

13 January 2011

Mr Colin Green  
Director of Children, Learning and Young People  
Coventry City Council  
Civic Centre  
1 Earl Street  
Coventry  
CV1 5RS

Dear Mr Green

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Coventry City 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 Coventry City Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 December 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 an area 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 satisfactorily addressed.

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

**Strengths**

- There are strong arrangements for early intervention with children and young people and families affected by domestic abuse, particularly through good joint working with police. The joint screening of all domestic abuse incidents ensures risks to affected children, young people and their families are identified promptly. There is subsequent timely and well planned multi-agency



action to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded.

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

- Good evidence was found in assessments of culturally aware and sensitive practice to ensure the involvement of children and young people and their families from the diverse communities within the city. There is effective use of the interpreter services to ensure that children and their families are enabled to engage in their assessments.
- The Coventry Safeguarding Children Board's procedures and guidance comply with statutory requirements, are up-to-date and are readily accessible to staff. Staff in the referral and assessment service (RAS) follow these procedures well to support their practice.
- Inspectors found good evidence that decision making in RAS and the children with disabilities team (CDT) is prompt and appropriate in ensuring that children and young people at risk of harm are identified and receive an appropriate response. These decisions are routinely recorded on children's case files and this promotes effective case planning.
- There are agreed inter-agency policies and procedures, including Thresholds and Practice Standards, which incorporate the common assessment framework (CAF) approach. The creation of multi-disciplinary teams, which each include a CAF coordinator, and the recently appointed CAF leads placed in the RAS service have been effective in embedding the partnership's approach. This has promoted good inter-agency working in the early identification of vulnerable children, young people and their families and the provision of appropriate and timely support.
- Assessments seen by inspectors were found to be child focused, children are seen alone as appropriate and their wishes and feelings are taken into account in case planning. Assessments address risk and protective factors, identify strengths and were found to be thorough, detailed and analytical.
- All Section 47 enquiries are undertaken by suitably qualified social workers. Joint investigations are carried out promptly. Assessments undertaken involve other professionals as appropriate and provide detailed information and analysis of risk and protective factors leading to clear action plans.
- Assessments and child protection investigations involving children with disabilities are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers in the children with disabilities team. The specialist skills held by these social workers contribute to the assessment of and effective safeguarding practice for these vulnerable children.
- The records of face-to-face strategy discussions are good. They reflect the multi-agency sharing of concerns, plans of action for each agency and review

arrangements. The prompt production and input of these records on to the electronic case file by dedicated administrators ensures that social workers are able to make timely progress in case planning. Staff value this support highly.

- Social workers' record keeping seen by inspectors was up-to-date and provides for effective case planning.
- Managers at all levels undertake regular monthly case file audits as part of a wider performance and quality assurance framework. The audits sampled by inspectors were found to be of a high standard, addressing practice issues, including equality and diversity, and management decisions. Action is taken to address any shortfall in practice identified.
- Staff report that managers at all levels have a genuine open door policy. Social workers receive regular supervision from line managers who are easily accessible on a daily basis to provide advice and guidance. Staff value the support, particularly when dealing with more complex issues during the team's duty week.
- Staff, including agency staff, have good access to relevant training and development opportunities including post qualification training. They value the support from managers which ensures that they are enabled to attend and complete assignments.
- Social workers' caseloads are variable but have been significantly reduced since the last inspection by the recruitment of additional permanent social workers. Caseloads are kept under review by team managers and senior managers.

#### **Areas for development**

- The arrangements for the communication and the transfer of information between the emergency duty team (EDT) and RAS are clear. However, inspectors found some cases where the response by EDT to safeguarding concerns did not comply with child protection procedures. Although no children were considered to be at immediate risk as a result there was a delay in taking appropriate action. This concern was addressed promptly when raised by inspectors.
- Minutes of initial child protection conference and some strategy discussions are not always produced in a timely way. This delays social workers' ability to progress the case and to make entries on the electronic case record which affects the timely completion of assessments and impacts adversely on the prompt transfer and closure of cases.

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

Yours sincerely

**Judith Nelson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council  
Colin Green, Chair of Coventry Safeguarding Children Board  
Joseph Clifford and Lynnette Kelly, Lead Members for Children's Services,  
Coventry City Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education