

26 August 2009

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 contains 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 4 and 5 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:

- Initial screening of referrals to the service is safe and rapid.
- All child protection referrals and ongoing cases are allocated to qualified social workers. This is despite an increase of more than 100% in the number of children subject to a child protection plan in the last twelve months.
- Initial and core assessments seen on files are of good quality and are clear and analytical.



- Communication and joint working with key partner agencies are responsive and effective.
- Monitoring and auditing of casework by senior management effectively measures the quality of decision making.
- The development and use of the common assessment framework by local partners shows early signs of positive impact for children and young people.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partnership work to support good outcomes for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people is effective.</li> <li>▪ Services across the partnership are responsive to the cultural, ethnic and religious needs of the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Capacity within the service is not sufficient to ensure a responsive and robust assessment and support service for children in need. Caseloads are often excessive.</li> <li>▪ Chronologies and genograms are not routinely maintained on files.</li> <li>▪ Some managers do not have access on the electronic recording system to the full range of information that they need in order to ensure that cases are being managed efficiently.</li> <li>▪ Participation of children and young people in child protection conferences is low. The availability of social workers' reports for parents in advance of initial child protection conferences has reduced, making it more difficult for families to contribute effectively when they attend.</li> <li>▪ Supervision does not always occur regularly and evidence of management direction on case files is often not visible.</li> </ul>

This visit has identified the following area for priority action:

<b>Area for priority action</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In a significant number of cases seen, there is delay in the completion of assessments and in the recording of key actions such as, importantly, whether the child has been seen, and of the decisions that have been made. This lack of evidence raises potential concerns for the welfare and safety of children.</li> </ul>

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive, Slough Borough Council  
Laura Eades, Chair of Slough Safeguarding Children Board  
Patricia O'Connor, Lead Member for Children's Services, Slough Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families