

28 July 2010

Mr Jim Taylor
Executive Director for Services for Children and Young People
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Council Offices
Wellington Road
Ashton-under-Lyne
OL6 6DL

Dear Mr Taylor

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 29 and 30 June 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any 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.

The inspection identified areas of strength and satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The out-of-hours team is well resourced and provides a flexible service which effectively complements the work of fieldwork teams. The council has made significant improvements to the service following concerns raised within the last



Joint Area Review.

- Reports for initial child protection conferences seen by inspectors were of a consistently good quality, contained a comprehensive level of detail, and provided effective analysis of risk.
- Social workers report that they are well supported by team and senior managers, who are accessible and ensure that prompt decisions are made when necessary.
- Performance management systems provide high quality, accessible and timely information to front line and senior managers enabling good comparative oversight of individual, team and service performance.

Satisfactory practice

- Contacts and referrals are responded to promptly and appropriately by qualified social workers.
- Timescales for completion of initial assessments are good and better than statistical neighbours and the national average.
- The quality of initial assessments was at least adequate and inspectors saw examples of rigorous core assessments, with a good level of analysis and engagement of partner agencies.
- Child protection investigations are timely and ensure that children and young people are appropriately safeguarded.
- Front line teams work closely with the children with disabilities team to ensure that when child protection investigations are required that there is a consistency of approach.
- There are satisfactory arrangements in place to make sure that the needs of minority ethnic families are met during assessments.
- Children and families are routinely seen within assessments. Their views and contributions are clearly recorded and inform outcomes.
- Training for both newly qualified and more experienced staff is of a satisfactory quality and has been successfully targeted towards priority areas of concern, for instance in further improving the quality of assessments.
- There is good management oversight of decision making. Management decisions are routinely and promptly recorded on electronic files.
- Supervision arrangements are satisfactory, although there is limited evidence of personal development of staff being routinely considered.

- As a result of learning from a serious case review, children's centres are now routinely contacted in respect of referrals for children aged under three.
- Dedicated and experienced admin staff placed within front line teams provide high quality support to social workers and managers. This ensures for example that there is a timely recording of supervision records.

Areas for development

- The common assessment framework (CAF) is not routinely used by partner agencies prior to making referrals to Children's Services. This contributes to a high volume of referrals leading to delays in meeting some timescales. The council is aware of the need for improvement and has recently appointed four CAF co-ordinators to drive forward a revised and strengthened strategy.
- Timescales for the completion of core assessments varies across the four teams and leads to an overall performance which is significantly below that of statistical neighbours and the national average.
- While case file audits take place, there is limited evidence of learning from them driving practice improvements.
- Screening arrangements for domestic violence referrals are insufficiently developed contributing to high numbers of referrals to front line teams.
- Workloads within some teams are high. The Ashton team have responded by separating duty activity from long term work and this has been effective in improving response times and reducing the level of stress experienced by staff. A comprehensive review of contact, referral and assessment arrangements is planned to take place.

Any areas for development identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

David Asher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Stephen Pleasant, Chief Executive, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Lynne Jones, Chair of Tameside Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Allison Gwynne, Lead Member for Children's Services, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education