

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 945 6448
Direct F 0117 945 6554
lac.safeguarding@ofsted.gov.uk



2 September 2009

Ms Jill Baker
Director of Children's Services
Salford City Council
Minerva House
Pendlebury Road
Swinton
Salford
M27 4 EQ

Dear Ms Baker

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Salford City Council's 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 Salford City council which was conducted on 11 and 12 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 areas 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 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 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:

- Regular supervision meetings are held and staff reported that they feel well supported by their managers and senior managers. They also reported that training opportunities are readily available and well received.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- The low number of initial and core assessments were identified as an area for development in the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment. Appropriate action has been taken by the council and the numbers of completed assessments has recently increased.
- Arrangements to transfer the cases of children who require child protection plans to the appropriate team are effective.
- The council have committed significant resources to improving the quality of safeguarding services. The Improvement Board receives regular and timely reports on performance against indicators relating to contact, referral and assessment and thematic reports on the quality of work. The council recognise that further work is needed to improve the quality of the contact, referral and assessment service.

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

Strength
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The contact, referral and assessment team visited by inspectors is suitably staffed by qualified and experienced social workers who undertake all initial and core assessments. More experienced staff appropriately act as mentors for recently employed colleagues.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The range of duties undertaken by social workers in the contact, referral and assessment service is too broad. For example, staff retain responsibility for looked after children until the second review of their care plan. The volume and range of work carried out reduces the resources available to assist in the timely completion of assessments. ▪ Inspectors identified the variable quality of information received from partner agencies including some inappropriate referrals. In one case there was a significant delay by an agency in referring a case where safeguarding concerns had been recognised. In particular, the quality of information from the police in respect of domestic abuse is poor and referrals do not routinely contain sufficient information about the child. The effort needed to obtain appropriate clarification of information from other agencies adds to the workload of the service. ▪ The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is insufficiently used to identify and respond to children's needs at an early stage. Information obtained through the CAF process is not systematically included by agencies when making referrals. This has been identified by the Local Safeguarding Children Board as an important priority for improvement. ▪ The quality of case recording is inconsistent. The analysis of risks and needs in the assessments viewed by inspectors was poor overall,

however some initial assessments were satisfactorily recorded. The involvement of health visitors in assessments is too limited.

- The extent to which individual children's views and feelings are taken into account in assessments is inconsistent. Initial assessments are not routinely shared with parents, carers, children or young people.
- Multi-agency involvement in strategy discussions is variable. The recording of these discussions is not comprehensive.
- Operational procedures are insufficient to support consistent practice in the contact, referral and assessment service.
- Casework decisions reached in supervision and in discussion with managers are not routinely recorded on children's case files. Thus it is difficult for the quality of managers' decision making to be audited through file examination.
- Systematic case file audit by managers at all levels is not in place. However, as part of the Improvement Plan, some thematic case file audits have been completed by consultants.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action.

Areas for priority action

- There are significant delays in the completion of initial and core assessments within required timescales. This is attributed to delays in recording work already undertaken. The council's strategies are not sufficiently effective in managing and prioritising risk and inspectors were unable to confirm from all case recording that the children concerned were safe.
 - The cases of five children were raised with the council as inspectors were unable to establish from records that action had been taken to ensure that they were not at risk of harm. These included cases where information had not been properly examined at the point of referral or where assessments undertaken were of poor quality and did not sufficiently consider risk. Senior managers gave a commitment to ensure that these cases would be immediately and thoroughly re-examined.
- Child protection investigations are identified at a later stage than required by statutory guidance. In cases reviewed by inspectors, enquiries and actions were not formally defined as child protection investigations until after a second strategy meeting had taken place. This delay has the potential to reduce the effectiveness and timeliness of multi-agency child protection.

The areas 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: Barbara Spicer, Chief Executive, Salford City Council
Gill Rigg, Chair of Salford Safeguarding Children Board
John Warmisham, Lead Member for Children's Services, Salford City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families