

17 May 2011

Mr Damian Allen  
Executive Director, Children and Family Services  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Huyton Hey Road  
Huyton  
Merseyside  
L36 5YH

Dear Mr Allen

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Knowsley 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 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council which was conducted on 12 and 13 April 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 of development and the area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements on 28 and 29 July 2009 have been addressed.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Robust audit of cases is applied systematically by managers to support</li></ul>



continuous improvement in the quality of service delivery to children and families. The Quality Assurance Unit provides additional independent oversight of cases to ensure that audit findings are applied effectively. The audit arrangements have had a high impact on improvement such as in relation to the timeliness and quality of assessments.

- The central contact service provides a highly effective system to ensure timely responses to individual and agency referrals. Good oversight of referral activity by social work qualified managers is supported by the electronic customer service management system. Early evidence from routine surveys undertaken by customer services advisers confirms high levels of customer satisfaction. All customer service advisers receive appropriate training, which includes safeguarding training, in order to ensure that good quality information is gathered at the point of contact. They have easy access to consultation from a co-located qualified social worker and team manager.

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

- Staff have easy access to up to date procedures and policies which are maintained electronically. This supports good practice which complies with statutory guidance.
- Most initial and core assessments are completed in a timely fashion. The quality of assessments is good and they show evidence that the views of the subject children and their families are included and considered. Explicit consideration is given to children's individual needs.
- Management decision making is timely for referrals, assessments and activity to safeguard children. Children are seen and assessed promptly by qualified social workers.
- Staff supervision files and case records demonstrate clear evidence of effective management oversight.
- The co-location of two common assessment framework (CAF) workers alongside duty social workers promotes the use of the CAF and helps to reduce inappropriate referrals to children's social care. Early identification of additional need is promoted well through targeting training for staff from private nurseries and childminders.
- Easy access by the children's duty service to designated health and education professionals ensures timely advice on individual cases and demonstrates good multi-agency working.
- Core assessments are routinely supported by multi-disciplinary meetings which are convened at the earliest opportunity to enable swift professional information sharing and improve the thoroughness of assessments.

- Strategy meetings are well attended by other agencies in addition to children's social care and police staff. The agreements made in relation to the roles and responsibilities of those attending the meeting are supported by contemporaneous recording with the decisions being signed by all parties and promptly distributed.
- Case recording is generally up to date and social workers report good access to administrative support.
- Out of hours duty arrangements are clear, robust and there are good arrangements for the handover of information to the day service.
- Staff, including agency staff, report that their caseloads are manageable and that they have access to regular supervision and training opportunities. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their roles.
- New qualified social workers receive good support through the newly qualified social worker programme. The benefits of the programme include protected caseloads, fortnightly supervision, personal mentors and a schedule of 'master classes' designed to promote good practice.

#### **Areas for development**

- In some cases seen by inspectors, the decision making process underpinning the timing and frequency of strategy meetings and subsequent Section 47 enquiries is unclear. The council is aware of this and will review procedures and the electronic case recording system to ensure that improvements are made.
- The absence of a clear policy and procedure for obtaining written consent from children and their families to the sharing of information with other agencies leads to inconsistent 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

**Sheena Doyle**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education