

10 June 2010

Ms Jane Portman
Executive Director, Children and Families Services
Bournemouth Borough Council
The Town Hall
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth
BH2 6DY

Dear Ms Portman

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bournemouth 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 Bournemouth 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:

Strengths

- The recent focus of senior management on improving the assessment and safeguarding team has led to good staff morale. Social workers report very good support and regular supervision.
- The views of parents are very well recorded within assessments and enquiries and there is a systematic approach which enables parents to feedback by questionnaire on the service they receive.



Satisfactory practice

- Management oversight is generally thorough and effective and has led to significant improvements in the timeliness of the completion of work since August 2009.
- Social workers have manageable caseloads which enable timely responses to referrals.
- Decisions about incoming contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales and are appropriate.
- Child protection enquiries are timely and are carried out thoroughly by suitably experienced social workers.
- Children are seen by social workers and their wishes and feelings are taken into account in assessments and enquiries.
- Initial assessments are at least satisfactory and some are good. There is also some evidence of research being used to inform the better assessments.
- Most core assessments seen identified key issues clearly and were satisfactory; some assessments were good.
- A number of cases closed by children's social care are receiving appropriate support in the community through the common assessment framework (CAF). While use of the CAF is not fully embedded across all services there are plans in place to improve this. CAF assessments seen during the inspection were of good quality.
- There is effective communication between the out of hours service and the assessment and safeguarding team.

Areas for development

- Inspectors found evidence of communication delays and failure by the police to share information with children's social care about children at potential risk of harm. As a result there have been unacceptable delays in assessment and decision making.
- Although decisions on contacts that do not proceed to referrals are appropriate, the reasons for management decisions are not recorded clearly. Where re-referral occurs, this makes the process of subsequent assessment and decision making more difficult.
- The electronic recording and retrieval system does not effectively support staff in undertaking their work. The system is slow and insufficiently robust which

leads to time-consuming recording and in some instances work being lost. The combination of no single record for a child and not all files having chronologies makes it difficult to ensure that all historical information is taken into account in assessment and decision making.

- There is insufficient systematic monitoring of the quality of front line practice by senior managers and limited evidence of thematic auditing.

Any areas for development 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: Pam Donnellan, Chief Executive, Bournemouth Borough Council
Ron Lock, Chair of Bournemouth and Poole Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Malcolm Davies, Lead Member for Education and Children’s Services, Bournemouth Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education