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Ms Annie Hudson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
Bristol City Council
3rd Floor
Council House
College Green
Bristol
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Dear Ms Hudson

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Bristol 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 Bristol City Council which was conducted on 6 and 7 September 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.

Two of the areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in September 2009 have been met, however work is still in progress to ensure timely transfer of cases, to inform referrers of the outcome of referrals and improve performance in relation to assessments in child protection cases.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A robust approach to recruitment and retention has resulted in a very stable and experienced social work workforce in the assessment teams. Most of these workers possess, or are pursuing post qualifying awards. Additional posts in the Assessment Service, secured since the last unannounced inspection, have resulted in more manageable social work caseloads.
The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contact and referral arrangements are timely and effective with good managerial oversight. Policies and procedures comply with statutory guidance and are regularly updated. Thresholds are consistently applied. ▪ Child protection investigations are carried out promptly by qualified social workers. Effective joint working between the police and duty teams results in timely decision making about children at risk. ▪ Children and parents are seen and their views are considered in assessments contributing to effective care planning. ▪ The quality of initial assessments seen by inspectors was satisfactory or good. Stronger assessments included detailed analysis of historical information, risk and protective factors. ▪ Ethnicity is appropriately and consistently recorded in all assessments, although the impact is not always sufficiently analysed to inform the assessment of individual and family needs. ▪ Management support and supervision is readily accessible and highly regarded by staff. Clear management direction is evidenced in case records. Opportunities for reflective practice are provided but not always recorded. ▪ Clear and effective communication between the emergency duty team and daytime service ensures children are appropriately safeguarded. The emergency duty team has been subject to a recent review and additional social work staff with relevant childcare experience are contributing to an improving response outside office hours. ▪ The common assessment framework (CAF) is well established and effective links between the assessment teams and the Area CAF panels enable vulnerable children and families, who do not meet the threshold for statutory services, to obtain effective support. ▪ Appropriate performance management systems are in place. Managers at all

levels utilise data, resulting in prompt responses to trends across the council.

- Case file and thematic audits are routinely undertaken by managers at all levels and are used to inform individual practice and service development. This was an area for development at the last unannounced inspection.
- Case records and chronologies are up to date, enabling a clear picture to be obtained of significant events and case management.
- Staff have good access to training and development opportunities and learning from serious case reviews is disseminated in a timely and effective way.

Areas for development

- Social work teams complete section 47 assessments and child protection conference reports in preference to full core assessments, leading to insufficient assessment of need and care planning. For example, the needs of individual children within families are not always separately assessed. The use of core assessments was an area for development at the last unannounced inspection.
- There are significant variations between offices in the time taken to transfer cases to longer term teams. In some offices this is leading to delay in implementing case plans and increased workload pressures for some assessment teams. This was an area for development at the last unannounced inspection.
- The arrangements for informing referrers of the outcome of their referrals are applied inconsistently between offices. This was an area for development at the last unannounced inspection. While senior managers are monitoring the effectiveness of new systems and mechanisms that have been introduced since that last inspection, further action is required to ensure referrers are appropriately and consistently informed of the outcome of their referrals.

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

Yours sincerely

Derek Churchman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Jan Ormondroyd, Chief Executive, Bristol City Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education