

22 September 2011

Mr Mike Livingstone
Strategic Director of Children's Services
Manchester City Council
Overseas House
Quay Street
Manchester
M3 3BB

Dear Mr Livingstone

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Manchester City 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 Manchester City Council which was conducted on 23 and 24 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 an area 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 November 2009 have not been fully addressed and remain areas for development.

The area for priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in November 2009 has been fully addressed.



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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-agency working in relation to children in need of protection is good. For example, there is good multi-disciplinary attendance at strategy meetings and visits with colleagues from partner agencies are routine for both enquiries under section 47 and core assessments. This enables effective planning for children's immediate safety and shared accountability in the provision of protective services.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is an established culture of strong performance management and of challenge across the management team. Managers operate effectively in a challenging environment and know their service well. They have made good use of management information to plan improved integrated services, such as those for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and children with a disability. ▪ Child protection work is undertaken by suitably qualified social workers, and a recent service restructuring has ensured a balance of experience within social work teams and improved management oversight across the city. No cases are unallocated and in the cases sampled by inspectors, no children were at risk of harm. Delay in the allocation and progress of core assessments was an area for priority action at the last inspection. ▪ Child protection procedures are easily accessible, are well understood and are applied by staff to ensure that children are safeguarded appropriately. ▪ Support and guidance available to social workers from all levels of management is good and most supervision records viewed are satisfactory. However, in a few cases formal supervision sessions are insufficiently frequent and the quality of supervision records is inconsistent, with little evidence of reflective practice. Staff report that training opportunities are easily accessible and training has improved practice. ▪ Learning from serious case reviews has been effectively disseminated which is leading to improvements in social work practice, such as the introduction of risk assessment tools that are adding value to assessments of children in need. ▪ Children are routinely seen and their views incorporated when assessments are undertaken, although they are not always seen alone and the reasons for this are not always recorded. ▪ The emergency duty service links well to daytime services and the effective handover of information offers a prompt and seamless response to meeting children's immediate safeguarding needs.

Areas for development

- Most core and initial assessments are timely and some are good and analyse both the diverse needs of children, and risk and protective factors well. However, too many lack rigour and offer insufficient analysis, resulting in a lack of clarity of children's needs and vulnerabilities on which to base the provision of services. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Family members are not always appropriately involved in initial assessments, leading to assessments that are not sufficiently comprehensive. For example, some assessments of domestic violence cases do not involve absent fathers and therefore lack clarity on the risks they present. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- The common assessment framework is underdeveloped as a process for identifying children's needs and it is not sufficiently embedded with partner agencies. This has a negative impact on early intervention and results in high levels of re-referral to social care services. Senior managers are aware of this issue and have plans in place to address it. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Some caseloads are high and this is leading in certain instances to delays in information being recorded on the electronic recording system. Some staff report working excessive hours in order to meet the deadlines required to safeguard children and additional posts have been created to address this issue. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- Newly qualified social workers recruited in the past year have been less well supported than previous cohorts. Both formal management supervision and training and mentoring opportunities to support their professional development have reduced. The social workers affected report that they feel insufficiently supported to deal with the challenging work they face. Senior managers are aware of this issue and have plans in place to address it. 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

Ian Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Sir Howard Bernstein, Chief Executive, Manchester City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education