

6 April 2011

Ms Sheila Smith
Director of Children & Young People's Services
North Somerset Council
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston Super Mare
Somerset
BS23 1UJ

Dear Ms Smith

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within North Somerset 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 North Somerset Council which was conducted on 8 and 9 March 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 areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in June 2010 have been addressed and now meet statutory requirements.

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

| Strengths |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ High quality relationships with the police in respect of safeguarding are supported by the co-location of a social worker with the police child protection unit. Consequently children and young people receive a timely safeguarding |



service including Section 47 enquiries based on effective joint planning and thorough investigation.

- File audits by senior managers are routine practice and the learning is effectively disseminated through high quality staff bulletins and team briefings. Staff clearly value and learn from this process and improvement in case recording is evident in files.

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

- Assessments demonstrate that children are routinely seen and their wishes and feelings are taken into account. Staff use a range of skills to ensure that the voice of children with disabilities is effectively captured in child protection investigations. The identity needs of children from minority ethnic groups are responded to appropriately and sensitively.
- Child protection procedures are kept up-to-date and comply with statutory requirements. They are understood and applied by staff consistently with effective management oversight to ensure the safety of children and young people.
- All child protection cases are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers and where children are assessed as being at risk of harm appropriate and prompt action is taken.
- Use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is integrated within an updated thresholds framework and is well-established across partner agencies facilitating a wide range of preventive services.
- Most initial and core assessments seen are of satisfactory, and some of good, quality. They contain key information including previous history, appropriate summary and analysis and lead to provision of services to meet the identified needs of the child.
- Records including chronologies and management oversight are up-to-date, clear and inform case planning.
- Partners confirm that out-of-hours arrangements are clear with prompt and effective exchange of information between the emergency duty team and daytime services and timely action taken to protect children at risk of harm.
- Regular service user feedback is sought and used to inform service improvement.
- The local authority ensures that lessons learnt from serious case reviews are disseminated to all staff which contributes to improved practice.
- Staff undertaking referral and assessment work are suitably qualified and

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| <p>experienced. The council has taken effective steps to ensure a stable workforce through its recruitment and retention strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff report that their workloads are manageable and that steps are taken to manage peaks through the use of a workload management system and flexibility in case transfer arrangements. |
| <p>Areas for development</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arrangements for assessment of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people are not always implemented appropriately and their needs are not always identified adequately. ▪ While management decision-making and case-related supervision discussions are routinely included in case files, supervision files seen are incomplete and records of supervision meetings show a lack of regularity. Links between practice, performance and staff development are not explicit and in consequence a clear understanding of individual social workers' effectiveness is not evident. |

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rushall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Graham Turner, Chief Executive, North Somerset Council
 Andrew Spencer, Department for Education