

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 03000 130570

Safeguarding.lookedafterchildren@ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Alison O'Sullivan
Director for Children and Young People
Kirklees Metropolitan Council
Civic Centre 1
High Street
Huddersfield
HD1 2NF

Dear Ms O'Sullivan

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Kirklees Metropolitan 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 Kirklees Metropolitan Council which was conducted on 13 and 14 July 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 areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

The areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in October 2009 have been taken forward by the council in an action plan and most have been satisfactorily addressed. While action has been taken to address longer term issues such as the impact of the common assessment framework (CAF) and the implementation of the children's electronic recording system, these remain areas for development and continuous action is being taken to address these.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial and core assessments completed within the children with disabilities team are of consistently good quality. Those seen by inspectors were comprehensive and analytical with clear recommendations and accountable action plans.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decisions regarding contacts and referrals to the service are prompt and effective, with established and understood systems in place to progress the work. Action has been taken to mitigate any difficulties or potential gaps arising through the current functionality of the children's electronic recording system. ▪ Cases where further enquiries need to be made before a contact outcome decision can be taken are proactively managed with a nominated duty worker to follow up enquiries within timescales. The work is supported by the use of an interactive screen to identify and monitor these cases so that they are swiftly followed through by the nominated worker. ▪ Duty and assessment teams are appropriately resourced. Managers, social workers and business support staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and supported by accessible policies and procedures. ▪ Children are seen, and where appropriate are seen alone, during the assessment process and their views or professional observations of their presentation are routinely included and evident in assessments. ▪ Parents' views are evident and contribute to assessments. While assessments are regularly shared with parents their views at the end of the assessment are not routinely recorded. ▪ Information from other key agencies is routinely obtained and thoroughly recorded in initial and core assessments. ▪ Section 47 enquiries are prioritised. They are promptly progressed with a swift multi-agency response to children who may be at risk of significant harm. They are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced staff. ▪ Within a very diverse local population, good attention is paid to addressing children's differing needs and the individual family circumstances, including disability, race, culture or religion, within assessments.

- Managers are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the service, through regular audits and management reports, and take informed action to address identified areas for improvement and improve and develop the service.
- Out of hours duty arrangements work well with daytime services to safeguard and protect children.
- Staff members, including newly qualified social workers, feel well managed and supported with manageable workloads. They value the accessibility of their managers and the ability to consult regularly on the progress of cases.
- Staff members report good access to training and career progression opportunities.
- Learning from serious case reviews has been well disseminated and social workers are aware of the implications with resulting changes to practice such as ensuring a child focus in assessments.
- There is an active approach to the risk management of domestic violence referrals or other aspects of risk to children and young people, such as forced marriages, with the secondment of social workers to the police vulnerable persons unit. This is still in its early stages and the impact is not yet evident.

Areas for development

- The use of the CAF is still developing with not all key agencies yet committed to taking on lead worker roles. Action is being taken to support the implementation and impact of the CAF but the benefits are not yet evident for children and families. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. While thresholds for social care intervention are generally well understood, there is a lack of clarity by some staff and agencies about the threshold between children in need within the meaning of section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and those children who may have a lower threshold of need under CAF arrangements.
- While no child or young person was seen to have been left at risk of harm the reasons for managers' decisions, including analysis of the risk factors and history, are not always clearly recorded.
- The quality of both initial and core assessments is variable. While good examples were seen by inspectors, including reference to relevant research, others lacked sufficient analysis of risk and protective factors.
- While the majority of staff supervision takes place at the agreed intervals, supervision records are not consistent and case supervision notes are not readily available on the electronic case record. Written records do not clearly demonstrate actions agreed in all cases, with follow up of outstanding actions or a focus on the quality of practice. Where there are gaps in supervision the

reasons for this are not recorded.

- Strategy discussions routinely constitute a telephone consultation between the social worker, rather than a relevant manager, and representatives from the police child protection unit. The agreed strategy and actions are not always clearly recorded and, in examples seen by inspectors, there is rarely representation from other key agencies. This could result in important information not being available at the planning stage of the investigation.
- In some cases case records are not kept up to date on the electronic recording system with social workers keeping contemporaneous records in different files. This could result in up to date information about a child being overlooked.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Dennis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Adrian Lythgo, Chief Executive, Kirklees Metropolitan Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education