

16 September 2010

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

Dear Ms Newton

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the Borough of Poole 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 17 and 18 August 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 areas of strength and satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

Strengths

- Front line staff report very good access to managers, regular supervision, and that they work in a highly supportive environment.
- Staff demonstrate very good commitment to improving practice, and benefit from comprehensive training which is highly valued.



Satisfactory practice

- Senior managers have good awareness of weaknesses in front line practice through good quality assurance arrangements, which include regular feedback from child protection conference chairs, thematic auditing and individual case audits. This has led to improvements in practice although in some instances from a very low base.
- Managers have access to good performance management information, which enables effective monitoring of performance relating to front line practice.
- Decisions about contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales with good management oversight and clear directions on actions to be taken.
- Effective screening of domestic violence notifications leads to prompt and appropriate decision making.
- There are good, well established working relationships with the police. This has enabled improvements in practice, for example notifications of domestic violence incidents are now being received more promptly.
- There is effective communication between the out-of-hours service and the referral and assessment service.
- Child protection conference reports and plans are of at least adequate quality and some are good.
- The majority of children in need plans are specific with clear measurable outcomes.
- Arrangements for transferring child protection cases between social work teams are effective and efficient. An improvement plan is in place to achieve faster transfer of children in need cases to the family support team.

Areas for development

- The combination of insufficient capacity in the referral and assessment service and limited evidence of management oversight following allocation leads to drift in some cases. In a small number of cases there was evidence of delay in child protection processes. In one case a child was left at potential risk of harm for a considerable period of time.
- There are significant delays in both the allocation of some cases and the completion of initial assessments. Performance is improving from a very low base.
- There are unacceptable delays in seeing some children in need, which can

result in some children being left at potential risk of harm.

- Some cases lack management direction, which has led to work being undertaken without a focused plan, and outside of a clear assessment framework.
- Some initial and core assessments are of poor quality. The views of children and young people are not sufficiently evidenced and protective and risk factors are not always explicit.
- Case recording is not sufficiently up-to-date in too many cases and for some cases the delay is significant. As a result it is not always possible to track the work undertaken.
- Some initial assessments of children in need are undertaken by unqualified staff. This is not compliant with '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' (2010).
- The needs of children in sibling groups are not always recorded separately. As a result social work caseloads do not always reflect the volume of work required and the individual needs of children are not sufficiently highlighted.
- Some agencies do not always respond promptly to requests for information, which results in delay in completing work.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul d'Inverno
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John McBride, Chief Executive, Borough of Poole Council
Ron Lock, Chair of Bournemouth and Poole Safeguarding Children Board
Janet Walton, Lead Member for Children's Services, Borough of Poole Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education