

20 July 2011

Ms Anne Newton  
Director of Children's Services  
Borough of Poole Council  
Civic centre  
Poole  
Dorset  
BH15 2RU

Dear Ms Newton

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Borough of Poole 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 the Borough of Poole Council which was conducted on 21 and 22 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 some areas for development.

The majority of areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2010 have been addressed. Areas that remain outstanding are identified below.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The council demonstrates a strong commitment to support all staff through a wide range of relevant, high quality training appropriate to their professional development. This is highly valued by staff. In addition, the mentoring scheme</li></ul>



for newly qualified social workers provides enhanced levels of supervision and developmental opportunities to learn from research and best practice to safeguard children and young people.

**The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas**

- Following a recent comprehensive review the council has invested additional resources in the referral and assessment team which has increased the availability of senior practitioners and improved management oversight. This has resulted in significant improvement in performance such as manageable caseloads and the timelines of initial assessments. These were areas for development at the previous inspection.
- The staff group is suitably qualified and experienced with a wide range of experience and skills. Staff retention is good with low levels of sickness absence and the commitment to the service is high.
- Children and young people are routinely seen and the work undertaken is suitably child centred to ensure their views inform assessments. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Most social workers receive regular supervision which is clearly recorded and supportive to practitioners' performance and professional development. Critically reflective discussion is evident which helps to improve analysis and planning to safeguard children and young people.
- The out of hours emergency duty service take prompt and effective action to minimise risk to children and young people. Robust arrangements ensure that referrals to daytime services are timely and contain the relevant information.
- Mandatory briefings on the outcome from serious case reviews are used to help improve practice. Social workers spoken to demonstrate an awareness of the lessons learned and the impact this has on improving their own practice such as considering full historical information when working with families refusing to engage in assessments.
- The quality of initial assessments is adequate and in some cases is of a good standard with reference to research and contain the clear identification of risk and protective factors. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- The protocols for the transfer of child protection cases between social work teams are effective and efficient which results in timely and appropriate responses to the needs of children and their families.
- Strategy discussions and initial child protection conferences (ICPC) are timely and well managed ensuring appropriate decision making in respect of child protection planning. All reports to the ICPC are subject to quality assurance checks which are reported to managers. This has contributed to improvements

in practice and reports seen by inspectors were of good quality.

- A range of quality assurance methods and analysis of performance management information are in place to improve the overall effectiveness of the service to safeguard children and young people.
- The common assessment framework (CAF) is well established with good multi-agency involvement. Staff benefit from multi-agency training and the CAF is increasingly used across a range of agencies.
- The diverse needs of children with disability are appropriately considered by the child health and disabilities team. This ensures a well coordinated approach in their response to the safeguarding of children in need of specialist services. Assessments are holistic and of good quality.
- Referrers are routinely informed of the outcome of investigations and assessments following contact.
- Case recording is clear and up to date with evidence of management oversight recorded on the electronic case record. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

#### **Areas for development**

- There are delays in the allocation of some contacts as initial assessments. Following contact, information continues to be gathered by the duty team and recorded on the case records rather than allocated as an initial assessment. Although children who were monitored by the duty team were not seen to be at risk this leads to some drift in planning for their needs. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Insufficient progress has been made in reducing the number of assessments of children in sibling groups that are included in one assessment document and not recorded separately. This results in incomplete consideration of the individual needs of each child. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

**Bill Wallace**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: John McBride, Chief Executive, Borough of Poole Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education