

5 November 2010

Ms Gladys Rhodes
Strategic Director Children's Services
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
The Exchange
Ainsworth Street
Blackburn
BB1 6AD

Dear Ms Rhodes

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Blackburn with Darwen 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 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council which was conducted on 7 and 8 October 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 areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development. The majority of areas for development identified in the last inspection in March 2010 have been addressed.

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

Strengths

- Successful multi-agency working ensures that children and young people are supported through a team around the child model which, when appropriate, includes children's social care services. Support is available seamlessly to



families both before and after any formal intervention by children's social services.

- There is a highly effective multi-agency response to all notifications of domestic violence which includes offering families the opportunity of support at an early stage. A wide range of services are available with specific support for the needs of local minority ethnic groups. This includes community work focused on reducing domestic violence; including honour based violence and forced marriages.
- Staff and managers from partner agencies spoken to during the inspection expressed a high level of confidence that all referrals made to children's social care were effectively and promptly responded to. This is supported by multi-agency co-located staff within the first response and duty teams.

The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas

- All children and young people in need of protection referred to children's social care services are promptly responded to and their needs assessed.
- The majority of children in need referred to children's social care services have their needs assessed within statutory timescales.
- All case management decisions are clearly recorded in the child's electronic file by the Principal Social Worker; this appropriately sets out the social work tasks to be completed.
- Children and young people, parents and carers are spoken to and take active part in the assessment process.
- Children with disabilities in need of protection are provided with an appropriate service by the children with disability team. Joint working between the first response team and the children with disability team ensures the safeguarding needs of all other children within the household are assessed.
- The emergency duty team is staffed by professionally qualified social workers, with significant childcare experience, who work effectively with daytime services. Services are in place out-of-hours to allow the team to respond to individuals whose first language is not English or those who have communication difficulties.
- All staff and managers spoken to reported high morale and demonstrated a strong commitment to working in Blackburn with Darwen to improve the lives of local children and young people.
- Social workers and staff value and benefit from regular supervision and related training coordinated by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. There is

evidence of a growing culture of reflective supervision practice.

- Staff receive regular electronic updates on policy and procedural changes. Effective monitoring is in place to ensure that every member of staff has read and understood these updates.
- Front line team managers effectively utilise performance management information and case file audits to ensure the timely management of workflow and to increase their understanding of pressures and trends on the service.

Areas for development

- The quality of assessments, as reported in the last unannounced inspection, remains variable. Some assessments do not contain all relevant information and lack a full analysis of risk and protective factors.
- The level of repeat referrals as identified at the last inspection remains high.
- There is a lack of clarity and consistency across teams regarding the level at which some decisions are taken and authorised. This is evident in the most complex cases which require clear lines of accountability. The council are in the process of revising these arrangements as part of the remodelling of the service.
- Some social workers' caseloads in the first response and duty teams are too high and above the number recommended by the council.

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

Yours sincerely

Simone White
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Graham Burgess, Chief Executive, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Laurence Loft, Chair of Blackburn with Darwen Safeguarding Children Board
Councillor Maureen Bateson, Lead Member for Children's Services, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families