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Mr Ashley Ayre
Strategic Director: Children's Services
Bath and North East Somerset Council
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Riverside
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Dear Mr Ayre

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bath and North East Somerset 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 Bath and North East Somerset Council which was conducted on 11 and 12 January 2011. 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 attended and observed practice at a Section 47 strategy discussion and a duty team meeting. Inspectors were able to speak to a range of staff within children's social care including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff. In addition telephone contact was made with representatives of key partners from within the police and health services as well as the emergency duty team.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in May 2010 are being addressed within an action plan. While some progress has been made the majority of measures taken are yet to demonstrate sufficient and sustained impact.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

| Strengths |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Domestic abuse is recognised well and expertly managed by a dedicated, multi-disciplinary service which offers specialist consultation, training, assessment and a range of interventions which result in children and young people being safeguarded well. There is good evidence of a reduction in repeat episodes of abuse which otherwise could have resulted in children being unable to live safely within their families. ▪ The council has implemented a wide range of integrated preventative services that have successfully offered assistance and support to families in need which have improved their circumstances thereby avoiding the need for other forms of intervention to safeguard or protect children and young people. |
| The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear procedures and policies are in place to inform practice and ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard and protect children and young people are met. ▪ Cases that require Section 47 enquiries are identified and, in most cases, undertaken in a thorough and timely manner by social workers who are suitably qualified and experienced. ▪ Children and young people with a disability receive an effective service from the specialist disabled children team which is conversant and sensitive to their particular needs. ▪ Arrangements for the transfer of cases to long term teams are clear, flexible and effectively implemented which means that children and young people do not suffer from unacceptable delays to the continuity of the services they receive. ▪ Thresholds for access to children’s services are applied consistently and protocols for joint working are agreed with, and well understood, by partner agencies. ▪ Record keeping is mostly up-to-date and demonstrates effective management of risk of harm to children and young people. ▪ Out-of-hours duty arrangements are clear and appropriately linked to the daytime referral processes. ▪ Regular informal and planned formal supervision is well established and valued by staff. |

- Staff have access to appropriate training to meet their professional development needs.
- Social work caseloads are manageable as a result of effective oversight by supervisors that carefully considers the capacity and capability of staff.

Areas for development

- Equality and diversity issues are not consistently addressed in casework, assessment and care planning.
- The delay in commencing assessments of some children in need cases means that children and young people may be waiting for longer than is necessary for their needs to be assessed.
- Referring agencies are not routinely informed of the proposed actions of children's social care following referral of children in need cases. Such practice may lead to a lack of clarity as to how, and by whom, the known concerns will be monitored and addressed prior to assessment.
- The quality of analysis within assessments is variable and does not consistently reflect sufficient focus on key risk and protective factors. Although children and young people are safeguarded weakness in analysis means that case planning for some children in need is insufficiently robust and timely.
- Recorded managerial comments on the quality of practice are not consistently evident in case records.
- The wishes and feelings of children and young people which are usually ascertained well in the assessment process fail to sufficiently influence individual case plans.

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

Yours sincerely

Sean Tarpey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Everitt, Chief Executive, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Jim Gould, Chair of Bath and North East Somerset Safeguarding Children Board
Chris Watt, Lead Member for Children's Services, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education