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24 September 2009

Ms Annie Hudson  
Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Bristol City Council  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
The Council House  
College Green  
Bristol  
BS1 5TR

Dear Ms Hudson

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bristol City Council 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 Bristol City Council which was conducted on 2 and 3 September 2009. 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, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

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 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, administrative staff and some professionals from partner agencies. I am grateful to you and your staff for the help and 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:

- Effective systems and arrangements for responding to contact and referrals are in place. Management decision-making is robust.
- Child protection cases are identified well and responses are timely.



- There is good evidence that children are seen by social care staff during assessments and enquiries, and that their wishes and feelings are taken into account.
- In most cases parents and carers are appropriately involved in social care assessments and enquiries.
- Satisfactory consideration is given to issues of ethnicity, disability and culture.
- Initial assessments are mainly of good quality. The timeliness of their completion has improved and is now in line with national averages.
- Core assessments are done well and the timeliness of their completion significantly exceeds national averages.
- Social work reports to child protection conferences are thorough and cover most of the core assessment domains.
- Performance management of social work staff in duty teams is focused on key service priority areas and is used routinely to challenge or support practice.
- The Common Assessment Framework is well established and there are appropriate targets for further development.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good staff morale, workforce stability and professional commitment are evident in the face of increased workload pressures.</li> <li>▪ Senior and team managers effectively oversee work, supervise regularly and make clear decisions on cases.</li> <li>▪ Effective partnership working with the police child abuse investigation team results in timely, considered and planned action to protect children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Incidents of domestic violence are identified and managed well in conjunction with the domestic abuse referral team.</li> <li>▪ The local authority and Local Safeguarding Children Board actively promote effective training and development opportunities which are well received by participants.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social work teams complete child protection conference reports on the electronic recording system in preference to core assessment records, resulting in low numbers of core assessments being formally recorded as part of Section 47 (Children Act 1989) enquiries.</li> </ul>

- The recent improvement in the timeliness of initial child protection conferences is being sustained by robust management action.
- Social worker caseloads are too high, which impacts upon the capacity to close and transfer cases in a timely way.
- Audit arrangements are limited in scope and impact and do not systematically support service development across the partnership.
- The arrangements for informing referrers of the outcome of their referrals are applied inconsistently.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Heather Brown  
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Ms Jan Ormondroyd, Chief Executive,  
Mr Ian McDowall, Chair of Bristol Safeguarding Children Board  
Ms Clare Champion-Smith, Lead Member for Children's Services, Bristol  
Council  
Mr Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families