

2 March 2011

Mr Nick Page
Strategic Director for Children's Services
Salford City Council
Minerva House
Pendlebury Road
Swinton
Salford
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Dear Mr Page

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Salford City 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 Salford City Council which was conducted on 1 and 2 February 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 practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of priority action identified at the last unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment in 2009 have all been met. Significant progress has been made on the recommendations for immediate action made at the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in May 2010. In addition progress has been made on other relevant recommendations. This includes the timely completion of initial assessments, ensuring that ethnicity is recorded on common assessment framework (CAF) documentation and from the assessments read by inspectors children are being seen alone and their views are recorded.



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

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

- The council has a robust improvement plan in place to tackle the recommendations from previous inspections which is supported by good performance management, and quality audits. This has led to restructuring of contact and referral services and further improvements for example, in assessment timescales.
- A newly created and agreed multi-agency threshold document is in place and used appropriately in decision making by social care managers and partner agencies.
- Practice and procedures comply with statutory guidelines to ensure that children and young people suffering or at risk of harm are identified and receive a prompt and appropriate response.
- Caseloads are maintained at a manageable level and work, including child protection enquiries, is carried out by suitably qualified social workers who are managed by experienced managers.
- Case records examined by inspectors show that children and young people are seen alone; their views are routinely recorded and considered in their assessments.
- The use of the CAF is consistently applied across the partnership, which supports the delivery of services to families in need. Effective reviewing and monitoring arrangements in place ensure that there is a clear process for the identification and delivery of statutory services when required.
- Senior managers are visible and easily accessible and undertake regular pieces of work including file audits to assure themselves of the quality and quantity of work undertaken.
- Salford's Safeguarding Children Board actively ensures that appropriate and creative training opportunities are delivered for staff so that they continue to develop skills.
- Newly qualified social workers have protected caseloads and are supported through regular supervision and use of mentors.

Areas for development

- The quality of assessments undertaken is too variable. Whilst some good quality examples were seen, too many contained insufficient analysis and were descriptive in style. These did not fully consider needs arising from the child and family's identity or indicate if the assessment outcome had been shared

with the family. Management decisions are not clearly recorded in all cases reviewed during this inspection and some managers have signed off poor quality completed assessments.

- The Salford Protocol between the emergency duty team and the daytime service is not embedded sufficiently to ensure that information sharing is of a consistent quality to aid understanding of the presenting issues from referrals or requests for additional work.
- The electronic system (ICS) for the recording of child protection enquiries and strategy discussions is complicated and results in significant duplication of work. Currently the system inhibits accurate recording of analysis of risk and decision making. This is acknowledged by the council who are already making changes to the electronic recording system as part of the Safeguarding Improvement Plan.
- Although new permanent managers are now being appointed, the long term interim management arrangements and changes of manager have in some cases contributed to low morale, amongst some staff, weak supervision arrangements and some inconsistent management decision making.

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 Humphreys
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Barbara Spicer, Chief Executive, Salford City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education