

10 June 2010

Ms Eleni Ioannides
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Athenaeum House
Market Street
Bury
BI9 0BN

Dear Ms Ioannides

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 11 and 12 May 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:

Strength

- Partnership working between the police and the advice and assessment service, with regard to domestic abuse is well established. Daily meetings are held which effectively consider and assess risk. The police actively support social work staff during investigations and respond immediately to requests for assistance during child protection investigations.



Satisfactory practice

- Staff within the Advice and Assessment Service have satisfactory access to relevant training, including learning from a recent serious case review.
- Partner agencies make appropriate referrals to the service which reflect a clear understanding of agreed thresholds for social care involvement.
- In the cases seen by inspectors, children and young people at risk of significant harm were identified promptly and were subject to timely child protection investigations undertaken by qualified and experienced social workers.
- Strategy meetings to plan child protection investigations are well attended by a range of agencies and are held within required timescales.
- Initial assessments are completed to a satisfactory standard by qualified social workers and contain a good level of detail and a clear analysis of risk.
- All advice and assessment staff, including those newly qualified, report feeling well supported by accessible managers who provide good day to day advice and mentoring. Staff receive regular supervision which is clearly recorded.
- Senior managers undertake regular audits of the quality of work in the advice and assessment service. The findings are incorporated into the local authority's safeguarding improvement plan.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board appropriately considers regular reports of referral and assessment performance and the findings of monitoring and audit.

Areas for development

- Inspectors identified a number of referrals of children in need where the presenting information clearly indicated that further assessment was appropriate but where the case had been prematurely closed by managers. Additionally, the original information had been insufficiently scrutinised by qualified social workers. The local authority acknowledged this and took immediate steps to correct the practice.
- The quality of core assessments is variable with some lacking sufficient analysis of risk.
- Children are appropriately seen and spoken to during assessments. However, case recordings do not sufficiently demonstrate that their racial, cultural and linguistic needs or their wishes and feelings have been taken into account.
- The recent increase in referrals has led to heavy workloads for staff in the

advice and assessment service. Although assessments have been undertaken, there are delays in the production of the completed assessment documents. Senior managers have recognised this and have identified additional social work capacity to enable all assessments to be recorded.

- The minutes of strategy meetings do not consistently identify a detailed plan for conducting child protection investigations and are not routinely circulated to those attending.
- Child protection investigations are not currently recorded in accordance with the local authority's own guidance. Details of the investigation and the analysis of risk are not contained within one easily accessible document.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Varley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Mark Sanders, Chief Executive, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Gill Rigg, Chair of Bury Safeguarding Children Board
Bob Caserta, Lead Member for Children's Services, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education