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

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Sheffield 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 Sheffield City Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 June 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 strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with one area for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 12 and 13 August 2009 have all been addressed.

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements has been addressed. All contacts to the local authority are now promptly assessed and investigated.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council has worked diligently with partner agencies to create an effective model of inter-agency working. For example the work of the Joint Investigation Team, involving police and social workers, has resulted in strong partnership working that ensures appropriate prioritisation and timely responses to child protection referrals. The Multi-Agency Assessment Meeting and Multi-Agency Assessment Team also effectively promote joint working to enable the early identification of children and families in need. This leads to good quality interventions and demonstrable improvements in preventative services.</li> <li>▪ There are robust performance management arrangements involving managers and staff at all levels. The collection and reporting of performance data is thorough, systematic and undertaken consistently. This has led to changes to practice or procedures where these are identified as being required. As a result the council can demonstrate that performance in most key areas is improving and that action plans to address all outstanding areas are in place.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All staff consistently implement agreed policies and procedures to manage risk of harm and ensure the best outcomes for children and young people. Staff comply with timescales set out in statutory guidance and ensure that referrals are responded to promptly.</li> <li>▪ Good attention is given to the diverse needs of children and families such as through the provision of interpreters. Although the impact of diversity is not always fully evidenced in some case records the council is actively promoting the improvement of practice in this area.</li> <li>▪ The use of the common assessment framework is becoming more embedded across the council and its partners. This improvement has been underpinned by the development of more effective multi-agency working relationships.</li> <li>▪ Inspectors saw some good examples of initial and core assessments with clear analysis leading to effective plans for children. All assessments were of at least a satisfactory standard. The service has prioritised the improvement of the quality of assessments and recognises this may have had some adverse impact on overall timeliness.</li> <li>▪ Children and family members are routinely seen and involved in the assessment process although the impact of that involvement may not always be recorded in sufficient detail. Their views however inform subsequent plans to meet their needs.</li> </ul>

- Child protection investigations are thorough and carried out promptly by experienced and qualified social workers. Strategy discussions lead to effective and timely plans for intervention.
- In cases seen by inspectors record keeping was generally of at least a satisfactory standard, although there were examples of some delay in completing recording. The council has introduced a number of measures to improve recording practice, such as through the provision of training and through supervision.
- Social workers' caseloads are generally manageable. However the council recognises that some may be higher than is desirable and has plans in place to recruit six additional social workers to ensure staff can provide effective and timely support to children and families.
- Casework supervision is mostly carried out within the council's procedural guidelines. It is thoroughly and consistently recorded and results in clear decisions and actions for staff in safeguarding children. As well as covering case discussion that identifies specific responsibilities and actions there is a strong emphasis on social workers' personal development.
- The case file audit process provides managers with a critical overview of the quality of work undertaken by social workers and facilitates effective transfers of cases to teams undertaking longer term work.

#### **Area for development**

- Systems for providing management oversight of decisions and subsequent actions on the assessment of risk at initial contact are not consistently applied across all teams involved in the contact, referral and assessment process. This increases the likelihood of some children in need not being adequately identified in a timely manner.

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

Yours sincerely

**Jeff Banham**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: John Mothersole, Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education