

Freshford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 9456448  
Direct F 0117 9456554  
lac.safeguarding@ofsted.gov.uk



11 September 2009

Dr Sonia Sharp  
Executive Director for Children and Young People's Directorate  
Sheffield City Council  
Town Hall  
Pinstone Street  
Sheffield  
S1 2HH

Dear Dr Sharp

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Sheffield City 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 Sheffield City Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 August 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 one area for priority action and a number of 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:

- Social workers receive regular supervision and reported that managers are accessible and provide good support.
- Social workers reported good opportunities for training, including multi-agency training provided through the Local Safeguarding Children Board.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- The majority of social workers are recently qualified but are well supported by the newly qualified social workers' scheme. This includes a structured induction and training programme, fortnightly supervision, dedicated time for reflection and development, and protected caseloads.
- There have been improvements to areas previously identified for development through previous inspection and self-audit; for example, qualified social workers now screen contacts and referrals on a rota basis and are relieved of other caseload responsibilities while they undertake these duties.
- Children are seen as part of assessments and assessments are routinely shared with families.
- Appropriate attention is given to ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs, for example good use is made of interpreting services.
- There was good access to, and support from, legal services in cases sampled by inspectors.
- Dedicated business support staff provide a good level of administrative support.

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

### Strengths

- Managers and staff demonstrate good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the service. A thorough audit of safeguarding services in Sheffield was conducted internally at the end of 2008 and there is evidence of impact as a result of this. For example, additional resources have been secured, consultancy posts established and additional social workers and team managers are being recruited. A clear career progression plan for social workers has been established as part of an overall recruitment and retention strategy.
- Social care staff are committed and motivated and are provided with good staff care arrangements including monitoring of their safety.
- A social work consultant post has been added to each area team base to provide additional support for all social workers in more complex work.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board has incorporated learning from serious case reviews into multi-agency training. Staff and managers spoken to by inspectors were alert to findings from serious case reviews and could identify resulting changes to practice; for example, the response to anonymous referrals or the need to check sleeping arrangements for children.
- Good action has been taken to safeguard children who experience or witness domestic abuse. There is a clear protocol in place for referrals to social care. Following review of this, a dedicated joint investigation team

with the police is shortly to be established which will include more sophisticated screening of domestic violence incidents.

- Systems for transfer of cases between specialist and multi-agency support teams and allocation of work are clear and effective.

### **Areas for development**

- Some written referrals from other agencies lack sufficient clarity or detail.
- Although the response to contacts and referrals was appropriate in most cases seen, decisions taken on some contacts that did not proceed to referral were based on insufficient information.
- Some initial and core assessments seen by inspectors lacked depth, analysis or clear evaluation of the risk and protective factors that impact on children's safety and welfare. Assessments do not always reflect the quality of work described by social workers and managers. In some cases, repeated initial assessments arising from re-referrals of children did not add to the evaluation of risk or assessment of need.
- The council recognises that numbers of core assessments completed are comparatively low and has acknowledged the need to improve this.
- In one office visited by inspectors there were discrepancies in the recorded start and completion dates for initial assessments. The council have taken immediate action to address this.
- Delays in allocating cases and progressing assessments, and workload pressures experienced by some social workers, potentially leave children at risk or without the services they need.
- In a small number of cases seen, the quality of advice provided to other professionals by the Safeguarding Children's Advisory Service was poor.
- While the use of the common assessment framework (CAF) has increased, the quality of some CAFs is poor and it is used as a referral to social care rather than early common assessment of need and identification of appropriate support services. Improvement action taken by the council, for example by the appointment of advisor posts to multi-agency support teams, has yet to make impact.
- Office accommodation at Darnell and Meade House is of poor quality and is not easily accessible by members of the public including people with disabilities.

This visit has identified the following area(s) for priority action:

Area(s) for priority action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Two cases were brought to the attention of the authority which had not been promptly investigated or assessed. The authority had taken action to investigate alleged harm to the young people concerned, however this had been delayed.</li></ul>



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

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mr John Mothersole, Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council  
Mr John Gomersall, Chair of Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board  
Mr Andrew Sangar, Lead Member for Children's Services, Sheffield City Council  
Mr Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families