

23 March 2011

Ms Cheryl Eastwood  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
PO Box 70  
Municipal Offices  
Smith Street  
Rochdale  
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Dear Ms Eastwood

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Rochdale 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 Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 22 and 23 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 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 areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 have been considered in this inspection and while some areas have been progressed sufficiently others remain areas for development.

The three areas of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in December 2009 have also been considered during this inspection. The restructuring of the duty service, with an additional team



manager post, ensures that there is timely and appropriate decision making on all contacts. The timeliness of child protection investigations has improved and those children at risk of immediate harm are suitably safeguarded. The timeliness of cases progressing to initial child protection conference has significantly improved and is now in line with statistical neighbours.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Following the inspection in July 2010 the contact, referral and assessment service has been swiftly and effectively restructured with an additional manager and two social workers. This has resulted in robust oversight and challenge to casework practice by senior managers. There is high quality supervision that is consistent, regular, critically reflective and clear evidence that this assists individuals to improve their performance. This, combined with rigorous performance management, has led to significant improvements in service delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children at risk of significant harm, including those children with a disability, are appropriately identified at the point of contact and prompt safeguarding action is taken. This was an area of priority action at the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Child protection investigations are timely, well recorded and have clear analysis of risk of significant harm. The majority have contributions by a range of partner agency professionals. This was an area of priority action at the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Decision making by team managers is prompt and all assessments are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers. The timeliness of initial assessments is good and there is sufficient analysis that identifies risk. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Equality and diversity is considered well within assessments. This was an area for development in the previous inspection.</li> <li>▪ Staff report that they are well supported by managers, who are readily accessible. Staff have access to training to meet their developmental needs.</li> <li>▪ Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place between daytime services and the emergency duty team and there is effective two way communication. Families also benefit from additional assistance provided by the Child and Family Support Service out-of-hours provision.</li> <li>▪ The majority of records seen by inspectors were up-to-date and complete and management oversight and decision making was well evidenced on case</li> </ul>

records. This was an area for development from the previous inspection.

#### **Areas for development**

- The quality of analysis in core assessment is too variable and does not always effectively summarise risk and protective factors.
- Partner agency consultation within assessments is not always clearly evidenced.
- While assessments do consider case history, the majority of chronologies are not maintained or effectively used to identify risk.
- The common assessment framework is not sufficiently developed or effective to provide preventative services and reduce the need for a safeguarding response. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Children are being routinely seen in assessments. However, in some cases this was after the completion of the assessment and their views and wishes are not always evident. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Service user engagement is a part of the quality assurance framework and the views of users about service delivery have recently been obtained. However, this is yet to influence service delivery.

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

Yours sincerely

**Pauline Turner**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Roger Ellis, Chief Executive, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education