

21 May 2010

Mr Andrew Webb  
Director of Children's Services  
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council  
3rd Floor  
Stopford House  
Town Hall  
Stockport  
SK1 3XE

Dear Mr Webb

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Stockport Metropolitan Borough 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 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 March 2010. 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.

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 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:

- The management and prioritisation of contacts and referrals in respect of children considered to be in need of protection enables clear, timely decisions and actions.



- Communication and planning while undertaking child protection investigations are well supported by timely strategy discussions and meetings with the police.
- Referring agencies have a clear understanding of thresholds for access to services based on Stockport's Common Processes model. This enables appropriate contacts and referrals to be passed to the Customer Contact Centre.
- Well trained and supported staff at the Customer Contact Centre offer a good range of advice and support to referring agencies and members of the public. All decisions about which contacts proceed to an assessment are taken by a qualified social worker.
- Initial and core assessments seen were overall of satisfactory quality with some good examples containing clear analysis. All social workers spoken to by inspectors demonstrated a high level of skills in analysis and risk assessment often well beyond that evidenced in their written assessments.
- Social workers receive regular supervision and value the overall support provided by their line managers, all of which contributes to maintaining a stable and committed workforce.
- Information is passed appropriately between the daytime services and out of hours service to ensure continuity of provision for children and young people.
- Senior managers collect and use performance data effectively to monitor the progress of social care work and other support work undertaken by schools and partner agencies.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Well established multi-agency partnerships enable the provision of a comprehensive range of support and preventative services. All agencies use Stockport's Common Processes Model including Team Around the Child meetings. Social workers also provide preventative services directly through the Social Care in Partnership with Schools team.</li> <li>▪ All staff and partner agencies benefit from a comprehensive range of training opportunities. Social workers place high value on the training offered and are able to demonstrate how they have used this to improve their practice.</li> <li>▪ Good joint partnership staffing arrangements within the Early Intervention Team ensure effective communication between health and social care services, particularly when joint assessments take place in complex child</li> </ul>

protection cases.

- Good management systems in the duty and assessment services support staff well to prioritise and plan all incoming work.
- The Children with Disability team provides good quality, timely assessments of children and young people's needs. Following assessment, a comprehensive range of services is available through the multi-agency Disability Partnership.

#### **Areas for development**

- Social workers report that the current electronic system is slow and complex to use. Senior managers are considering a number of options to help improve both the electronic system and recording practices.
- While all contacts where a child or young person may be at risk are dealt with promptly, some less urgent contacts received by the Early Intervention Team and which require further information to be gathered from other agencies prior to a decision being made, have been subject to delays.
- There is delay in the provision of services for some children and young people assessed as requiring support from the Family Support Teams. Monitoring of their welfare, while awaiting support, does not consistently or robustly consider significant changes to family circumstances.

Yours sincerely

**Simone White**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: John Schultz, Chief Executive, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Webb, Chair of Stockport Safeguarding Children Board  
Mark Weldon, Lead Member for Children's Services, Stockport Metropolitan Borough council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families