

Freshford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol BS1 6NL

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

Direct T 0117 9456333  
Direct F 0117 9456554  
Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk

9 December 2009

Mr Julian Wooster  
Strategic Director, Children, Families and Learning  
Portsmouth City Council  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Civic Offices  
Guildhall Square  
Portsmouth  
Hampshire, PO1 2BG

Dear Mr Wooster

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Portsmouth Council 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 Portsmouth Council which was conducted on 10 and 11 November 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 one area for priority action and some 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 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for the help and time given by you and your colleagues during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment services were satisfactorily carrying out their responsibilities in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- Processes for receiving and prioritising information and referrals of children and young people are robust and timely.



- Clear thresholds for access to referral and assessment services, which have been agreed with partner agencies and have recently been updated, are in place
- Child protection enquiries are timely and appropriately investigated and assessed by suitably qualified workers.
- The views of children and young people, who are involved in the assessment of their needs, are recorded and the outcomes of initial assessments are routinely sent to them. Equality and diversity issues are satisfactorily considered within assessments.
- Senior managers have appropriate audit and performance management systems in place which enable them to monitor workloads and throughput of cases and review and develop services. For example, the Initial Assessment and Protection Service has recently been restructured to maximise its efficiency. It is, however, too early to assess the impact.
- Senior managers provide effective oversight and challenge of casework decisions where children may be received into care.

The following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is an efficient out of hours service, which is well integrated with the assessment teams. The Emergency Duty Team provides a well resourced, robust and effective service for children and their families.</li> <li>▪ Effective partnership working across agencies is well established and results in most cases in prompt and appropriate referrals to identify children and families in need.</li> <li>▪ Case records are up to date and information contained on files is of good quality.</li> <li>▪ A graduate trainee programme, together with a good induction and support package, is highly valued by social work staff and facilitates staff retention. Staff report that morale is high within the Initial Assessment and the Child Protection and Court teams, with good access to supportive managers.</li> <li>▪ The Initial Assessment and Duty Team is fully staffed with permanent staff who have manageable workloads.</li> </ul>

- Staff are provided with regular formal supervision, which is recorded and up to date, and frequent opportunities for personal development and training.

#### Areas for development

- There are vacancies not covered in social work posts within the Child Protection and Court teams which results in high numbers of cases remaining unallocated. These are overseen by a senior practitioner and issues arising responded to by different duty workers. While these numbers have gradually reduced, the support received by those children and their families lacks continuity.
- The timeliness of initial assessments for children in need is poor, leading to delays in services being provided to some children and their families.
- Decisions and managerial oversight that take place outside of formal supervision are not regularly recorded in case files. It is, therefore, not always evident when case plans are changed.
- While service user feedback is sought and collated, it has insufficient influence on service development.

This visit has identified the following area for priority action.

#### Area for priority action

- Some cases referred to the Initial Assessment Team, have been inappropriately closed without the children being seen and therefore their needs are not fully investigated.

Yours sincerely



Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: David Williams, Chief Executive, Portsmouth Council  
Julian Wooster, Acting Chair of Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Board  
Cllr John Ireland, Cabinet Member for Education, Portsmouth Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families