children and care leavers at risk of extra-familial harm. This is reflected in the work of children's services staff and how they deliver the service. Children who

are vulnerable to extra-familial risk benefit from the additional support of specialist teams which complement and support existing services in how they manage and reduce risk.

An established multi-agency approach to safeguarding ensures that there is a consistent response to children and care leavers at risk of exploitation. Mature and strong relationships with key partners and close working relationships across the council mean that children at risk of extra-familial harm are supported to access the right services at the right time.

Extra-familial risks and harm to children and care leavers are recognised and thresholds for intervention are applied consistently. Established processes ensure that risk and needs are well understood through effective triage. Comprehensive multi-agency assessments ensure that interventions are put in place in a timely way that is right for the child or care leaver. Practitioners are well trained and supported by managers to use their skills and experience to positively engage children and care leavers and reduce the risk of harm.

The child exploitation team (CET) works effectively with children vulnerable to exploitation up until they are 18 and is effective at managing and reducing risks for many children. Most work undertaken by the team is timely and proportionate, and workers know their children well. Workers focus on forming trusting relationships with children. It is the quality of these relationships that provides a foundation for the interventions that are improving outcomes.

When children in care transition to adulthood and are eligible for support from the pathways service, risk and needs associated with extra-familial harm are well understood. Managers and staff have a strong awareness and understanding around their specific vulnerabilities. Risks are identified in pathway planning and there is a multi-agency approach taken to safety planning alongside care leavers, which is a strength.

Child exploitation assessments are comprehensive and provide detailed analysis and reflections around intra- and extra-familial risks to individual children. Assessments evidence that staff have a wide understanding of the push-and-pull factors which exist, which provides workers with an enhanced understanding of children's lives and experiences.

Multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) and matrix meetings provide a structured, multidisciplinary approach that helps professionals to analyse and evaluate risks to children who are vulnerable to extra-familial harm. A collaborative approach to managing risk leads to consistent decisions about what needs to happen next. MACE and matrix meetings are used to share information and concerns across multi-agency partners. These provide mutual oversight and challenge across the professional network and are contributing to the reduction of harm to children in Calderdale.

While inspectors saw a range of individualised interventions for children in practice, not all plans reflected the extent of the work being undertaken by various professionals as identified by MACE, although it was evident from children's records that interventions are taking place. Leaders are already aware and are taking steps to improve and strengthen this area of practice through the implementation of bespoke 'Risk Outside the Home' plans for children and care leavers.

There is a robust and effective response when children go missing from home and care. The majority of children who go missing are offered timely return home interviews. Leaders recognise that the take-up of return home interviews is lower than they would like and are working to improve this.

Most return home interviews explore risk and factors influencing risk. The strong professional curiosity of staff in the missing team is supporting them to better understand their children, which is influencing future interventions. When children do not engage, there is evidence of follow-up and discussions with parents and carers to build as complete a picture as possible. This means essential information is obtained that is relevant to assessing and understanding risk to children. Established multi-agency networks with partner agencies enable consistent responses to reduce the risk of children going missing.

The risk to children and care leavers vulnerable to extremism or radicalisation in Calderdale and beyond is understood. A knowledgeable 'Prevent' chair, supported by a range of lead professionals, understands and considers local and national risks to children. Children's social care plays a key role in these multi-agency arrangements, and this supports timely and proportionate responses to children, care leavers and their families when these risks are identified.

Senior leaders routinely scrutinise the quality of practice and child experience in relation to extra-familial harm within their overarching quality assurance framework. A coherent audit tool supports auditors to clearly identify strengths and areas for improvement in practice which are used to contribute to service development. Although this practice supports leaders to better understand social work practice and children's experiences, audits are not consistently collaborative with social workers, parents and children, which would strengthen this practice even further.

Real-time data reporting and performance management tools support leaders and managers to respond to need and monitor practice in this service area. Managers understand how to use performance data effectively. This provides leaders and managers with an accurate line of sight and practice assurance, and this is improving the timeliness and quality of interventions with children and care leavers.

Pathway advisers and social workers in the child exploitation team receive regular access to professional training and formal management supervision, and this is helping plans to progress for children and focusing interventions. This, however, is not the case for project workers in the child exploitation team, who do not receive formal case supervision to reflect on their work. Although no detriment was noted to

the quality of the work with children, leaders have acknowledged this as an area for further development.

Staff spoken to during this visit are positive about working in Calderdale. They say that it is a good place to work, and report a positive workplace culture. Staff say that they feel that they are provided with opportunities to develop and that they feel listened to and supported. Most staff report that caseloads are manageable and that they are supported to spend quality time with children and care leavers. Leaders have demonstrated that they are responsive to demand and capacity.

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

Yours sincerely

Gareth Dakin  
**His Majesty's Inspector**