

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 03000 130570

Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



18 May 2011

Ms Lesley Heale
Corporate Director for People
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
PO Box 20
Council House
Solihull
B91 9QU

Dear Ms Heale

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Solihull 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 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 13 and 14 April 2011. 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 areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

All but one of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2010 have been addressed. Staff capacity within the duty, assessment and referral team has been increased and effective workload management strategies have reduced caseloads and the staff hours worked to an acceptable level. The council has been successful in recruiting permanent members of staff to the majority of posts, resulting in increased stability and sustainability within the service. The issues with accident and emergency services have been addressed and health professionals are now part of practice discussion forums and audit arrangements.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early intervention services delivered through the common assessment framework (CAF), known locally as LINCS (local integrated needs led co-ordinated support) and the Team Around the Family model are effective, are embedded well and are valued by practitioners and service users. Three CAF co-ordinators are now located within the duty, assessment and referral team, optimising multi-agency support to families and children within the community. CAF assessments seen by inspectors were undertaken by a range of professionals and were of good quality.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thresholds for the assessment of risk by children’s social care services have been agreed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. They are understood by partner agencies and applied consistently. ▪ Decision making in response to referrals is timely, of consistently good quality and is recorded clearly on case files. Managers routinely record their rationale for the focus of assessment activity in initial assessments. ▪ Children are routinely seen alone where appropriate and in the recording of the assessments their voices and feelings are clearly evidenced. Families’ views are considered well and help inform the conclusions of assessments. ▪ The quality of analysis in core assessments is satisfactory. The impact of the assessment findings on the lives of children and their families is positive, reducing levels of risk by the implementation of satisfactory plans which lead to the provision of appropriate services. ▪ In cases seen by inspectors where children are identified who may be at risk of harm, timely inter-agency strategy discussions take place to agree appropriate intervention. ▪ Child protection enquiries are carried out in a prompt and thorough manner by suitably qualified and experienced staff. In the cases inspected the outcomes and the decisions made are clearly evidenced in the records and when formal child protection investigations are undertaken they are well managed. ▪ The council has developed a specialist team to respond to the high numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive in Solihull. The cases inspected evidence timely and appropriate initial assessments of the needs of these young people. ▪ There is consistently good communication with partner agencies including

feedback on the outcome of referrals and assessments.

- The out of hours emergency duty team takes prompt and effective action to minimise risk to children and young people. Information is passed on appropriately to the daytime service for follow up.
- Social workers are very satisfied with the quality and regularity of supervision and feel supported by senior managers. Supervision files are up to date, are of a good standard and include evidence of reflective practice.
- Training for staff is appropriate and accessible. Training records are satisfactory and reflect both the core and the more specialised training undertaken by social workers.

Areas for development

- The arrangements for recording incoming contacts are inconsistent and in some cases initial advice is being given by non social work qualified staff without reference to social work managers.
- A lack of timeliness in allocating and commencing work on initial assessments causes delays in the needs of vulnerable children being identified and addressed. Managers are aware of this and regularly review and prioritise waiting cases to minimise delay in allocation. This was an area for development in the last inspection and although performance has improved it has not yet reached a satisfactory standard.
- The quality of the analysis and action plans within initial assessments is too variable and in some cases it is unclear how a child's individual needs will be effectively met.
- The recording of children's ethnicity is inconsistent and too often their cultural heritage is not being fully considered in the assessment process.
- The quality of management data within the contact, referral and assessment service is not robust and does not accurately record performance. In one team this was illustrated by core assessment data which under-represent the actual number of assessments completed. Managers are aware of this and plan to undertake a programme of improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynn E Radley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Mark Rogers, Chief Executive, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education