

13 July 2011

Dr Janette Karklins  
Director for Children, Young People and Learning  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
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Dear Dr Karklins

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bracknell Forest 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 Bracknell Forest Borough Council which was conducted on 14 and 15 June 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 and social workers.

The inspection identified areas 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 August 2010 have been fully addressed.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>There is a strong focus and commitment by the council to support staff through a wide range of relevant high quality training and development. This is a positive initiative which has led to a stable and highly motivated</li></ul>



workforce.

- The council has responded well to the views of children, young people and parents about the service, through post assessment questionnaires and surveys. This has led to a number of improvements including clearer information being provided to children and young people about the service.

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

- Where children and young people are identified as being at risk, appropriate and prompt action is taken to safeguard them. Investigations are timely and are always carried out by qualified social workers. Strategy discussions are prompt, comprehensive and include relevant agencies.
- Children with disabilities, who are in need of protection, are provided with an effective service. Their needs are holistically assessed which results in good plans that meet both their safeguarding and welfare needs.
- The quality of initial and core assessments is generally satisfactory, with some of high quality, using relevant research to underpin judgements and plans. Initial assessments are undertaken by suitably qualified social workers.
- Contact and referrals are responded to promptly. Cases are allocated without delay for assessment, ensuring vulnerable children and young people are identified and supported. Managers ensure consistency and clarity in the recording of contacts and referrals.
- Children and young people are involved in their assessments and routinely seen alone with good evidence that their views and wishes are appropriately taken into account in case planning and decision making. This was an area of development identified at the last inspection.
- Practice is sensitive to the ethnic, linguistic and cultural needs of children and young people. Interpretation and translation services are used to aid effective communication with children, young people and families.
- The common assessment framework (CAF) is established across a range of partner agencies. Action has been taken to embed its use, and as a result, the numbers of appropriate CAFs have increased. Examples of comprehensive CAFs were seen by inspectors and the involvement of families was demonstrated well. This was an area of development identified at the last inspection.
- Families benefit from a wide range of support services offered by the council and its partner agencies. This includes specific support services to children, young people and their families who experience domestic abuse.

- Record keeping is up to date and of good quality, this ensures that important information is readily available to inform decisions, case planning and direct work with children. Records routinely include comprehensive chronologies of significant events and provide evidence to support judgements in assessment.
- There is a good senior management oversight of the work of the contact, referral and assessment arrangements. This includes effective auditing which has resulted in appropriate action identified to continue to improve the service.
- Staff morale is high, and is supported by regular formal and informal supervision although the recording of these does not always reflect these discussions. Social workers have a manageable caseload which has increased their capacity to undertake more direct work with children and young people.
- Newly qualified social workers speak highly of the support provided by managers. They report that they have a good professional development programme which includes induction, protected caseloads and enhanced levels of supervision. They benefit from working alongside experienced social workers which is contributing to improvements in practice.
- The emergency duty team arrangements are clear and robust with well coordinated and effective communication links with daytime services.

#### **Areas for development**

- The presence of children at domestic violence incidents is not routinely recorded by police or the duty team. However, managers are aware of this shortfall and are taking appropriate action. Inspectors did not identify any children at risk as a result of this practice.

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

Yours sincerely

**Lolly Rascagneres**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Timothy Wheadon, Chief Executive, Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education