

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 03000 130570

Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



7 April 2011

Mr Mark Carriline
Acting Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Athenaeum House
Market Street
Bury
B19 0BN

Dear Mr Carriline

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bury Metropolitan Borough 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 Bury Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 9 and 10 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 May 2010 have not all been fully addressed. The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in May 2010 relating to core assessments and strategy meetings remain.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership working between the police and the advice and assessment service, with regard to domestic abuse is well established. Daily meetings with police colleagues are held which effectively consider and assess risk as well as decide the level of intervention. As a result there is good evidence of a reduction in repeat episodes of abuse which otherwise could have resulted in children being unable to live safely within their families. ▪ Senior management have taken decisive action to address significant resource pressures within the advice and assessment team. They have increased the staffing ratio by three qualified social workers and developed management information tools in order to ensure that the service is able to continue to safeguard and protect vulnerable children.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear procedures and policies are in place to inform practice and ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard and protect children and young people are met. ▪ All contacts are screened by a qualified and experienced social worker and all actions are agreed by a suitably experienced manager. Decisions from contacts and referrals are routinely communicated to referring agencies. ▪ Children are routinely seen and their wishes and feelings form an integral part of assessments and planning for their future care. ▪ Quality assurance processes are well established. An audit programme of safeguarding cases is undertaken by senior managers and the findings are routinely used to improve practice and service delivery. ▪ Social workers have a range of training opportunities available to them and are able to access external training to develop practice and improve service delivery. ▪ Children, when seen to be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, receive a prompt and appropriate service from suitably qualified and experienced social workers. ▪ In most cases seen by inspectors the ethnic, cultural and religious needs of children and young people are identified. ▪ A caseload weighting system allows team managers and social workers to effectively judge workload capacity and inspectors saw evidence of managers using this tool to adjust caseloads.

- Out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear and appropriately linked to the day referral processes.

Areas for development

- The quality of core assessments seen by inspectors is variable. While there are some good examples a significant number of assessments lacked rigorous analysis and focus on the individual needs of the children. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- There is significant delay in recording the minutes of strategy meetings on electronic case files. Copies of minutes are not passed on to partner agencies in a timely way. This reduces the ability of agencies to safeguard vulnerable children. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Record keeping is not routinely kept up-to-date and managers often have to check with individual staff members to ascertain the progress of cases and whether individual children have been safeguarded. Senior managers are aware of this and their aim is that action will be progressed through service improvement plans.
- Although the backlog of work is being tackled social work caseloads remain high and managers have responsibility for too many staff. There is evidence of regular supervision taking place but this is not always formally recorded. Senior managers are aware of this and aim to progress this through service improvement plans.
- There are delays in the allocation of work requiring social work assessment, other than child protection enquiries, and this impacts upon timescales for completion and the opportunity to meet children's needs promptly.
- The common assessment framework (CAF) is not sufficiently embedded although there is a commitment from senior managers to develop CAF in order to address the needs of children who do not meet the threshold for statutory social work intervention.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Nash
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Mike Kelly, Chief Executive, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education