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8 October 2009

Mr Chris Pratt
Corporate Director Trafford Children and Young People's Service
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Trafford Town Hall
Talbot Road
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M32 0TH

Dear Mr Pratt

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Trafford Metropolitan Borough 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 Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 15 and 16 September 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 no areas for priority action but some 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 and senior practitioners 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:

- Senior managers monitor front line services effectively; they receive weekly performance information reports and monitor the quality of recording and case work through regular case file audits.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Contacts received by the Multi Agency Referral and Assessment Team (MARAT) are responded to in a timely manner. A thorough information gathering process collates multi-agency information and any previous service involvement with the child or family concerned. Decision making about which of these contacts require a referral and assessment service is safely and efficiently managed.
- Information is passed appropriately and effectively between the MARAT and the emergency duty team, ensuring that children and young people's needs can be responded to at all hours.
- All assessments of the needs of children are undertaken by qualified social workers. The majority of social workers in the MARAT are experienced and those who are newly qualified are well supported.
- Initial and core assessments examined by inspectors are almost all of a good quality, providing clear analysis and recommendations. All assessments are at least satisfactory with children and young people routinely seen and their views recorded. There is a clear focus in assessments on individual needs and recognition of the full range of identity issues relating to children and young people in the local area.
- All assessments and children's plans seen by inspectors had been routinely shared and agreed with parents, carers, children and young people and evidenced on case files.
- All staff and managers interviewed demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the policy and procedure covering the provision of children's services. This supports clear and consistent decision making about the management of risk and service provision.
- Child protection strategy meetings are timely, thorough and recorded well. There is good evidence of strongly committed multi-agency involvement in the process which enables prompt and appropriate actions to be undertaken to protect children.
- Decision making on individual cases seen by inspectors is safe and robust with case files holding clear recorded evidence of management oversight.
- The majority of case records examined by inspectors in the MARAT contain up to date recording which is of a high standard.
- The council has recognised the limitations of the current electronic recording and performance monitoring system and has purchased a replacement system which is scheduled to go live in November 2009. Its implementation plan includes good arrangements for training and support for all staff.

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

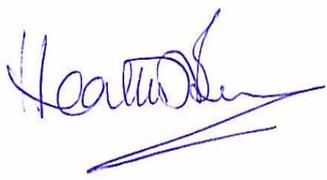
Strengths

- The MARAT, created earlier this year, greatly benefits from the inclusion of team members from the police, health and housing services. This arrangement is enabling effective information sharing and robust multi-agency working in both child protection and children in need cases.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board has a strong focus on inter-agency strategic partnership working which results in improvements in multi-agency frontline service delivery. The Board's strong emphasis on ensuring good practice as well as monitoring performance data is having a positive impact on the quality of practice.
- Investigations of child protection concerns are managed very well by the MARAT. There is a strong focus on working in partnership with children and parents, even when dealing with challenging child protection cases.
- The morale of staff interviewed is positive and they consistently report that they receive good management support, supervision and training.

Areas for development

- Current administrative inefficiencies in processing and recording contact information cause duplication of work and is leading to some delays prior to contacts being recorded on the electronic recording system.
- The current level of administrative support in the service is insufficient. Social workers report spending too much time completing routine administrative tasks which reduces the time available for direct work with children and families.
- There are currently 32 unallocated initial assessments of children in need. Although these cases are risk assessed and appropriately monitored with partner agencies, the extent of unallocated assessment work is too high.
- Individual social worker caseloads are monitored weekly by managers. However the current electronic case record and performance monitoring system is unable to provide immediate access for managers to performance information.
- The recording of core assessments is supported by too many formats which vary in content and all do not encourage workers to enter specifically important information. For example, not all formats support consistency in recording ethnic origin.
- Social workers and managers do not currently have a clear process for raising significant safeguarding concerns about the practice of other agencies with the Local Safeguarding Children Board in order to enable multi-agency learning.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Janet Callender, Chief Executive, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor John Holden, Lead Member for Children's Services, Trafford
Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families