

11 November 2010

Ms Clair Pyper
Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services
Slough Borough Council
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
SL1 3UQ

Dear Ms Pyper

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

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

Strengths

- The local authority uses robust performance management and quality assurance data to ensure that service delivery to children is efficient and effective. Recent changes to front line practice including the screening of initial contacts and more consistent application of the inter-agency threshold criteria lead to demonstrable improvements in service delivery. These improvements ensure children and young people receive a more timely service.



- Strong partnership arrangements, the diversity of the workforce, the availability of a wide range of translation services and effective support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children ensure that service design and delivery is appropriate and responsive to the cultural, ethnic and religious needs of the community.
- Highly motivated staff are supported by knowledgeable, experienced and accessible managers. Social work skills are further enhanced by good quality supervision, support and training opportunities which are well regarded by staff and ensure effective intervention to safeguard children and young people.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- Leadership and management of the duty and assessment service ensure that practice and procedures are effective in managing risk, providing an effective safeguarding response to children and young people.
- Decision making on contact and referrals are appropriate and they are processed in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Child protection referrals are responded to by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- Initial child protection and review conferences are timely and well managed ensuring appropriate decision making in respect of child protection planning.
- Assessments ensure the views of children and young people are considered and their wishes and feelings are taken into account and acted upon.
- The co-location of the common assessment framework coordinator in the duty and assessment team helps to ensure an integrated approach to the provision of services for children and young people.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements are well established and staffed by qualified and experienced practitioners. Working relationships with the duty and assessment team are valued highly by partner agencies.
- The children with disabilities team have a multi-agency membership which provides a single point of entry for all contact and referrals for children with disabilities. This ensures a well coordinated and timely response to children and families in need of specialist services across the borough.
- Newly qualified social workers receive good support and training opportunities to enhance their skills and further development.

Areas for development

- Some assessments lack sufficient analysis and therefore do not ensure that the full range of the needs of the child are identified. The rate of completion of case recording and assessments within timescales is too variable.
- While all cases are allocated in the duty and assessment team caseloads are variable and in some incidences high. Managers are aware of this and are increasing resources to ensure there is sufficient capacity to respond to the changes in demand for services.

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: Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council
Elaine Coleridge, Chair of Slough Safeguarding Children Board
Natasa Pantelic, Lead Member for Children's Services, Slough Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education