

17 February 2010

Mr Stuart Smith  
Executive Director Children, Families and Adults  
Municipal Buildings  
Dale Street  
Liverpool  
L2 2DH

Dear Mr Smith

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Liverpool 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 Liverpool Council which was conducted on 19 and 20 January 2010. 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.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but 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 your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- All children who are referred to the safeguarding teams, either as a child in need or a child in need of protection, receive a timely response and assessment which promote their safety and welfare.
- Staff in the safeguarding support teams demonstrated a satisfactory working knowledge of practice and procedures when responding to referrals and assessments.



- Staff receive regular formal and informal supervision which ensures case work decisions are made in consultation with a manager.
- Newly-qualified social workers report that they benefit from an induction programme, which includes good training and support that lead to development of their practice.
- Initial assessments were of a satisfactory quality and completed in a timely manner. Children and young people were routinely seen and spoken to as part of their assessment.
- Core assessments and records of child protection investigations demonstrated that holistic assessments had been undertaken. These assessments gave clear consideration to risk and protection issues.
- Social work staff, managers and the customer services advisors in Careline understand and apply their policies and procedures consistently. Customer service advisors respond effectively to contacts, signposting where appropriate. There was evidence that checks regularly take place which inform decision making about contacts and whether they should become referrals. Care is taken to ensure that records are accurate with regards to name, age and any specific cultural or communication needs of children or families.
- Core assessments in the Disabled Children's Team were of a satisfactory quality and completed in a timely manner, enabling good service plans to be put in place.
- The common assessment framework is being used satisfactorily by partner agencies. There is a clear focus on increasing numbers and improving quality to ensure that children and families receive a range of preventative services in a timely manner.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Liverpool Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust Board, have undertaken effective monitoring of the performance and quality of the safeguarding support service and have responded to an increased number of referrals with significant additional resources. This has ensured that the service can continue to meet the identified needs of children and families.</li> <li>▪ Staff report that they value the support, advice and guidance that front line managers provide. This contributes to the service being able to retain a qualified and skilled workforce.</li> <li>▪ Staff access training easily and effectively via the I-learning system, which offers a wide variety of training opportunities that are valued by staff.</li> <li>▪ The out of hours service is well organised with good communication links with the safeguarding services and Careline. This ensures that urgent</li> </ul>

assessments can be undertaken outside of normal office hours and provides continuity in the investigation and assessment of the needs of children and families.

### **Areas for development**

- The council's Information Communication Technology is not robust enough to cater for the social care electronic recording system. This system regularly crashes and staff report that this has resulted in case recording having to be re-done. This increases the pressure of work for staff when working to tight deadlines.
- Staff are losing confidence in the electronic recording system and as a result are not always recording work electronically in a timely manner. Inspectors also identified that not all S47 investigations are recorded on the electronic system and initial assessments are sometimes completed in word documents.
- Initial assessment documents are not routinely shared with children and families, although these are discussed with children and families.
- Decisions taken by managers regarding individual children and young people's cases are not routinely accessible within electronic case records. Management decisions, although recorded during supervision sessions, are not routinely transferred to case records. As a result, there is no clear audit trail of case decisions to ensure that managers have effective oversight, particularly for contacts and referrals.
- Management information is routinely provided at a strategic level but this is not used effectively to assist performance management monitoring at individual and team level to support front line managers to deliver a more effective service.
- Performance data considered during the inspection indicate that current re-referral rates are higher than previously reported. The council is now aware of this issue and will be examining in detail data and information relating to this.

Yours sincerely

**Marie McGuinness**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Colin Hilton, Chief Executive Liverpool City Council  
Bernie Brown, Chair of Liverpool Safeguarding Children Board  
Keith Turner, Lead Member for Children's Services, Liverpool City Council  
Ron Gould, Executive Member for Health, Care and Safeguarding,  
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