

5 August 2010

Ms Di Smith
Director of Children's Services
Brighton and Hove City Council
Kings House
Grand Avenue
Hove
BN3 2SR

Dear Ms Smith

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Brighton and Hove 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 Brighton and Hove City Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 July 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:

Strengths

- Staff report that they benefit from good levels of professional support and development opportunities including regular high quality supervision and comprehensive training.
- The council has been very successful at recruiting permanent social workers to the referral and assessment team and is reducing the reliance on agency staff



and increasing the stability of the workforce.

- There is evidence of good strategic planning by senior managers which has led to significant improvements in the service from a low base. Consequently staff report morale is high.

Satisfactory practice

- Monitoring and auditing of cases by senior managers has led to improvements in some areas of practice. This is being developed further through a programme of themed audits.
- Decisions about contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales.
- Child protection enquiries are timely and are carried out thoroughly by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.
- There is good partnership working with the police which results in timely and appropriate action to protect children and young people.
- Arrangements for transferring cases between social work teams are effective and efficient. The majority of cases are transferred in a timely manner and at an appropriate point within the casework plan.
- Case recording is generally up to date and comprehensive.
- There is evidence of effective support and intervention to families and children by the Family Intervention Project.
- Core assessments following child protection enquiries are at least adequate and some are of good quality.

Areas for development

- Although significant progress has been made in reducing the caseloads of social workers, the high numbers of section 47 enquiries and their prioritisation is impacting on the management of children in need assessments. The council has yet to review the thresholds for section 47 enquiries and the comparatively low numbers of these resulting in initial child protection conferences.
- There are unacceptable delays in seeing some children in need. This delay results in potential risk to children.
- In order to meet conflicting priorities and manage the pressure of work a significant number of initial assessments are being signed off by managers as complete before the child or young person has been seen. Because of drift and delay in completing initial assessments core assessments are being started and used inappropriately to complete what could be clearly covered by an initial

assessment.

- The current management practice in the recording of completed initial assessments significantly affects the accuracy of performance data and prevents effective performance monitoring by senior managers.
- Assessments are of variable quality and some initial assessments are poor as the views of parents, children and young people are not sufficiently evidenced.
- Some initial and core assessments of children in need are undertaken by unqualified staff. This is not compliant with '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' (2010).
- Child protection plans and those for children in need are of variable quality and are not sufficiently specific with clear measurable outcomes.
- Some files do not have chronologies or they are incomplete and there is no single record for children and families. This makes it difficult to safely ensure that all information relevant to the family is taken into account in assessment and decision making.
- Although there has been recent improvement in the use of the common assessment framework it is not yet sufficiently established to ensure children with additional needs receive a timely and effective response.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul d'Inverno
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Barradell, Chief Executive, Brighton and Hove City Council
Alan Bedford, Chair of Brighton and Hove Safeguarding Children Board
Vanessa Brown, Lead Member for Children and Young People, Brighton and Hove City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education