

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



15 September 2011

Ms Linda Uren  
Director of Children's Services  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Shire Hall  
Westgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 2TP

Dear Ms Uren

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Gloucestershire County 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 Gloucestershire County Council which was conducted on 16 and 17 August 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 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 January 2010 have been addressed.

The area for priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in January 2010 regarding the poor quality of assessments has been addressed.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

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

- Appropriate thresholds for access to children's social care services have recently been agreed and launched by Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board, although it is too early to establish the impact.
- Decisions on contacts are made promptly and appropriately by experienced managers, and cases are allocated without delay. Agencies are now made aware of the outcomes of referrals, and copies of letters to referrers are present on files.
- Child protection referrals are responded to promptly and investigations are undertaken by qualified social workers. Strategy discussions are timely and are clearly recorded.
- Partnership working is good with all key partner agencies, which helps to ensure good multi-agency engagement in assessment and care planning for individual children and young people.
- The quality of initial and core assessments is at least adequate, and some assessments are good. The history of each case is now clearly identified and taken into account. Most assessments demonstrate consideration of risk and protective factors, leading to appropriate recommendations.
- The views of children and young people are consistently sought and recorded in assessments. Children and young people are seen alone and their views are taken into account. Where children are too young to speak to a social worker, assessments contain good observations of their appearance and behaviour.
- Chronologies are being maintained on most files and recording is generally adequate and up to date. Management oversight and decision making are evident on most files, enabling social workers to be clear about the action required.
- Social workers have manageable caseloads. Caseloads have reduced significantly in recent months as staffing levels have increased and cases are managed more effectively. Case transfer arrangements between teams are working well and there are no delays.
- Emergency duty team arrangements ensure that referrals outside of office hours are responded to appropriately. Linkages with daytime services are satisfactory.
- Social workers have good access to a range of training and are supported and encouraged to attend. Newly qualified social workers report that they are well supported. They have protected caseloads and have good opportunities to

work alongside colleagues to enhance their learning and professional development. Morale is good and vacancy levels are low.

- Staff have good formal and informal access to support from managers and receive regular supervision, which they value. Supervision records contain the key elements of the discussion, although timescales for action are not consistently recorded.
- The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is well established and well supported by a range of CAF co-ordinators. The quality of the assessments is at least adequate and in some cases, good. The views of children and young people are clearly represented and in many cases demonstrate a positive impact on outcomes, including appropriate referral to other agencies if necessary.
- Improvements have been made to auditing arrangements at local and county-wide level, for example the performance of each of the referral and assessment teams has been audited and the findings analysed. This is enabling managers to be well informed as to the quality of service, and to focus improvement activity accordingly.

#### **Areas for development**

- Strategy discussions do not routinely include all relevant agencies, other than children's social care services and the police. This means that information held by other key agencies is not considered at that point.
- Social workers do not receive training in joint interviewing of children and young people with the police in section 47 enquiries. This has already been identified by the local authority as an area for development and action is being taken to ensure that social workers are fully trained.
- Case recording regarding children who are part of a sibling group is not robust, and relevant information is not always recorded on each child's file.
- Ethnicity is recorded on most cases. However, most assessments seen by inspectors give little consideration to the impact of ethnicity, culture and language of children, young people and their families.
- Performance management information produced by the electronic recording system is not reliable and managers maintain local systems to assist with managing performance. Plans are well advanced to implement a new electronic recording system later this year.

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

Yours sincerely

**Carolyn Adcock**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Peter Bungard, Chief Executive, Gloucestershire County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education