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Mr Jim Taylor  
Executive Director for Services for Children and Young People  
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council  
Council Offices  
Wellington Road  
Ashton-under-Lyne  
Tameside  
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Dear Mr Taylor

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Tameside Metropolitan Borough 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 Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 February 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.

Some of the areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010 have been addressed although, further work is on-going to improve screening arrangements of domestic abuse notifications, usage of the common assessment framework (CAF) and the auditing by managers of the quality of assessments and these remain areas for development.



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 out-of-hours team is well resourced, provides a flexible service and there are strong links with fieldwork teams. Initial assessments are undertaken by the team, including for complex cases, and these are consistently focused, concise, timely and of a good quality.</li> <li>▪ A proactive approach is taken to gain feedback from children, young people and parents who use referral and assessment services through post-assessment questionnaires and surveys. These have influenced new developments such as the creation of quality standards to support improvement and delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prompt and effective action is taken to safeguard children and young people identified as being at risk of significant harm. Child protection investigations seen by inspectors are timely, thorough and with clear outcomes. Investigations are carried out by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.</li> <li>▪ A range of appropriate agencies are involved in, and contribute to, strategy discussions and meetings. This contributes to robust decision making and the consistent good planning of child protection investigations.</li> <li>▪ Children and their families are routinely involved in their assessments. Children are seen alone; their feelings and wishes are taken account of and are used to inform case planning.</li> <li>▪ Consideration of equality and diversity issues is reflected well in assessments and demonstrates sensitivity to cultural needs of children and their families particularly those from diverse minority communities. Effective specialist services are provided including appropriate interpreter services.</li> <li>▪ Initial assessments are completed to a satisfactory standard and contain a good level of detail and analysis. Risk factors are appropriately identified with clear outcomes and actions required to safeguard children aiding successful case planning.</li> <li>▪ There has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of core assessments which was an area of development identified at the last inspection.</li> <li>▪ There is a comprehensive training programme for social workers targeted on key areas of safeguarding practice. This includes opportunities for personal development and provides children they work with an assured level of social</li> </ul>

work intervention. Learning from serious case reviews has been disseminated as part of this programme and has been effectively used to improve practice.

- Newly qualified social workers value the support provided by managers. This includes protected caseloads, effective training and regular supervision. They benefit from co-working alongside more experienced social workers on child protection cases and from the support of a specific worker to assist their development.
- The impact of domestic abuse on children and families is well understood by the council and their partners. Therapeutic services are available to children and adults affected by domestic abuse and are well used.
- Effective partnership working following referral and assessment ensures that children and their families receive appropriate support from a variety of services such as the Compass early intervention service.
- The Tameside Safeguarding Children Board undertake effective monitoring of the referral and assessment service including regular audits of initial and core assessments and the number of children subject to a child protection plan. Appropriate actions are identified to continue to improve the service.
- Case recording is up-to-date and is of a good quality. Management oversight is clearly evidenced and entered onto the electronic case record; however, the rationale for all management decisions is not always recorded.
- Members of staff receive regular formal and informal supervision and mentoring. They report morale is high; they receive good support from managers and caseloads, which were an area of development at the last inspection, are now manageable.
- The roles and responsibilities of support staff are appropriate and their work is highly valued. They work efficiently with social workers in a well coordinated manner to deliver a good service.
- Policies and procedures comply with statutory requirements, are accessible to staff and support their work to safeguard children and young people.

#### **Areas for development**

- The understanding and usage of the CAF amongst partner agencies is not sufficiently developed and this continues to lead to higher levels of referrals to children's services. This was an area for development highlighted at the last unannounced inspection and the council has responded by re-launching the CAF. There is however insufficient progress in evidence and it remains an area for continued improvement.
- Although staff receive regular supervision there was a lack of evidence within supervision records seen by inspectors of challenge by managers and of social

workers having opportunity to reflect on their practice.

- The quality of core assessments is too variable. In some, the purpose of the assessment is not clear and the analysis of risk and protective factors is insufficient. It is not always clear what value the core assessment adds to the information and analysis already contained in the initial assessment.
- Audits by managers of the quality of assessments are not undertaken by a manager independent of the service and focus on process not quality. This limits learning from them to improve practice. This was an area for development identified at the last inspection.
- Multi-agency working between children's services and the police has not yet resulted in sufficiently robust screening arrangements for domestic abuse notifications. This continues to result in a high number of un-prioritised referrals being directly received by front line teams whose resources are then expended in prioritising them. Senior managers have plans in place to deal with this. This was an area for development identified at the last unannounced 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

**Lolly Rascagneres**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Steven Pleasant, Chief Executive, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education