

14 July 2010

Ms Theresa Gillespie
Corporate Director for Children and Young People and
Chair of South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board
South Gloucestershire Council Offices
Badminton Road
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South Gloucestershire
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Dear Ms Gillespie

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within South Gloucestershire 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 South Gloucestershire Council which was conducted on 15 and 16 June 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and challenges within the service and systems are in place to address deficits. As a result, a wide range of effective improvements have been made. These include the provision of additional resources, the implementation of routine service-wide



case audits and regular performance improvement meetings to monitor progress.

- Effective oversight of multi-agency safeguarding practice is provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Lessons learnt from serious case reviews are disseminated well. This has led, in one case, to a better understanding and engagement with the needs of the traveller community.
- The skills of staff are enhanced by a wide range of high quality supervision, support and training.

Satisfactory practice

- Thresholds for access to social care services are well understood and operate effectively across partner agencies.
- Screening systems for referrals and contacts are robust and timely. Adequate information is gathered to ensure that decision-making by managers is appropriate.
- All child protection cases are allocated promptly and investigations are undertaken by suitably experienced and qualified staff. Strategy meetings are comprehensive and timely and include contributions from key partners. However, in a minority of cases, minutes are not completed in a timely manner.
- In most cases seen by inspectors, recording by social workers was comprehensive and up-to-date.
- Effective management oversight is undertaken and decisions agreed in supervision are appropriately transferred into case files.
- The quality of assessments was at least satisfactory in almost all cases seen by inspectors. The level of analysis is strong and effectively balances protective factors with areas of risk.
- Clear written working agreements with parents, signed by all those involved with the case, are used well. These ensure that roles and expectations of agencies and parents or carers are clearly understood by all parties.
- The views of children and young people and their families are sought and used as part of the assessment processes. There are high levels of attendance by parents or carers at child protection conferences and family support meetings.
- Managers had rapidly and effectively responded to recent workload pressures in one team, caused by unexpected short-term vacancies. Unallocated cases had been appropriately assessed for the level of risk and need. High priority cases had all been re-allocated, through the use of additional resources from other social care teams in the council; 20 lower priority cases, which required a service, were unallocated at the time of the inspection. However, a system of

management oversight had been put in place to ensure that these were reviewed on a regular basis until they could be allocated to new social workers. None of these cases required immediate action.

- Effective working relationships with the police ensures robust information-sharing and collaborative work.

Areas for development

- Slow implementation of new information technology results in case records being held in a variety of paper and electronic forms. Consequently, full information is difficult and time-consuming to obtain and the out-of-hours service does not have access to all available information. This potentially places some children at risk.
- While the timeliness in the completion of initial assessments is improving, data provided by the council shows that the time taken to complete core assessments is still below both national targets and those set by the council.
- In some cases insufficient attention has been taken in considering the diverse needs of children and families in assessment and planning processes.
- The use of the common assessment framework to assess the needs of children who do not reach the thresholds for social care is not embedded within the partnership.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Amanda Deeks, Chief Executive, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr Sheila Cook, Lead Member for Children's Services, South Gloucestershire Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education