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Mrs Edna Sutton
Director for Children, Young People and Families
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
PO Box 609
Barnsley
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Dear Mrs Sutton

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council 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 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 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 also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff.

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

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in May 2010 have been addressed by the council through an action plan. One area of development was found to have not yet been fully addressed and therefore it remains an area for development.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A very stable, skilled and experienced workforce is supported well by good training and development opportunities and effective management oversight. This is contributing to timely interventions that safeguard children and young people effectively.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the cases seen by inspectors the risk of harm was appropriately identified and managed effectively and children and young people were safeguarded. ▪ Initial and core assessments are generally of a good standard with all at least adequate. Children and young people and their families are seen and their views are included in assessments. Inspectors saw good examples of proactive and persistent work by social workers to ensure that children and young people were seen alone and good work with young children was evidenced in case files. ▪ All child protection enquiries are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers. Joint work with the police and other agencies is undertaken where appropriate. Risks and protective factors are identified in assessments and suitable plans protect and meet the needs of children and young people well. ▪ Prompt and appropriate decision-making in the assessment and the disabled children teams ensures that children and young people at risk of harm are identified and receive an appropriate response. Good communication with partner agencies at an early stage ensures that their information informs decisions. Referrers and families are appropriately signposted where involvement by social care is not appropriate. ▪ Assessments include information about ethnicity, disability and religion and a recent amendment to the electronic recording system reinforces this well. Staff understand the changing profile of Barnsley's population which has informed their practice. Some good examples of culturally sensitive work were seen in case files. Assessments of the individual needs of disabled children are good and benefit from an experienced and knowledgeable disabled children team. ▪ Referrers receive letters to inform them of the outcome of their referrals. ▪ Record keeping is generally up-to-date and this supports effective case management. Management decisions are clearly recorded on individual children's case files. Staff feedback has led to good improvements in the electronic recording system.

- Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board procedures and guidance comply with statutory requirements, are up-to-date and are readily accessible to staff in social care and in partner agencies. Assessment team staff and managers are aware of and use the procedures to ensure that contacts, referrals and assessments are responded to promptly and undertaken appropriately.
- The Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board has agreed inter-agency thresholds which incorporate the common assessment framework (CAF) approach.
- Partners have a clear plan about how CAF can be further reinforced and extended and have a firm commitment to enhanced training across the partnership. Effective measures are in place to monitor whether CAF assessments are working successfully and there are robust systems to ensure that decisions to undertake CAF assessments are followed up with support offered to partner agencies undertaking them.
- Senior and front line managers receive regular performance management information which enables them to monitor the referral and assessment service and respond effectively. Front line managers share performance information with staff teams to promote their awareness of trends or concerns. The information is also regularly shared with and monitored by elected members, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust executive board.
- There is good staff morale. Staff report a high level of satisfaction with the support that they receive from their line managers and service managers and are also very positive about the accessibility of their senior managers.
- Staff receive, and value, regular formal supervision and also effectively use their managers' day-to-day accessibility for consultation and advice which contributes to good decision-making and casework. These consultations are recorded on children's case files.
- All staff undertaking child protection work are appropriately qualified and experienced. They value the very good access to training and development opportunities to consolidate and develop their skills and expertise in working with children and families.
- Caseloads of social workers undertaking assessments are manageable, including those of the disabled children team. A workload management system supports staff to complete assessments in a thorough and timely way.
- Emergency duty arrangements are effective and regular management liaison promotes positive working relationships with the assessment teams to secure good information sharing arrangements.

Area for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">While there are examples of detailed and well recorded case discussions, the timely recording in case files of decisions made within supervision is not consistent across the assessment teams. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Judith Nelson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Phil Coppard, Chief Executive, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Simon Hart, Chair of Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board
Cllr Linda Burgess, Lead Member for Children's Services, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education