

1 July 2010

Ms Sharon Menghini
Civic Centre
Glebe Street
Stoke-on-Trent
ST4 1RN

Dear Ms Menghini

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Stoke-on-Trent 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 Stoke-on-Trent City Council which was conducted on 2 and 3 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 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 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.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Capacity in front line services has been strengthened through the provision of substantial additional resources including the appointment of two social work senior practitioners which has led to all referrals being allocated and responded to in a timely manner.▪ Good training and development opportunities are promoted, easily accessible and are well regarded by social workers. They report that this training has led



to increased confidence in practice.

- The out-of-hours duty service is effective, well resourced and well coordinated with daytime services.
- The children's disabilities team have expertise in discerning the views of children with communication difficulties which ensures an effective safeguarding response.

Satisfactory practice

- Decisions on contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales and are processed within a 24 hour period.
- Child protection enquiries are timely and effectively carried out by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.
- Children and their families are involved in the assessment and planning process and their views are appropriately taken into account.
- Consideration of equality and diversity issues is well reflected in casework practice and planning.
- Social workers report that they receive supportive and regular supervision with access to managerial advice when they need it.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board provides effective support, training and coordination of safeguarding arrangements across the partnership.

Areas for development

- Although there is good casework decision making on the majority of referrals, in a small number of re-referrals the full pattern of previous social care involvement is not always taken into account.
- Some initial assessments lack sufficient analysis to ensure that the full range of children's needs are identified and met. The regular management audit of case files has highlighted this and an action plan for improvement is in place.
- Notifications of domestic violence to Specialist Services involving children are not consistently timely to ensure a prompt response to safeguarding concerns. Training across the partnership is being undertaken with the aim of clarifying the role of all agencies in reporting incidents of domestic abuse.
- The council's recording and monitoring systems do not effectively identify incidents of domestic violence. This has been recognised and is being addressed by the council with the aim of ensuring a better understanding of

trends.

- Section 47 strategy discussions are not consistently held at the right time in the investigation. This means some actions are taken independently of children's social care.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Norry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Mr John van de Laarschot, Chief Executive, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Jackie Carnell, Chair of Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Ms D Gratton, Lead Member for Children's Services, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education