

23 December 2010

Mr Julian Wooster
Strategic Director, Children, Families and Learning
Portsmouth City Council
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Dear Mr Wooster

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Portsmouth 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 Portsmouth City Council which was conducted on 24 and 25 November 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 an area of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Three of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 have been addressed. Further work is required to ensure that service users' views influence service development.

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 has been addressed.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership working is strong. Joint investigations of child protection concerns are prioritised and illustrate robust multi-agency working to ensure children and young people are safe. Good working relationships have been developed with the voluntary sector, for example through partnership with the Hampton Trust, particularly effective intervention and support is provided to families where domestic violence is a known risk.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agreed inter-agency thresholds for service in relation to children in need and safeguarding are in place and regularly reviewed. ▪ Early intervention through use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is effective; the council maintains oversight of take-up and provides support via a network of 'CAF supporters'. ▪ Practice and procedures conform to statutory requirements and guidance in most key respects. ▪ Social work staff report that there is a good range of training available, which they can readily access. A thorough review of the workforce recruitment and retention strategy has been completed and welcomed by social workers; this contributes to the strong morale evident within the team. ▪ Decisions are made in accordance with statutory timescales. All contacts are seen by a manager and a decision made within 24 hours. ▪ Children and their families are involved in assessments and in most of the cases seen by inspectors children's views were seen to influence case planning. ▪ The outcomes of assessments are routinely sent to children and referring agencies. ▪ Out-of-hours arrangements for receiving and responding to referrals are effective and appropriate links to daytime services are in place. The social care electronic database is easily accessible to the out-of-hours service and supports timely assessment of referrals received. ▪ Section 47 enquiries are allocated to a qualified social worker, investigations are timely and prompt action is taken to ensure children's safety. The service ensures that children are seen early in investigations. ▪ Social workers receive regular supervision. Newly qualified social workers are

well supported; they receive a clear induction, additional supervision and a protected caseload.

- Staff workloads are manageable and the skills mix between experienced and newly qualified social workers is well managed. This enables work to be allocated appropriately and provides opportunities for less experienced staff to co-work more complex cases.
- Most performance indicators are met and there has been a consolidated improvement in some indicators such as the timeliness of initial child protection conferences despite the continued increase in service demand.
- Record keeping is up-to-date, chronologies are on file and case notes are detailed. Records demonstrate that managerial oversight is maintained and provides both support and challenge to case planning.

Areas for development

- While service user feedback is sought and collated this has yet to have a sufficient impact on service development. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- While there is evidence of management oversight and decision making on individual case files, a systematic and robust system to review the quality of work across the team and to inform future planning, has yet to be implemented.
- Where a child in need plan follows a child protection plan systems to ensure ongoing monitoring are not always robust and contingency arrangements, should concerns escalate, are not sufficiently clear.
- The quality of core assessments remains too variable with some lacking sufficient rigour and analysis. In some assessments historical information has not been effectively analysed or used in the identification of risk or protective factors. In assessments seen by inspectors cultural issues were not fully addressed.
- The percentage of children subject to a child protection plan for less than three months, or to a second plan, is too high. While initial evidence has been gathered by the council, further analysis is required to inform the actions required to ensure that child protection arrangements are effective.
- The protocol for information sharing between agencies is ineffectively applied. Contacts, which do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention, are regularly sent to the referral and assessment team. This adds significantly to workload and inappropriately diverts management attention from other key tasks.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: David Williams, Chief Executive, Portsmouth City Council
Jimmy Doyle, Chair of Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr John Ireland, Lead Member for Children's Services, Portsmouth City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education